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Ether and Mormon: Parallel Prophets of Warning and Witness

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Ether and Mormon: Parallel Prophets of Warning and Witness

13

E. Dale LeBaron

The Book of Mormon is a record of two fallen nations. Both the Jaredites and the Nephites achieved marvelous heights spiritually and temporally, but then fell to spiritual depths and eventual destruction. The prophet Nephi testifies that God does not destroy a chosen people “save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord” (2 Nephi 25:9). The destructions of the Jaredites and Nephites were foretold by prophets. Both Ether (a Jaredite prophet) and Mormon (a Nephite prophet) filled their divine appointment by warning their respective people, witnessing their destruction, and documenting the fulfillment of rejected prophecies.

The purpose of this paper is to show the similarities and differences of these two prophets and ministries. Ether and Mormon were different in their backgrounds and situations, and similar in their missions and convictions. How different they might have been in personalities cannot be fully determined from the present record because in its edited form it lacks much of the detail of their lives. However, since the gospel of Jesus Christ is based upon eternal principles and not personalities, the similarities are particularly significant. To recognize a similarity is often to recognize an eternal principle. The differences between Ether and Mormon show how eternal truths can be manifest in differing circumstances, making the Book of Mormon eternally and individually significant to all who read it. This all illustrates how the Lord can use a diversity of people to

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bring about a unity with him by accepting his prophets and the eternal principles which he reveals through them.

Differences Between Ether and Mormon

Ether and Mormon came from vastly different family and social backgrounds. Ether was a direct descendant of Jared and was the last in a long line of royalty. His grandfather, Moron, was overthrown as king of the Jaredites and spent many of his days in captivity; and his father, Coriantor, spent all his days as a political prisoner (Ether 11:23). We do not know whether Ether's father was righteous, but the record does state that Ether's grandfather, Moron, and the three previous kings were wicked. We also know that Ether lived during the reign of Coriantumr, the last Jaredite king.

The prophet Mormon was a "pure descendant of Lehi" (3 Nephi 5:20), and his name means "more good" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 299–300; hereafter *TPJS*). He was named after his father and also after the land where Alma established the Church (Mormon 1:5; 3 Nephi 5:12), which suggests a spiritual commitment on the part of Mormon's parents. There is no indication that Mormon's family had either wealth or station.

Ether was deprived of social status whereas Mormon was granted it by the Nephites. Ether, the heir apparent to the Jaredite throne, was rejected by the people in power, and they even tried to kill him. The fact that Ether was the grandson of a deposed king and that he was making accusations against king Coriantumr must have created a strong bias against him. Because both his person and his message were unwelcome in Coriantumr's court, Ether had to flee for his life (Ether 13:20–22). He lived without influence among the people rather than as a king in a castle. In fact, he was considered to be an enemy, and lived as a recluse in a cave. He warned the people, observed the war by night, and recorded the tragic events (Ether 13:13–14).

By contrast, Mormon was elevated to perhaps the highest position of power and responsibility in Nephite society—that of commander over their armies. The Nephites gave him this honor twice. Even though Mormon warned the people they had to repent, they still considered him a hero, not an enemy. He lived at the center of Nephite political life, not as a recluse.

Such differences between Ether and Mormon illustrate how the Lord works through a diversity of people. Because different people may be inspired and impressed by different things, through diversity in the prophets, some messages may touch the hearts and minds of some readers whereas another's writings may impact others. What is critical, of course, is for everyone to recognize the Lord's divine message and His eternal voice. He said: "Mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts" (D&C 29:7). Ether and Mormon both heard the Lord's voice, which brought similarities into their very different lives.

Similarities Between Ether and Mormon

1. *The Timing of Their Mortal Mission—A Final Witness*

The birth of a prophet comes according to the Lord's time-table. Elder Spencer W. Kimball said: "When clouds of error need dissipating and spiritual darkness needs penetrating and heavens need opening, a little infant is born" ("A Prophet is Born" 426–27). Both Ether and Mormon entered the world after their societies had fallen to unprecedented lows from unparalleled heights. Their missions included being final witnesses and giving final warnings to their people.

The Jaredite civilization had reached its temporal apex prior to Ether's birth. According to chapter 10 of Ether, the Jaredites became a vast population of people who were "exceedingly industrious." The record states that there "never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it" (Ether 10:21–28; see also Ludlow 323).

Yet in these times of great prosperity there was wickedness and war, and the Lord sent many prophets to call the people to repentance (Ether 11:1–6, 12–13, 20–22). However, they rejected the prophets and killed them. This was followed by "a great destruction, such an one as never had been known upon the face of the earth" (v 7) and a warning that, "except they should repent the Lord God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction; and the Lord God would send or bring forth another people to possess the land" (vv 20–21). Still the people rejected all the words of the prophets

because of their secret societies and wicked abominations (Ether 11:22). It was into this situation that the prophet Ether was born.

Mormon was also born in a time of spiritual decadence. After nearly two centuries of celestial peace and righteousness among the Nephites, that came about from the Savior's post-resurrection ministry among them, the people had turned from the glorious gospel light to evil and darkness. At the time of Mormon's birth, they had slipped into self-indulgence, superstitions, and secret combinations. They sought sorceries, witchcrafts, and magic instead of their God and "the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land" (Mormon 1:19).

Thus, both Ether and Mormon filled their mortal missions at most difficult and demanding times when their societies were disintegrating, destroying themselves spiritually and temporally.

2. A Divine Calling and Spiritual Preparation

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose" in his premortal existence (*TPJS* 365). Along with being foreordained, Ether and Mormon received careful preparation for their divine callings as prophets and seers.

Although the Book of Mormon gives little information about Ether's life prior to his call as a prophet, we can be certain that he was spiritually prepared for his calling. The record states: "Ether was a prophet of the Lord; wherefore Ether came forth in the days of Coriantumr, and began to prophesy unto the people" (Ether 12:2). Ether was blessed with the godly powers of seership. He saw from the beginning to the end of the world, including the ministry of Christ. He prophesied of the last days, the rebuilding of old Jerusalem, the building of the New Jerusalem, the return of the city of Enoch, and the ushering in of the millennial era (Ether 13:2–12). Of his prophetic powers, Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said the following:

Ether is a classic example of a prophet who devoted his whole life to the cause of the Savior. . . . Because his righteousness removed the restraints that otherwise hold each of us back, Ether actually saw high points of the future—centuries before these were to occur. . . . Other things Ether saw were simply too "great and marvelous" for Moroni to record (Ether 13:13). How marvelous these must have been—in view of the great things Moroni was able to record!
(6–7)

Like Ether, Mormon devoted his life to service of the Savior and was prepared spiritually for his divine calling. Although Nephite society had sunk into spiritual quicksand, he exercised the faith and courage to build on the Rock of Christ. From that foundation, Mormon excelled in ways rarely equalled in history as a military leader, an editor-historian, and as a prophet.

Few prophets have received their divine appointment at such a young age. When he was ten years old Mormon was given a charge by Ammaron, who had kept the Nephite records for the previous fifteen years. Just as Ammaron was “constrained by the Holy Ghost” to hide up all the sacred records (4 Nephi 1:48), he must have also been constrained by that Spirit in selecting a ten-year-old boy to have responsibility for these records at this most critical time in Nephite history. Ammaron was impressed that Mormon was “a sober child, and . . . quick to observe.” He instructed Mormon to go get the plates in some 14 years time (Mormon 1:2–4).

At the age of 15 years, Mormon “was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15). Surely this heavenly visitation must have been one of the greatest experiences of Mormon’s life and a spiritual anchor to his soul. In his ministry, Mormon also seems to have been given the power and authority of an apostle of Christ. While editing the Nephite records, he identified himself as “a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among His people that they might have everlasting life” (3 Nephi 5:13). The twelve disciples chosen by Jesus as he ministered to the Nephites were ordained apostles according to the Prophet Joseph Smith (*History of the Church* 4:538). Mormon’s designation of himself as a disciple called of Jesus Christ strongly supports this thesis (Moroni 2:2).

From his early years, Mormon must have been an impressive young man spiritually, physically, socially, and mentally. Mormon, who was now large in stature, was selected to be the commander-in-chief of all the Nephite armies in his sixteenth year (Mormon 2:1). This began one of the greatest military careers in history, stretching over the rest of his life, a period of 58 years. Of this, Elder Sterling W. Sill has said:

If you think it an inspiration that a 16 year old boy could win the leadership of a great national army, what would you think of a man between the ages of 65 and 74 who was still the best man among his entire people for this top position

of leadership, and in those days the general marched at the head and not in the rear of his troops (Mormon 6:11). (Sill 248–49, 252–54)

Although Ether and Mormon differed in their backgrounds, circumstances, and personalities, they were both prophets. They were both called and schooled by the Lord. The Lord’s influence was manifest in their lives, spiritually and temporally.

3. Writer, Abridger, Editor, and Historian

From the beginning the Lord appointed some of His servants to “write by the spirit of inspiration” so a record could be kept for the blessing of mankind (Moses 6:4–9). Because many prophets have carried out this task, we are blessed with a rich treasure of scriptures. From the voluminous records kept by the Jaredites and Nephites, Ether and Mormon abridged the entire histories of their people from the time the Lord brought them to the promised land until their final destruction (Ether 1:6; W of M 1:3, 9). Although Ether and Mormon were blessed with the godly power of seership, their individual personalities and backgrounds undoubtedly impacted their records.

Although Ether’s abridgment of the Jaredite history was later abridged by Moroni, some of Ether’s background and circumstance are reflected in the Jaredite record. Perhaps because his grandfather and father were dethroned monarchs who spent much of their lives in prison, the record draws particular attention to the imprisonment of deposed royalty (Ether 7:7; 8:3; 10:14, 30; 11:18). It suggests strong feelings about abusive and corrupt rulers, and frequently focuses on kings being rebuked by prophets because of their wickedness (Ether 7:23; 9:28; 11:1, 12, 20). Surely, Ether saw much political corruption, war, and violence.

Mormon, who spent most of his life involved with warfare, focused on war throughout most of his writings. He devotes 20 chapters (Alma 43–62) detailing the Nephite-Lamanite battles fought by Captain Moroni. He gave Captain Moroni one of the greatest tributes of any person in Nephite history: “He was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ. . . . If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever” (Alma 48:11–17). It is also evident that the Book of Mormon was prepared by a knowledgeable military strategist (Hamblin 241–55).

Mormon edited the materials from Lehi through 4 Nephi, periodically writing editorial comments such as Helaman 12. He also wrote the Words of Mormon. Mormon chapters 1–7 is an abridgment of a larger record he had written on the large plates of Nephi (Mormon 2:18). From his letters included in the record by Moroni (Moroni 7–9), we can see the power of revelation which rested upon Mormon and the clarity with which he expounded doctrine, such as baptism of little children, translated beings, and faith, hope and charity. Mormon's great faith and hope and charity are evident in his final message, directed to the posterity of those who had destroyed his people (Mormon 7).

As an editor, Mormon selected material, wrote, and drew conclusions that would bring people to Christ (Hardy 15; Tvedtness 31). He had a constant vision before him of those who would receive this record in the last days. It was to us that he was writing, for he said:

I write unto you, Gentiles, and also unto you, house of Israel . . . Yea, behold, I write unto all the ends of the earth, yea, unto you, twelve tribes of Israel . . . And I write also unto the remnant of this people . . . And these things doth the Spirit manifest unto me, therefore I write unto you all. (Mormon 3:17–20)

President Ezra Taft Benson has said the following:

The Book of Mormon was written for us today. God is the author of the book. . . . Mormon, the ancient prophet after whom the book is named, abridged centuries of records. God, who knows the end from the beginning, told him what to include in his abridgment that we would need for our day. (63)

4. A Warning Voice

As previously noted, the Lord will always send prophets to warn his covenant children before he allows them to destroy themselves (2 Nephi 25:9). Both Ether and Mormon courageously testified of the people's wickedness and warned of their pending destruction if they did not repent. Ether's dedication to his responsibility is described as follows: "He could not be restrained because of the Spirit of the Lord which was in him. For he did cry from the morning even until the going down of the sun, exhorting the people to believe in God unto repentance lest they should be destroyed" (Ether 12:2–3). In the second year of Ether's ministry, the Lord commanded him to deliver a final warning to king Coriantumr face to face:

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

The Lord’s final plea and opportunity for the king and his people to be spared was not only rejected by them, but they sought to kill Ether, and he made a hasty retreat to his cave.

Early in Mormon’s life, the Lord forbade him to preach to the Nephites because they had willfully rebelled and hardened their hearts (Mormon 1:16–17). However, over three decades later, the Lord commanded him to give the Nephite people a final warning and plea. They were told to repent, be baptized, and build up the Church, and the Lord would spare them (3:2). However, his missionary efforts were in vain and the people hardened their hearts against the Lord. Soon thereafter the Lord assured Mormon that the Nephites “shall be cut off from the face of the earth” (vv 13–15).

The Lord gives prophets an eternal perspective and a “knowledge that the course they are pursuing is according to the will of God”; otherwise, they would “grow weary in their minds and faint” (*Lectures on Faith* 6:4). Mormon wrote to Moroni:

And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God. (Moroni 9:6)

Both Mormon and Ether persevered in their ministry regardless of how the people responded.

5. A Witness to Prophecies Fulfilled

It is an awesome responsibility to prophesy in the name of the Lord, but for Ether and Mormon to prophesy regarding the pending destructions to come to their own people if they did not repent was even more so. And they witnessed the fulfillment of what they prophesied. This, too, came with their callings. They were special witnesses that every word had been fulfilled.

A vivid description of the total collapse of the Jaredite civilization is reflected in these words:

The Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed. . . . They were drunken with anger, even as a man who is drunken with wine. (Ether 15:19, 21)

The final struggle between Coriantumr and his arch-enemy Shiz illustrates the ultimate tragedy of a self-destructing society. Driven by revenge and vengeance towards Coriantumr, Shiz overthrew many cities and “he did slay both women and children, and he did burn the cities” (Ether 14:17). This scorched-earth policy created a dreaded fear among the people, who cried: “Who can stand before the army of Shiz? Behold, he sweepeth the earth before him!” (v 18).

The Jaredite war of extinction may have been the bloodiest war ever fought on the American continents (Ludlow 327–28). Even before the final battle, king Coriantumr had lost two million “mighty men, and also their wives and their children” (Ether 15:2), and this represents only one side of the conflict. In preparation for this final battle the two sides spent four years gathering “all who were upon the face of the land” so that every man, woman and child were on one side or the other, determined to fight to the end (vv 14–15). And they fought to the end.

As with the Jaredites, the Nephites had fallen to such a spiritual low that they were “without principle, and past feeling” (Moroni 9:20). Hence, “the day of grace was past with them both temporally and spiritually” (Mormon 2:13–15).

When the Nephites began an offensive warfare, Mormon refused to lead them. Thirteen years later, at age 64, he repented of his oath and agreed to command their armies once again because the Nephites “looked upon me as though I could deliver them from their afflictions” (Mormon 5:1–2). However, because of their continued wickedness, he knew what the future held for them.

The Lamanites now began a scorched-earth policy of warfare, as Shiz had among the Jaredites. As the Lamanite army moved forward, they burned Nephite cities and killed the people who could not escape. Mormon was sickened by the “awful scene of blood and carnage” which was before his eyes (Mormon 5:5–8), and chose to

spare us a graphic description of the carnage he witnessed. He wrote that some things were “impossible for the tongue to describe,” for “there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi” (4:11–12). He does tell that Lamanites offered captive Nephite women and children as human sacrifices to Lamanite idol gods (v 14), and fed them the flesh of their husbands or fathers as their rations (Moroni 9:8). But the Nephites were doing worse things as they raped the daughters of the Lamanites, tortured and murdered them, and then ate their flesh like wild beasts. He concludes: “O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. . . . They have become strong in their perversion. . . . They are without principle, and past feeling” (vv 18–20).

The Nephites, as the Jaredites before them, arranged a period of time to gather all the people together for one final battle. Their battle site was also the same—a hill named Ramah by the Jaredites and Cumorah by the Nephites (Ether 15:11; Mormon 6:2).

After hiding the records in Cumorah, Mormon joined his people as the vast armies of the Lamanites marched towards them. The Nephites experienced “that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked” (Mormon 6:7). Mormon then records that 230,000 of his people died in senseless slaughter.

6. The Record is Completed

It is important for the scriptures to be complete and accurate. The Savior taught this to the Nephites by having them correct their record to testify that every prophecy given by Samuel had been fulfilled (3 Nephi 23:6–13). As the fighting ended and the destruction was finished, both Ether and Mormon completed their records as witnesses that every word of the Lord had been fulfilled. This also concluded the mortal mission of both prophets.

Ether observed and recorded the final scenes of extermination which left only two Jaredite survivors: Coriantumr and himself. His last recorded directive from the Lord was to “go forth,” and he “beheld that the words of the Lord had all been fulfilled; and he finished his record” (Ether 15:33). He then hid the record so the people of Limhi would find it. We are left to wonder if there was any contact or communication between Ether and Coriantumr at this point. The record does confirm the fulfillment of the final part of the Lord’s

promise to Coriantumr, in that he was found by the people of Zarahemla and lived with them for “nine moons” (Omni 1:21).

As with the Jaredites, the Nephites were destroyed as a people (Mormon 6:15). Mormon completed his record and testimony of the events which he witnessed. He and his son Moroni were among 24 Nephite survivors. A heart-wrenching outpouring of deep sadness is recorded by Mormon as he views the lifeless bodies of his people strewn across the bloody landscape of Cumorah:

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss. O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen! But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return. (Mormon 6:17–20)

We do not know how long Mormon lived after the final battle, but Moroni records that his father was killed by the Lamanites. Moroni, who was given the keys to the Book of Mormon (D&C 27:5), was left to finish the record and bury it in Cumorah. In the end, he, like Ether, faced a future alone in the hands of the Lord (Mormon 8:1–5; Moroni 10:34).

7. *Well Done, Thou Good and Faithful Servants*

Because of their faithfulness in giving their lives to Christ, both Ether and Mormon received the assurance of an eternal reward. Ether’s final words on the plates reflect his complete trust in and love for the Lord, when he writes: “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” (Ether 15:34). Elder Neal A. Maxwell has stated that “this very special prophet might have been translated” (9).

As Mormon reflected upon a life fraught with spiritual and physical destruction, he expressed contrasting feelings of pain for his people, and feelings of joy for his promise of eternal life:

A continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man. And wo is me because of their wickedness; for my heart has been filled with sorrow because

of their wickedness, all my days; nevertheless, I know that I shall be lifted up at the last day. (Mormon 2:18–19)

Thus, although Ether and Mormon were different people with diverse experiences, they were brought together through Christ.

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon was written by many prophets who had a variety of backgrounds, personalities, and experiences. The Jaredite and Nephite records were written or edited by two prophets—different people who in some ways seem like polar opposites. Clearly, the Lord can accomplish his purposes using all of his children, different as they may be. Surely these differences enhance and strengthen the Lord’s work, for they demonstrate that the Lord’s principles are eternal. The similarities between Ether and Mormon center on things that matter most: eternal principles of Jesus Christ.

Elder Marion G. Romney compared our day with that of the Jaredites and Nephites, and he sounded this warning to us:

Fifteen and a half centuries ago, because of their unrighteousness, the remnants of the Nephite race were in a death grapple upon this land with their brethren, the Lamanites. Among them stood the mighty prophet-leader Mormon. . . . They as well as the Jaredites, were wiped off this land. This was true notwithstanding the glorious promises made in the Book of Mormon. . . .

The world in which we live today is sick nigh unto death. The disease of which it suffers is not a new one. It is as old as history. Its name is unrighteousness. The cure for it is repentance. The Lord foresaw our present extremity long ago and prescribed the remedy. On November 1, 1831, he said:

“I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; and also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world” (D&C 1:17–18).
(430)

Elder Romney’s statement bears the subtle stamp of his personality. However, the Lord’s eternal voice can also be heard, and his warning is consistent and unmistakable. President Kimball taught at the December 1973, Johannesburg, South Africa Stake Conference, “If we will just follow the Lord’s prophets we will arrive at where they are going” (Author’s personal note). Surely, that was the desire of Ether and Mormon, for all of their people—and for us.

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