

The Book of Ether

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Keep Speaking the Same Language (Ether 1)

In an earlier chapter (Mosiah 8), Mormon records that the people of Limhi had discovered 24 gold plates upon which was engraved a history of a group of people who traveled to America many years prior to the Nephites. After describing the translation of this history (in Mosiah 28), Mormon adds that "this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account" (Mosiah 28:19).

The Book of Ether is the account referred to above. It is named for the man, Ether, who compiled the history on the 24 gold plates. Moroni is following the stated desire of his father in the verse above by adding this history to the otherwise completed Nephite record.

As you read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover, don't be confused into thinking that this portion chronologically follows the Nephite history. This story begins more than 2,000 years before Christ and is about a totally different group of people — people who are referred to as the Jaredites.

In Ether 1, a man named Jared is living near the site of a large construction project — a project referred to as the Tower of Babel. As described in Genesis 11, this project is not pleasing to God. The people are trying to build "a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" (Genesis 11:4). So, their goal is to try to get to heaven on their own strength, rather than depending upon God.

Despite the physical impossibility of building a tower to reach heaven, the Lord does comment, "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (Genesis 11:6). He is affirming that great things can be accomplished when people are united and all speak the same language.

To terminate the Tower of Babel project, God "confounds" the language of the people — suddenly, they are all speaking different languages. The people are no longer "one;" they can no longer communicate with each other or work together, and nothing great can be accomplished.

Seeing what is happening, Jared implores his spiritual brother (whose name is not written in the history) to "cry unto the Lord, that he will not confound us that we may not understand our

words" (Ether 1:34). The Lord responds favorably — Jared and his brother and their families and friends continue to speak the same language and are commissioned for a great project that will be described further in the following chapters.

What "language" do we speak as people of God? When we're in church, we praise God and express our total faith and trust in Him. Do we speak the same language outside of church?

At the current time, we're going through a crisis that is keeping us away from our church buildings. As we experience this crisis (or any other difficult time in life), are we still putting our total faith and trust in God as we have expressed in church? Or, is it time to change that language and put more trust in people who present themselves as "experts"? Getting input from people who have knowledge can obviously help in choosing appropriate actions, but ultimately, we must depend upon God to deliver us from any crisis — and praise His name as He helps us navigate difficult times.

If all of us who comprise the body of Christ can be united in maintaining this same "language," think of how we can move the arm of God. In the verse above, the Lord Himself said, "nothing will be restrained from them"!

The language of God's people transcends the earthly languages (English, Spanish, etc.) that came about at the time of the Tower of Babel. We share a common language — the language of faith and trust in God. Whether in good times or difficult times, let's keep speaking the same language and work together to build up the kingdom of God.



Seeking, Receiving, and Following God's Direction (Ether 2)

In the previous chapter, the Lord had told the brother of Jared that He would lead his group of Jaredite people away from the Tower of Babel to "a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth...And thus I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me" (Ether 1:42-43). So, because the brother of Jared was diligent in calling upon the Lord for direction, God said He would provide that direction for the Jaredites.

In Ether 2, the journey begins. The brother of Jared prays for direction and the Lord speaks to him from a cloud, "command[ing] them that they should go forth into the wilderness, yea, into that quarter where there never had men been" (verse 5). They cross some bodies of water on barges, "being directed continually by the hand of the Lord" (verse 6). Finally, they arrive at the ocean.

At this point, things get off track somewhat. The people set up tents on the ocean shore — and they remain there for the next four years! What happened to the journey? Perhaps the people are enjoying the beachfront property so much that they can't bring themselves to move on. Perhaps they're uncomfortable moving out of their comfort zone into an unknown area.

Whatever the reason, the people stop moving forward. They no longer call upon the Lord for direction so no direction is given. Finally, after four years have passed, the Lord returns in a cloud and scolds the brother of Jared "because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord" (verse 14). The relationship is mended, and the Lord then instructs the brother of Jared how to build barges to cross the ocean.

Notice how it works. The people ask God for direction; He provides the direction; the people move forward toward where God wants them to be. The people stop asking for God's direction; no direction is given; the people make no progress in accomplishing God's goals for them.

As followers of the Lord, we should seek to have it work this way in our own lives too (the first way, not the second way). As noted above, there are three steps in the process, and all three are important.

Seek God's Direction

It sounds easy — just pray and ask God for His direction, right? Well, before we can do this, we first need to be willing to go to God for His direction. Often, it may seem easier — and certainly more comfortable — to seek direction from other people, especially those who seem to know what they're talking about. While God can certainly use people to dispense wisdom, be careful — those well-meaning folks may well advise you to hang onto that beachfront property rather than to try crossing the ocean.

Receive God's Direction

In order for us to receive God's direction, we need to be sincerely seeking it. If we have no intention of following His direction, why would He give it? Are we following the Lord's direction in the Word of God? Have we followed through on previous communication from Him? If so, then there's no reason to expect that He won't respond to our requests for further direction.

It would be nice if hearing the voice of God was as simple as having Him stand in a cloud and give us directions. Although it's (unfortunately) not typically that straightforward, we can learn how to hear the voice of God through the Holy Ghost within us. Once we do, we should then wait upon the Lord for His response to our requests for direction. A lack of a response is not a response — we need to make sure we have received God's direction before proceeding.

Follow God's Direction

The third step may seem obvious, but it needs to be stated. Once we have received direction from God, we need to follow that direction. This is true even if the direction isn't what we may personally desire to do. We do all have free will, and we are certainly capable of making our own choices in life, but, if we're going to ask God for direction, we should follow that direction when we receive it. Otherwise, don't ask for it.

In the story referenced above, the Jaredites are on their way to the promised land, following God's direction. But, on their way to the promised land, they find a place that's comfortable and suddenly stop seeking God's direction. If we find ourselves in a comfortable place in life, it's not necessarily a bad thing, but let's not get too comfortable such that we stop seeking, receiving, and following God's direction — if we do, we may miss out on whatever "promised land" God has in store for us.



The Light of the World (Ether 3)

In Ether 3, the brother of Jared continues to prepare the barges that the Jaredite people will use to cross the ocean. The barges are completely solid on all sides such that no light will be able to enter. The brother of Jared is concerned about the people being in darkness for the entire voyage. He comes up with a plan — he prepares sixteen stones (two for each barge) and asks the Lord to touch them:

"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." (Ether 3:4)

To his amazement, the brother of Jared sees an actual finger appear, which touches each of the stones, and they light up! The Lord then explains to the brother of Jared that he was able to see the finger due to his great faith, stating that "never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast" (verse 9). In fact, the Lord then proceeds to show His entire body (as it would appear over 2,000 years later when He would come as Jesus Christ) to the brother of Jared at this time.

The faith of the brother of Jared — it's a standard we should all desire to attain. When we have a high level of faith, we are more aware of God working in our lives. As a result, we are more at peace; we experience more joy; and we appear to others as lights in an otherwise darkened world.

Let's compare ourselves to the stones referenced above. The stones began as ordinary stones just as we began as ordinary people. Just like the stones were presented to the Lord by the brother of Jared, let's think of ourselves being presented to the Lord with the same request as in the verse above (just changing one word): "Touch these souls, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness."

As the song says, "Then the hand of Jesus touched me and now I am no longer the same." Jesus referred to Himself as the light of the world (John 8:12), but He also referred to those of us who are His followers as the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). This depiction is not meant to be just a cutesy thing ("this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine") but is rather a serious calling for the followers of Christ to be the light in a world of darkness.

We have an opportunity to be that light right now since the time we are living in (the COVID-19 crisis) is a very dark period of time for the world. People are frightened, frustrated, and angry. Rather than adding to this darkness by fueling the debates about the seriousness of the virus, trying to figure out who to blame for it, or screaming at people who are standing too close to each other, we can be the people who bring peace, calmness, and a positive attitude to the situation. We can be the ones who continue to be loving toward others. We can provide assurances that God is in control. If our faith is solid, then we can do all of this because we really believe that God is in control. It's our faith that makes our light shine brightly.

If you were out in the woods in total darkness with a group of people, and you were the only one with a flashlight, you would be the most popular person there. Everyone would want to be near you and would want to follow you because you have the light — obviously, you would be the one who knows which way to go. You have the same opportunity in today's world — let the light of Christ shine from you to show others the way to navigate through a difficult time and, ultimately, how to find the straight and narrow path that leads to the kingdom of God.

"Ye are the light of the world" – Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:14)



Taste the Grass on the Summit (Ether 4)

In the previous chapter, the Lord recognized the great faith of the brother of Jared by allowing him to view the body that He would inhabit as Christ on the earth. The Lord also showed him things that would happen through the end of the world. Ether 3 ends with the Lord commanding the brother of Jared to write down what he saw, such that this record could be shared with future generations.

In Ether 4, the Lord instructs Moroni in how to handle the record of the brother of Jared. He is told to "seal up" the writings such that "they shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean before the Lord" (verse 6).

On the one hand, the call to repentance is typically directed at those who have not yet given their lives to the Lord, even as it is at the end of this chapter — "repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel, and be baptized in my name" (verse 18).

On the other hand, even servants of God can be prone to sinful actions or attitudes that require repentance. Lest we're quick to say, "Not me — I'm not doing anything wrong," remember that pride, envy, lack of forgiveness, and lack of love toward others all qualify as behaviors that should not exist in a servant of God.

This particular week, the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ are asking us to examine ourselves for the above types of behavior — or anything else that could be deemed sinful — and to "turn ye even to [the Lord] with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:12-13).

If we can be honest with ourselves and truly be repentant where necessary, it will surely move the collective righteousness of the Church in a positive direction. Will it be enough to bring forth the revelations of the brother of Jared? Well, every effort we make does draw us closer to that point. Using the metaphor of sheep on the mountain (as in the song referenced by this article's title), any sinful behavior that we can shed may move us above the level of eating scrubs on the lowlands — but we will still have a good bit further to go to reach the summit.

Hopefully, we're not satisfied with remaining lower on the mountain, where the grass has been beat by the footsteps. It may be comfortable there, but let's try to climb higher, with a desire to

even taste the grass on the summit of the mountain of the Lord. How do we move in that direction? As the Lord tells Moroni in this chapter:

"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" (Ether 4:7).

So, the goal is to have the same faith as the brother of Jared. It's a lofty goal, but let's not allow the extreme challenge to discourage us from trying our best — **any** growth of our faith will move us up the mountain toward the summit. The greater our faith, the greater will be our understanding of God's will for our lives and the greater will be our righteousness. Even if we don't live until the time that the brother of Jared's revelations come forth, if we have a pure heart, we will see more of God in our lives.

The current crisis we are all experiencing is a great opportunity to exercise and grow our faith. It's a time when we need to trust in the Lord each and every day — perhaps more so than ever before. It's also a time when we should be learning how to evaluate things we are told to do (or not do), making sure they're consistent with God's direction rather than just blindly following; we don't want to be the blind being led by the blind (we know where they end up). Don't miss this opportunity for growth — it's a chance to climb higher on the mountain.

The Lord tells Moroni (in verse 13) that He desires to show us the greater things, and that it's only unbelief that's holding us back. Let's grow our faith and increase our righteousness such that we will see more of those greater things. Let's accept the Lord's invitation to taste the grass on the summit.

***Come sheep, taste the grass on the summit,
Sheep come, breathe the pure mountain air.
"Climb higher", the Good Shepherd cries, "Higher,
For the pasture is much sweeter there."***



The Power of God - Not to Be Denied (Ether 5)

In Ether 5, Moroni shares some instructions for the man (Joseph Smith) who would receive the plates with the engravings of the Book of Mormon narrative and would be used to bring it forth to the world. The instructions include:

- Don't try to access the sealed portion of the plates, which contains the revelations of the brother of Jared (as described in the previous chapter; these will not be accessible until sometime in the future).
- Feel free to show the plates to the people who will assist in the work of bringing forth the information (the testimony of eight of these people is included in the first few pages of the Book of Mormon).

There is a third point, but it is not really an instruction but rather more of a prophecy:

"And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God, wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true." (Ether 5:3)

The three men who wound up fulfilling this prophecy were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. The three gathered together one day and prayed until an angel appeared before them, holding the plates for them to see. As stated in the verse above, the power of God in this experience convinced each of them that these were true records of God.

The testimony of these three men is also included in the first few pages of the Book of Mormon and, as the next verse states, "all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day" (verse 4).

The most compelling aspect to this testimony is that none of the three men ever denied what had occurred — even though all three were eventually separated from the church! Each of them eventually had issues with Joseph Smith and/or others in the church such that they either left or were excommunicated. That would have been the obvious time for them to reveal if it had all been a hoax or if they now decided that they were deceived, etc.

Yet, none of them ever denied that God had revealed to them the truth of the Book of Mormon. This is both good news for believers of the Book of Mormon and also an indication

that the power of God was truly present that day. When the power of God is manifested, you can't deny it lest you deny God Himself.

When someone leaves the church (for whatever reason) and then proceeds to deny their belief in the Faith and Doctrine and beliefs of our church, it makes me sad. It means that either the person now thinks that they were previously mistaken in discerning the voice of God or else they are willing to put aside God's message in order to strike back at a group of people with whom they are now upset. To their credit, the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon didn't go this route — they never denied what the power of God revealed to them, making it a very powerful testimony.

Even assuming that we are in the church for life and we're solid in our beliefs, we need to make sure that we are firm in our testimony of how the power of God has affected our lives. Don't let unbelievers or people of little faith convince you otherwise.

My favorite example of this in the scriptures occurs in John 9. A man whose sight was restored by Jesus is surrounded by people who are telling him to not credit Jesus for this miracle: He did this on the sabbath! He's a sinner! How can you believe this is a miracle? The man's famous response: "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

The three witnesses described above couldn't prove with any degree of certainty the truth of the Book of Mormon to those who refused to believe in it. Yet, they couldn't deny that the power of God had revealed its truth to them.

If God has performed a miracle in your life or answered your prayer, you may struggle with getting others to believe it. You may not be able to explain why this happened or why that didn't happen. It doesn't matter. If you have experienced the power of God, then you know, and it can't be denied. It's not changed by what others say. Whatever happens tomorrow doesn't erase what God did today. Stand by your testimony of the power of God in your life — make it something powerful that will stand until the end of the world.



Happy Windsday! (Ether 6)

If you (or your children) grew up watching "The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh," then you might remember the part when Winnie the Pooh goes to visit Piglet on a particularly windy day and greets him with a hearty, "Happy Windsday Piglet!" Piglet then gets picked up by the strong wind and nearly flies away.

Sometimes, when someone says that they can't see God, an explanation is offered that compares God to the wind — you can't see it, but you can see what it does. Jesus made a similar statement in John 3, comparing the Spirit of God to the wind — you can't see where it's coming from or where it's going, and you can't control it; it goes where it's going to go.

In a spectacular scene described in Acts 2, there were 120 disciples of Jesus sitting in an upper room on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus had been crucified and had resurrected. Perhaps these disciples were unsure of what to do at this point. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2) and the Holy Ghost swept into the room, filling all the people there. Now, they were ready to go out and turn the world upside down for the cause of Christ. It was a happy "windsday" indeed!

Even as God uses His Spirit to push people in the right direction to accomplish His will, there are numerous accounts in the scriptures of how He occasionally used actual winds to do the same:

- After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were on their way to the promised land but the Red Sea was in front of them and Pharaoh's army was behind them. "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided" (Exodus 14:21). After the Israelites crossed over, another wind blew the sea back on top of Pharaoh's army.
- God directed the prophet Jonah to go preach in Nineveh. Jonah instead got on a ship going the opposite way. "But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (Jonah 1:4). Jonah was thrown overboard, a whale swallowed him up, and he was eventually brought to Nineveh to do what God wanted him to do.

In Ether 6, the Jaredites get in their barges and begin the voyage to the promised land. They have no ability to steer the barges themselves, so it's totally up to God to direct them:

"And it came to pass that the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land...the wind did never cease to blow towards the promised land while they were upon the waters; and thus they were driven forth before the wind" (Ether 6:5,8)

After a 344-day voyage, "they did land upon the shore of the promised land. And when they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land they bowed themselves down upon the face of the land, and did humble themselves before the Lord, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them" (verse 12). Another happy Windsday!

So, what is it that I'm referring to as "windsday"? It's any time that God gives you a push (large or small) to move you in the direction that He wants you to go. Perhaps it's a little prompting from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it's multiple promptings. Perhaps events occur in a certain way so that you're more or less forced to be where God wants you to be or do what He wants you to do. There are many ways that God can push us in the direction He wants us to go.

For example, even as our lives have been so greatly affected by the COVID-19 crisis, I choose to believe that there is something coming in the future that we will be better prepared for as a result of having lived through this crisis as servants of God. We're always taught to exhibit faith and look to God for direction, but this period of time has pushed us to do that more than ever before. I believe that's exactly where God wants us to be at this time.

If you feel a push from God, go with it. Don't fight it — it's like pushing against strong winds. If you allow God to direct you, then you will wind up exactly where He wants you to be — whether at a promised land like the Jaredites or taking flight like Piglet. Regardless of how it happens, when you realize that God has done something to move you to where He wants you to be, you, too, can say that it's a happy Windsday!



There Are 2 Kingdoms — Pick One (Ether 7)

In Ether 7, Orihah (one of the sons of Jared) concludes his reign as the first king of the Jaredite people in the new land, passing the mantle to his son Kib. Sadly, things go downhill quickly after that, as two families then begin to compete for the throne, resulting in a series of kidnappings and murders and many temporary changes in who is king. Finally, they settle into two kingdoms:

"And the country was divided; and there were two kingdoms, the kingdom of Shule, and the kingdom of Cohor, the son of Noah." (Ether 7:20)

There were probably lots of people who thought this arrangement was wrong. Why should there be two kingdoms? We only need one. Perhaps there were even some who disliked both Shule and Cohor and would have wanted more choices. None of that mattered; there were two kingdoms, and each person had to pick the one they wanted to be part of.

We face many similar situations today, where we need to choose between two competing "kingdoms." Just as the verse above says that the country was divided, the same can be said about our country today. We have two political parties vying for leadership in the country, and they represent dramatically different philosophies with very little common ground between them. As much as we may dislike this arrangement, there's not much we can do to change it — we just need to pick which "kingdom" we want to be a part of.

There are also two other types of kingdoms that exist on earth. Membership in these kingdoms have more far-reaching effects than your choice of political party. The two kingdoms are the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil. Like it or not, each of us has to pick one of these kingdoms to be a part of.

Some may try to mask the need to make a choice, using flowery language with words like "love," "inclusiveness," and "dignity" to make it sound like we can all be one big happy human family — one kingdom — if we can just put aside our differences and love each other. While the scriptures do teach the need to love one another, they also teach that there are two kingdoms, and we need to pick one to be a part of:

- "There are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations." (1 Nephi 14:10)

- "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother..." (Luke 12:51-53)
- "Choose you this day whom ye will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

In the midst of all the uncertainty and fear that pervades the world today, don't lose sight of which kingdom you are part of. Don't forget who your king is. Look to Him for direction, protection, and comfort. There's lots of advice out there — everyone sounds like an expert. Some of it can be helpful, but just make sure that the advice you choose to follow is not coming from the other kingdom.

"We're all in this together" is a nice slogan but, clearly, everyone is not together on the same team or in the same kingdom. Always remember that there are two kingdoms — pick one and then follow your king. When you choose to follow Jesus, take heart — your king is much more powerful than the leader of the other kingdom.



God Sees Us, Whatever We Do (Ether 8)

If you're familiar with Windows computers, you're likely aware of the little button near the top right corner of each window that allows you to minimize the window. When you click on that button, the window is then no longer visible on the computer screen — the computer can still see it, but people cannot see it. It's actually quite an effective method to hide what you're doing from someone who is trying to look at your computer screen.

What might you be thinking if, every time you walked past someone using a computer, that person hit the Minimize button?

- If it's one of your children, you might wonder, "What are my kids getting into?"
- If it's your husband, you might wonder, "Who is my husband chatting with?"
- If it's your employee, you might wonder whether the employee is actually working.

In general, when someone goes to great lengths to hide their actions, it often means they're doing something they shouldn't. Otherwise, they would have nothing to hide. The sad part of this is that people who are good at hiding what they are doing may never come to a realization that what they are doing is wrong because they are able to get away with it.

Our definition of right and wrong should not hinge on whether or not something can be kept hidden from other people. Just like the computer is always aware of the minimized windows in the example above, God is always aware of whatever we do. So doing what's right means doing what's right in the sight of God.

Some of the people in the early scriptures had to learn this the hard way. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and then tried to hide from God — but God knew where they were and what they had done. Cain killed his brother, Abel, and then tried to hide Abel's body in the ground — but God knew what had happened as the dead man's blood "cried to Him from the ground."

In Ether 8, some of the people join together to make plans to overthrow the kingdom. Their plans include murder plots and other wicked acts. Knowing what the penalty will be if they are caught, they form an alliance — also referred to as a "secret combination" — and administer secret oaths among themselves to keep their actions hidden. It is noted that these were oaths used in years past, "handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning" (verse 15).

These unholy alliances were "most abominable and wicked above all, in the sight of God" (verse 18). Notice the last few words of that verse — "in the sight of God." The people may have been successful in hiding their actions from other people, but it was all done in the sight of God. They may have thought they were getting away with something for a while, but they eventually all suffered destruction as a result of their actions.

It may sound basic to say that God sees whatever we do. So, if we understand that basic truth, let's make our decisions in life accordingly. Don't be lulled into thinking that if something can be successfully hidden from other people, then it becomes OK. In fact, the more we feel the need to hide something, the more it should raise a red flag for us.

If we allow the Spirit to guide us in choosing our actions, understanding that the Lord is there seeing whatever we do, we can live with nothing to hide and be good examples to others of how a true follower of Christ should live.

*Our earnest devotions are viewed with delight,
Then let us be faithful and true;
Approach Him sincerely, Ye children of light,
He sees us whatever we do.*

*My God! Thou see'st me,
My God! Thou see'st me;
By day and by night,
In error or right,
My God! Thou see'st me.*



The Lyin' King (Ether 9)

In the classic movie, "The Lion King," the evil lion named Scar wants so badly to be king that he is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve that. He kills the current king — his own brother. He enlists willing followers by making wild promises like, "Stick with me and you'll never go hungry again!" But, as time passes, the food supply is gone and the country is in ruins. It becomes clear that it was all lies from a power-hungry tyrant who will just wind up dragging everyone down with him. Happily, the true king then appears and everyone is saved.

In Ether 9, we read an account that has many similarities to the movie referenced above. This chapter describes multiple cases of men so determined to be king that they kill their own family members to gain the throne. All of the wickedness "corrupted the hearts of all the people" (verse 6) who obviously believe the lies of the power-hungry tyrants since they have no objection to even murder being committed in order for their king to be in power. After some time passes, the true king is restored to the throne, and there is peace in the land.

The conditions we live in today are not very different from what is described above, and it's so important that we not allow this to distract us from following the Lord. We see various people and groups seeking power over others, and they appear to be willing to say and do pretty much anything to obtain that power. We often hear about the hypocrisy, lies, and illegal acts that accompany these power grabs — and there's likely plenty more going on behind the scenes that we are not even aware of.

With so much untruth circulating, it's often difficult to know who to believe. Is this person really going to help me, or is he just trying to get my vote? Is this group really committed to a good cause, or do they have a hidden agenda? The only way to see through all of this is to be led by God's Holy Spirit and His unchanging Word. Otherwise, we will find ourselves getting caught up in the emotion of the day and perhaps supporting individuals and causes who will lead the country away from God, dragging many people down with them.

And then, there's the individual that the scriptures refer to as the father of lies. He definitely has his own agenda — to drag as many people down with him as he can. Here are a few verses that describe the agenda of the real "lyin' king":

- He wants us "to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who

transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness." (2 Nephi 9:9)

- "The devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none — and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance." (2 Nephi 28:21-22)
- "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)

As servants of God, we are on the path that leads to eternal salvation. Let's not allow the lies of the enemy to draw us off the path. Remember, he is the lyin' king — he already has many people believing that the precepts of God are hateful and judgmental and that supporting sin is equivalent to showing love, respect, and dignity to others. He's capable of carefully leading people away — don't be one of those.

Rather, let's stay the course so we can look forward to our own happy ending. The true king is returning! "And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall, and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory" (1 Nephi 22:24). Yes, Jesus Christ will return to usher in a period of peace on earth. And, of course, we especially look forward to the ultimate happy ending of dwelling with the Lord in the kingdom of God for all eternity.

Following power-hungry world leaders or organizations won't bring about a happy ending. Following Jesus Christ will!



We're Done Living in Captivity (Ether 10)

In Ether 10, the leadership of the Jaredite kingdom changes hands many times, sometimes peacefully and sometimes by force. Toward the end of the chapter, one of the kings is deposed and forced to live in captivity for the rest of his life. It doesn't sound like he was actually living in a dungeon, though; most likely, he was under some type of stay-at-home order or some type of arrangement that limited what he could do or where he could go.

The same captivity for this family lasts for the next four generations. Finally, a man named Com decides he is done living in captivity, and he goes out and reclaims the kingdom, living out the remainder of his days as king of the land.

Many of us have experienced living in some type of captivity during our lifetime.

Most recently, we have all experienced the stay-at-home orders associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. What has kept people in captivity during this time? Some combination of being willing to follow the rules and guidelines issued by lawmakers and health experts, as well as some level of fear associated with the virus. As we see the rules and guidelines being relaxed somewhat, the only thing left that will keep us in captivity is fear. As followers of Christ, let's allow our faith to overcome our fear. Let's reclaim the kingdom — returning to church and whatever else the Lord has for us to do, trusting that He will be with us.

Perhaps, you've experienced being in captivity to your job. This type of captivity can cause us to give a lower priority to our service to God and to our family. What keeps us in that type of captivity? The money we're making. In fact, there's a term that describes a condition in which you literally can't leave your job because you would be giving up too much financially — the term is "golden handcuffs," illustrating that we are in fact in a form of captivity. Instead of continuing in this type of captivity, let's reclaim the kingdom by giving a higher priority to our service to God and our family. As Jesus said:

"Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you". (Matthew 6:31-33)

And then there's the type of captivity that we all experienced at one time. For each of us, there was a time when we were captive to sin. Various scripture passages describe this condition as

being a servant of sin, in bondage, or even in chains. Why did we stay in captivity? Because we didn't know (or refused to know) the Lord.

However, the day came (hopefully, for all of us) when we determined we were done living in captivity. We repented of our sins and were baptized and did "shake off the awful chains by which [we were] bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe" (2 Nephi 1:13). We knew the truth, and the truth made us free! We claimed our spot in the kingdom of God. Praise the Lord!

Now that we've broken free from the chains of captivity, let's "stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). In other words, let's not do anything that puts us back in captivity again. We're done living in captivity — it's time to live in and for the kingdom of God.



Don't Shoot the Messenger (Ether 11)

If you've ever delivered a message on behalf of someone else, then you're probably familiar with what can happen if the message is upsetting to the person who receives it. It's entirely possible that the person may direct their anger about the message toward you, even though it didn't really come from you. It's at times like this that the appropriate thing for you to say is, "Don't shoot the messenger."

In Ether 11, God sends a message to the Jaredite people who have fallen further and further into iniquity. His message is that "they should repent, and turn unto the Lord, and forsake their murders and wickedness" (verse 1). The people He uses to deliver the message are referred to as prophets (by definition, a prophet is a messenger of God).

Not surprisingly, the people who hear this message don't receive it well. Not only do they reject the message, but they literally kill the messengers. One wicked king "caused that all the prophets who prophesied of the destruction of the people should be put to death" (verse 5).

The above illustrates the challenge of delivering a message from God, especially one that tells people they are doing something wrong. Since there is no visible proof that the message is actually coming from God, people will typically come to the conclusion that it's not really from God at all — if they even believe in Him — but rather it's just the personal thoughts of the person giving the message. As a result, it's not surprising that they often want to shoot the messenger.

We may not consider ourselves prophets today but, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are, in fact, in a position to deliver messages from God. Such messages can take the form of inspired sermons or lessons from the Word of God. They can also take the form of testimonies that send the message that God is still on His throne, performing miracles and interacting with His followers as in the time of the scriptures.

When these types of messages are shared within a church congregation, they are relatively safe to the extent that the members of the congregation share the same beliefs and are desirous of being instructed by God. However, when people with differing beliefs are present, we may well be challenged on the validity of our messages. That's why it's so important that what we bring forth is based on the Word of God — we can then point to His Word and say, "See, it's not our words; it's God's words — so don't shoot the messenger."

Unfortunately, we see a growing number of people today behaving in a manner that is contrary to the Word of God. If we deliver the message that such behavior is wrong in the sight of God — even if just by the choices we make for our own lives — we shouldn't be surprised if we become quite unpopular ("Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you," 1 John 3:13). Sadly, even pointing to the Word of God doesn't satisfy very many people anymore — if anything, it makes them even angrier and more likely to shoot the messenger.

Does this mean we should stop delivering God's messages? Should we change our definition of righteousness? No way! Although none of us wants to be hated or persecuted, there is actually a blessing in it if it happens as a result of being a messenger of God. As Jesus said:

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Matthew 5:10-12)

So, move forward with courage and confidence as a messenger of God. As long as you're truly bringing forth God's message (in whatever form), you have nothing to fear. If people hate you for it, be excited about that, as it means you will receive a special blessing from God. And those are Jesus' words, not mine (so, please don't shoot the messenger).



Believing Is Seeing (Ether 12)

In Ether 12, the man named Ether finally appears. In addition to being the writer of the Jaredite record, Ether is a prophet of the Lord who "could not be restrained because of the Spirit of the Lord which was in him" (verse 2). Ether exhorts the people to have faith in God. He prophesies "great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe because they saw them not" (verse 5). People who feel this way today — that they won't believe in something they can't see — might express this feeling by saying, "seeing is believing."

As Moroni, the son of Mormon, is adding Ether's record to the plates that contain the manuscript of the full Book of Mormon, he comments on this philosophy of "seeing is believing," pointing out (similar to Hebrews 11:1) that "faith is things which are hoped for and **not seen**" (verse 6). In other words, "seeing is believing" is the exact opposite of faith. Moroni then lists several examples of faith from the Book of Mormon, showing how the people first had to believe, and then they saw God move in a visible way:

- When Alma and Amulek were in prison, they put their faith in God, and then they saw the prison walls tumble to the earth.
- When Ammon went among the wicked Lamanite people to share the gospel, he put his faith in God, and then amazing things happened and an entire nation was converted to the Lord.
- When the Brother of Jared needed light for the barges he had built, he put his faith in God, and then he saw the finger of the Lord touching the stones and causing them to light up.

The formula for each of the above was the same — first have faith (believe in what you can't see) and then God moves in a very visible way. Another way of saying it is "believing is seeing" — first you believe, then you see.

All of us who believe in God have some amount of faith. We don't see Him, and yet we believe — that's the definition of faith. However, it requires more than a basic belief in God to actually see Him moving in our lives.

In Mark 9, a man has a son who is possessed by an evil spirit. He asks Jesus to help his son. Jesus tells the man, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." The man replies, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

We may occasionally find ourselves in a similar mindset as the man in this scripture. We believe, yet we have unbelief. We believe in God; we believe He can do all things. But this situation I'm going through? ... Well, I don't know.

This condition is often accompanied by a statement that begins with the words, "I have faith in God, but..." with the rest of the statement indicating some action we're going to take that illustrates our unbelief.

Instead of resigning ourselves to living in unbelief and not seeing the miracles of God, we can instead follow the example of the man in this scripture and ask the Lord to help our unbelief. Don't be satisfied with "faith in God, but..." Pray for God to increase your faith and reduce or even eliminate any unbelief. You don't need to see it to believe it — you need to believe it to see it!

How can you tell if your belief is strong? The actions that you take (or don't take) indicate what you really believe.

For example, most every person you encounter right now will be wearing a mask and will be unwilling to touch you. This is due to belief in unseen particles floating through the air or resting on surfaces that can make you sick. Unless you're a scientist working in a lab, you've never actually seen any of these particles. Yet, your belief is strong enough that your daily actions revolve around avoidance of these unseen particles.

The scriptures tell us that "if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater" (1 John 5:9). So, if we're willing to fully accept the word of scientists to believe in something that we can't see — and there's no reason to not accept it, by the way — how much more should we who have the Holy Ghost within us be willing to believe in the power of God (not just regarding this disease but in all aspects of our lives)?

Believe that God hears every prayer. Believe that God sees what we are going through every day. Believe that God is always in the matter. Let your actions show that you believe these things, and then get ready to see what God does. Believing is seeing!



A City of Peace Provided by God (Ether 13)

In Genesis 22, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son as God has requested. However, at the last instant, an angel stops him and a ram is provided to use as the sacrifice instead. Abraham memorializes the place by calling it Jehovahjireh (Genesis 22:14) which means "God provides." The same area already had the name of Shalem (or Salem as it's referenced in the Bible), meaning "city of peace." As time passed, the two names were combined such that the city was referred to as Jireh-Shalem or, as the scriptures spell it, Jerusalem. The meaning of the name can be intuited to be "city of peace provided by God."

Ether 13 describes a city that can be referred to as a city of peace provided by God. The city will be called New Jerusalem, and it will be the principal city in a place called Zion at a period of time referred to as the peaceful reign.

Let's not confuse this New Jerusalem with other cities that go by the same or a similar name.

Obviously, this is not the city described in the first paragraph above. That original city of Jerusalem is the one where much of the action in the Bible takes place and was the city where Lehi and his family lived at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. When God warned Lehi to take his family and flee from the city, "the Lord brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto the seed of Joseph" (verse 7). Jerusalem was subsequently destroyed but was later "built up again [to] become a holy city of the Lord...unto the house of Israel" (verse 5). This Jerusalem is the city that currently exists in the country of Israel.

This New Jerusalem is also not the city that will "come down out of heaven, and [be] the holy sanctuary of the Lord" (verse 3). That city — which also goes by the name New Jerusalem — will come to earth in the last days, after the devil and his minions have been cast into the lake of fire. See Revelation 21 for a further description of this New Jerusalem.

So, the New Jerusalem we're talking about is not the city in Israel and it's not the city coming down out of heaven. What is it? Where is it? Who will be there? This chapter answers those questions.

What Is It?

It's a place to be built for the descendants of Joseph to have as "a land of their inheritance;...a holy city unto the Lord, like unto the Jerusalem of old" (verse 8). It's a place where a remnant of the House of Israel who are currently scattered throughout the earth will be "gathered in from the four quarters of the earth, and from the north countries" (verse 11). In short, it will be the site of the great gathering of the House of Israel.

Where Is It?

"New Jerusalem [will] be built upon this land [of the Americas]" (verse 6).

Who Will Be There?

This city will be reserved for the righteous, for "they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb" (verse 10). This will include "the remnant of the seed of Joseph" (verse 10), the Jews who will "come [from] the Jerusalem of old" (verse 11), and the remainder of the House of Israel who will be "gathered in from the four quarters of the earth" (verse 11). The righteous of the Gentile people will also be part of this great gathering, as they will be numbered among the righteous of the House of Israel as "partakers of the fulfilling of the covenant which God made with...Abraham" (verse 11). See also 2 Nephi 30, 3 Nephi 30 and Galatians 3.

Other parts of scripture tell us:

- Jesus will appear in New Jerusalem (3 Nephi 21)
- Joy will abound (Isaiah 35)
- Prayers will be answered very quickly (Isaiah 65)
- Righteousness will prevail as the devil will be bound (1 Nephi 22)

And, of course, it will be a time of great peace:

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:4)

As we live through periods of turmoil and destruction in the world, it's helpful to know that this is not the end state on earth for the righteous in Christ. There will come a day — for people still living in the flesh on earth — when there will be a city of peace provided by God — a city known as New Jerusalem.



Lost and Found (Ether 14)

Recently, we've seen several testimonies on the Gospel Blog that have described occasions when certain items were lost and then God intervened to allow the items to be found. Any time you find something that has been lost, it's a great feeling. Not only is the item restored to you but you are also relieved of whatever negative feelings or consequences accompanied the loss of the item. And to think that God actually intervened on your behalf? That makes it a great blessing!

I've experienced several "lost and found" blessings in my own lifetime. Here's a recent one:

Following a Sunday meeting at Levittown a few months ago, a few of us were standing around, talking in the parking lot for a while. As I was about to leave, I got a phone call from my wife who had already arrived at home. She couldn't find her phone, so she was thinking she may have left it in church.

I went back into the empty church building and looked on and under the pew where she always sits, but it wasn't there. I checked the table in the back of the room, and it wasn't there. Looked in all the bathrooms — not there.

As I was about to call my wife to tell her the phone wasn't in church, I walked past her pew again — and there was the phone, sitting squarely on her seat! It wasn't askew as if it had been dropped but it looked as if it had been purposefully placed right in the middle of the seat. I have no idea where God brought it from, but I surely appreciated being spared the hassle that accompanies a lost phone, while being blessed that God had intervened on this day.

Luke 15 contains three parables of Jesus that describe the joy of finding something that has been lost. The first two use a lost sheep and a lost piece of silver as the items that are lost and found. The third is the parable of the prodigal son in which a man's son falls into sin and eventually finds his way back to his father. At the end, the father throws a big celebration, explaining to his other son that "thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:32).

For all of us who have given our lives to Christ, we once were lost, and now we're found! How fitting that God occasionally reminds us of this by finding items for us.

Now, suppose there were some people who were seriously lost in sin and God wanted to illustrate that to them. How might He do that? Well, the Jaredite people in Ether 14 were in that condition, and here's what God did:

"And now there began to be a great curse upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land." (Ether 14:1)

Not even considering that this could be a message from God, the iniquitous Jaredites assume that other people are stealing their things, so they become suspicious of each other and wind up in an all-out war that eventually leads to the entire civilization being destroyed.

As people of God, we know it's not about the things. Possessions on earth are nice to have and sometimes inconvenient or upsetting to lose, but they're all temporary. It's our immortal soul that we want to make sure is not lost.

It's important to understand that all souls on earth are either in a "lost" or a "found" state. There is no other category. We praise God for those of us who have been found — let's not get lost again. And for the many who are still lost, let's allow God to use us to help find as many of them as possible. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10), so as we share the gospel with others and demonstrate the love of Christ, let's do so with the goal of igniting a celebration in heaven when a soul that was lost is found.



Keep Doing What You're Doing (Ether 15)

There is a quote that is often used in motivational speaking that says, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." The point of this quote is to recognize that the way things work out in various areas of our lives are often a direct result of what we do in those areas. If we keep doing something the same exact way, the results will probably be pretty much the same. If we want the results to change, then we need to change what we do.

Perhaps the Jaredite civilization would have survived if they had only known this definition of insanity.

In Ether 15, the last of the Jaredites are divided into two groups with everyone — men, women, and children — included as part of one army or the other. The two sides go to war and, after a fierce day of fighting, each side suffers many deaths. In each camp, the night is filled with "a howling and a lamentation for the loss of the slain of their people; and so great were their cries, their howlings and lamentations, that they did rend the air exceedingly" (verse 16).

After this horrific night, the people go out the next day and...do the exact same thing. Again, many people are killed on each side, and another night of howling and lamentation is spent. The cycle is repeated the next day and the next, over and over again, until eventually everyone is dead and the Jaredite civilization is no more.

In the above account, each day was an opportunity to do things differently and achieve different results but instead, the same actions were taken, resulting in the same outcome — many deaths.

In our own lives, each day is an opportunity to change the way we do things. If the results we are seeing in any area of our lives are not what we would like them to be, then doing the same thing over and over in that area will probably result in the same unacceptable outcome. As servants of God, we have the opportunity to approach the Lord in prayer and ask for His direction. If He directs us to change our behavior in one of these areas, let's be open to making those changes. Doing the same exact things and expecting different results is...well, you get the idea.

Although this concept is always taught from the perspective of wanting to change your results and therefore being willing to change what you are doing, it occurs to me that the reverse would also be true. If you're happy with how things are working out in a specific area of your life, you probably don't want that to change, so then you want to keep doing what you're doing. Changing what you're doing and expecting the same good results you were getting before — well, it may not be insanity but it's risky and probably unwise.

When Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, He told His apostles:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Notice how the statement is structured — They were to do certain things (teach all nations, baptize them, teach them to observe what Jesus commanded) and the results would be that Jesus would be with them always. Over the next few hundred years, church leaders gradually did things differently — not surprisingly, the results were also different, as the Lord was no longer with them.

In The Church of Jesus Christ today, we do our best to follow the teachings and examples of Christ in areas such as baptism, communion, feet washing, etc. As we do these things, we feel the Lord's presence with us. We don't want this to change, so we are careful to not change these ordinances. Even when it's difficult — such as during a pandemic — we need to keep doing what we're doing in order to ensure the same result.

In your own life, think of a time when you felt close to God (hopefully, it's today). What personal activities contributed to that result? Perhaps some combination of fasting, praying, reading the scriptures, actively attending church, etc. If you do feel close to God today, keep doing what you're doing. If you don't feel close to God, don't resign yourself to that condition — do more of the things that you did when you did feel close to Him, and you should see better results.

When we stand before God when this life has ended, we will be admitted into His eternal kingdom if our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. If your name is written in that book today, you definitely don't want that to change, so keep doing what you're doing for the rest of your life (also referred to as enduring to the end) and you can look forward to a most blessed result — a mansion in the kingdom of God.