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## Gazelem the Jaredite

Elliott Jolley

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# GAZELEM THE JAREDITE

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Elliott Jolley

*Abstract: Alma refers to Gazelem in his instructions to his son Helaman in Alma 37:23. This article proposes and explores the concept of identifying Gazelem as a Jaredite seer. Other theories of the identity of Gazelem are addressed in this article but not explored in depth. It discusses the full context of Alma's words, the Jaredite secret combinations and their oaths, Gazelem's seer stone, and the Nephite interpreters. Additionally, it proposes a possible timeline that Gazelem lived among the Jaredites. It also discusses the usage of "Gazelam" as a substitute name for Joseph Smith in early editions of the Doctrine and Covenants.*

One of the more mysterious passages of the Book of Mormon is Alma's reference to Gazelem in Alma 37:23.<sup>1</sup> Gazelem has been interpreted by various authors to be the name of a seer stone, a name-title for seer, or a prophecy of Joseph Smith, among other things. This article proposes that Gazelem was a Jaredite prophet who received revelations about the Jaredites through a seer stone.<sup>2</sup> Considering this idea necessitates the discussion of several topics: Alma's instructions to Helaman,<sup>3</sup> the use of a seer stone, the "interpreters," the Book of Ether, the secret combinations

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1. The Book of Mormon has multiple individuals named "Alma." The Alma referred to in this article is commonly called "Alma the Younger" or Alma<sub>2</sub>. Throughout this paper this individual will simply be referred to as "Alma."

2. The word "Jaredite" is never used in the Book of Mormon but is used in this article. The phrase "Jaredite plates" is used as a substitute name for the record of the Jaredites: "the twenty and four plates which were found by the people of Limhi, which is called the Book of Ether" (Ether 1:2).

3. The Book of Mormon also has multiple individuals named "Helaman." In all instances in this paper, except one, references to "Helaman" are to the son of Alma. The one exception, noted hereafter as Helaman<sub>2</sub>, is to Alma's grandson.

of the Jaredites, and “Gazalam” as a substitute name for Joseph Smith in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.

The discussion begins with the full context of Alma’s words to his son, Helaman:

And now I will speak unto you concerning those twenty four plates,  
that ye keep them,  
that the mysteries and the works of darkness and their secret works  
— or the secret works of those people which have been destroyed —  
may be made manifest unto this people  
— yea, all their murders and robbings and their plunderings  
and all their wickedness and abominations may be made manifest unto  
this people —  
yea, and that ye preserve these directors.  
For behold, the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness  
— yea, work secret murders and abominations —  
therefore the Lord said  
if they did not repent,  
they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth.  
And the Lord said:

***I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem  
a stone which shall shine forth in darkness unto light,  
that I may discover unto my people which serve me —  
that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren,  
yea, their secret works, their works of darkness,  
and their wickedness and abominations.***

And now my son, these directors were prepared  
that the word of God might be fulfilled which he spake, saying:  
***I will bring forth out of darkness unto light  
all their secret works and their abominations.  
And except they repent, I will destroy them from off the face of the  
earth.***

***And I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations  
unto every nation which shall hereafter possess the land.***

And now my son, we see that they did not repent;  
therefore they have been destroyed.  
And thus far the word of God hath been fulfilled;  
yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness  
and made known unto us.

And now my son, I command you  
that ye retain all their oaths and their covenants  
and their agreements in their secret abominations;

yea, and all their signs and their wonders ye shall retain from this  
 people,  
 that they know them not,  
 lest peradventure they should fall into darkness also and be destroyed.  
 (Alma 37:21–27)<sup>4</sup>

## Theories

Some proposed theories about the identity of Gazelem are summarized by the quotations below. The purpose of this article is not to discredit or disprove these theories, simply to propose my own. These quotations serve as a representative sample of their number and variety. I include them here to demonstrate that there is no consensus among them, and sometimes there isn't a consensus within them.

- With reference to the name Gazelam, it is interesting to note that Alma in directing Helaman to preserve both the Urim and Thummim and the plates containing the Book of Ether, says that such record will be brought to light by the Lord's servant Gazelem, who will use "a stone" in his translation work. (Alma 37:21–23.) It may be that Gazelem is a variant spelling of Gazelam and that Alma's reference is to the Prophet Joseph Smith who did in fact bring forth part at least of the Ether record. Or it could be that the name Gazelem (Gazelam) is a title having to do with power to translate ancient records and that Alma's reference was to some Nephite prophet who brought the Book of Ether to light in the golden era of Nephite history.<sup>5</sup>
- "I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone." This may well be a play on words. Is Gazelem the seer stone or the servant? It is difficult to tell from the passage and depends very much on the placement of a comma in the sentence. Perhaps it could refer to both. It is interesting to note that when Jesus called Simon Peter to the ministry, he said: "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a seer, or a stone" (JST, John 1:42). Though this

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4. Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). This edition is used for the passages quoted from the Book of Mormon throughout this article. The ***bold italic*** text indicates suspected quotations from the Jaredite plates.

5. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 307.

name or title of Gazelem may be used in regard to any seer who utilizes seer stones, it seems in this instance to be a direct reference to Joseph Smith the Prophet.<sup>6</sup>

- Whether Gazelem refers to the servant or the stone is unclear. ... If it is the name or title of a servant, Gazelem could refer to the brother of Jared, who received the interpreters from the Lord, or to Mosiah, who used them to translate the Jaredite record for the benefit of the Nephites.<sup>7</sup>
- Alma used this prophecy to emphasize the prophetic role of Mosiah II and his translation of the 24 gold plates. He apparently felt that the person “Gazelem” was Mosiah II and that it was relevant that he translated with the two seer stones bound in a metal bow.<sup>8</sup>

### My Servant Gazelem

Royal Skousen has argued from a linguistic and textual standpoint that Gazelem is probably the name of a person and not the name of a stone.

Most likely, the phrase here in Alma 37:23, “my servant Gazelem,” intends to say that the name of the servant was Gazelem. One reason is that there are numerous instances in the text of the expression “my servant <name>”: my servant Abinadi (Mosiah 26:15), my servant Amulek (Alma 8:29), my servant Samuel the Lamanite (3 Nephi 23:9), my servant John (Ether 4:16). Another reason is that if the name of the stone were *Gazelem*, we would expect the word order to be different, with the indefinite *a stone* preceding its name (something like “I will prepare unto my servant a stone, Gazelem”). ... The

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6. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 3:278.

7. Stan Spencer, “Reflections of Urim: Hebrew Poetry Sheds Light on the Directors-Interpreters Mystery,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 14 (2015): 187–207, note 18.

8. Michael Hubbard Mackay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center-Brigham Young University, 2016), 103.

critical text will therefore interpret the name *Gazelem* as the name of the servant, not the name of the stone.<sup>9</sup>

This article will also interpret Gazelem to be the name of the servant. The question then becomes, who was he? And why does Alma refer to him?

### **Alma's Instructions to Helaman**

The words of Alma to his son Helaman include Alma chapters 36 and 37.<sup>10</sup> Chapter 36 is a beautiful retelling of Alma's conversion, including personal exhortations to Helaman, formed as an ancient chiasm.<sup>11</sup> In Alma 37, Alma instructed Helaman regarding certain artifacts, "sacred things" he would be charged with preserving: the plates of brass, the 24 Jaredite plates, the brother of Jared's "interpreters" which Alma called "directors,"<sup>12</sup> and the Liahona. He took the opportunity to teach Helaman certain doctrines relative to each one. Dividing this chapter into topical sections based on each of these "sacred things" reveals a structure wherein Alma combined his discussion of the 24 plates and the directors together under the broader topic of the Jaredites' secret combinations. His reference to Gazelem originated within that discussion. Alma taught Helaman how secret combinations destroyed the Jaredites and warned him that they could also destroy the Nephites. He instructed him how to approach this subject — to readily teach the people to abhor secret combinations but not to reveal the particulars of the Jaredite oaths.

Alma described the secretive subculture that overtook and extinguished the Jaredites with these words: "mysteries," "works of darkness," "secret works," "murders," "robbings," "plunderings," "wickedness," "abominations," "secret murders," "secret abominations," and "secret combinations."<sup>13</sup> This article will refer to them simply as secret combinations. Helaman was told to freely teach the Nephites the consequences of these. Alma described the agreements between members of those secret combinations with these words: "oaths," "covenants,"

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9. Royal Skousen, "Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Four: Alma 21–55" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2007), 2361–63.

10. The chapter breaks in the Original Manuscript indicate that Alma 36 and 37 were originally one chapter.

11. See John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (1969): 69–83.

12. The word "directors" was replaced with "interpreters" in the 1920 LDS edition of the Book of Mormon. For a discussion of this change see Skousen, "Textual Variants," 2359–2361. See also: Stan Spencer, "Reflections of Urim" 187–207.

13. Alma 37:21–32.



“agreements,” “signs,” “wonders,” and “secret plans.”<sup>14</sup> This article will refer to them as oaths. Alma commanded Helaman not to reveal the oaths of the Jaredites’ secret combinations to their people; therefore, it stands to reason that both the history of the secret combinations and the details of their oaths were written on the Jaredite plates.

The secret combinations that Alma referred to were in the Nephites’ past — the Jaredite secret combinations. Secret combinations among the Nephites didn’t exist at the time Alma spoke these words to Helaman. They were foreign to the Nephites until just before Alma’s grandson, Helaman<sub>2</sub>, became chief judge.<sup>15</sup> Kishkumen and Gadianton formed a secret band with their own secret signs, words, laws, and covenants. Mormon made sure to inform us that “those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman.”<sup>16</sup>

### Gazelem

Within Alma’s discussion of the Jaredite secret combinations, he introduced the historical context of Gazelem:

For behold, the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness  
— yea, work secret murders and abominations —  
therefore the Lord said  
if they did not repent,  
they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth.  
(Alma 37:22)

Note that Alma used past tense: “the Lord *saw* that his people *began*.” In light of the circumstances of these verses (Alma’s giving the Jaredite record to Helaman), this statement is clearly a reference to Jaredites and their secret combinations, as written on the Jaredite plates. It is a discussion of the past, not a prophecy of the future. Alma was summarizing the Lord’s interactions with the Jaredites — how he responded to their wickedness. He was retelling a sequence of historical events, a give-and-take or cause-and-effect. The Lord *saw* their wickedness; *therefore*, the Lord spoke. The Lord had a message for the Jaredites: repent, or be destroyed. Simple as it sounds, this conditional consequence was the crux of the Jaredites’ fate. A few verses later, Alma referred back to this prophecy by observing:

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14. Alma 37:27–32.

15. Helaman 1:9–12; 2:2–14; 6:15–31.

16. Helaman 6:22–26. See also Alma 63:12.

we see that they did not repent;  
therefore they have been destroyed.

(Alma 37:26)

Later in his instructions, Alma applied the same requirements to all future inhabitants of this land:

Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever  
unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto  
destruction,  
except they repent before they are fully ripe.

(Alma 37:31)

After introducing the history of the Jaredites' secret combinations, it appears that Alma quoted two scriptural passages.<sup>17</sup> His source text is not available to us.<sup>18</sup> Neither did Alma specify where the words came from. However, we can make several deductions with confidence. These quotations were written in the voice of the Lord. They were spoken to the Jaredites. Alma was well acquainted with these words and wove them seamlessly into his teachings about the consequences of the Jaredites' secret combinations. Alma's omission of their source might indicate that Helaman was already familiar with the quotes and their origins. Given all this, the strongest possibility is that Alma quoted directly from the Jaredite plates, the same records he was entrusting to Helaman.

If we combine the two blocks of quoted text from Alma's instructions to Helaman, we see how they may have originally been one continuous passage:

I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem  
a stone which shall shine forth in darkness unto light,  
that I may discover unto my people which serve me —  
that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren,  
yea, their secret works, their works of darkness,  
and their wickedness and abominations.  
I will bring forth out of darkness unto light  
all their secret works and their abominations.  
And except they repent, I will destroy them from off the face of the  
earth.

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17. See the bold italic text in the passages quoted at the beginning of the article.

18. "While we do not yet have Ether's full record, we do have what may be a fragment from that account in the prophecies of Alma when he entrusted these records to his son Helaman." (Matthew Roper, "A Fragment from the Unabridged Record of Ether," <http://etherscave.blogspot.com/2014/10/a-fragment-from-unabridged-record-of.html>, September 19, 2017).

And I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations  
unto every nation which shall hereafter possess the land.  
(Alma 37:23–25)

Whether or not they were one passage, it is important to point out that these words were spoken by the Lord before the Jaredites were destroyed. They were given to the Jaredites as a warning. There was still a chance for them to repent. “If they did not repent” and “except they repent” are the conditions proposed. Therefore, the Lord spoke these words when the Jaredite secret combinations existed. The Lord brought their secrets “out of darkness unto light” at that time.

As discussed previously, these revelations commenced when “the Lord saw that his people began to work “secret combinations.”<sup>19</sup> In response, he revealed their secret works to “their brethren.” A logical interpretation is that the brethren of the wicked Jaredites were the righteous Jaredites, those who served the Lord. The Lord revealed to them “all the secret works” of their brethren.

According to these passages, the instrument for these revelations was a stone, given to a servant of the Lord. The name of this servant was Gazelem, and the revelations he received were written on the Jaredite plates.

### A Stone

The function of this seer stone sounds similar to what is known about the translation of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith used either the Nephite interpreter stones or his own seer stone (eventually, either instrument became synonymous with the term “Urim and Thummim”). Joseph placed the seer stone into a hat and then put his face into the hat to look upon the stone in darkness. The words revealed to Joseph were then dictated to his scribe.<sup>20</sup> The seer stone that the Lord prepared for Gazelem was similarly a stone which would “shine forth in darkness unto light.”<sup>21</sup>

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19. Alma 37:22.

20. Richard E. Turley Jr., Robin S. Jensen, and Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Joseph the Seer,” *Ensign*, October 2015, 49–54; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness Unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2015); Roger Nicholson, “The Spectacles, the Stone, the Hat, and the Book: A Twenty-first Century Believer’s View of the Book of Mormon Translation,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 121–90.

21. Alma 37:23. Moroni alludes to Joseph Smith’s future translation of the gold plates in Mormon 8:16: “And blessed be him that shall bring this thing to light, for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it

Thus the Jaredite record describes three different types of sacred stones which had divine functions: the sixteen stones that the brother of Jared asked the Lord to touch with his finger to give light to the Jaredite barges,<sup>22</sup> the two stones that the Lord gave to the brother of Jared on the mount (the “interpreters” or “directors”),<sup>23</sup> and the seer stone of Gazelem. As indicated by the text, Gazelem’s seer stone was a single stone. Conversely, the interpreters are always described in the plural — as “stones,” “directors,” or “interpreters” — specifically as “two stones ... fastened into the two rims of a bow.”<sup>24</sup>

### Interpreters

I propose that the revealing of the Jaredite secret combinations to the Nephites was a two-step process. First, Gazelem used his seer stone to reveal the secret combinations of his contemporaries during his time. Those revelations were subsequently recorded on the Jaredite plates. Later, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> translated these words into the Nephite language with the interpreters.<sup>25</sup> Through these two revelatory steps, the secret combinations of the Jaredites were manifest to the Nephites. Both times, interpreters and seers worked in tandem to bring them to light — first Gazelem and his seer stone and, much later, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> and the interpreters. Alma referred to both instruments via the two quotations (above) to describe that process. The first quotation (discussed above) refers to Gazelem and his use of a seer stone. Part of the second quotation (discussed below), includes a prophecy that Alma considered to be fulfilled by Mosiah<sub>2</sub>’s use of the interpreters.

The language of the Jaredites was completely unknown to the Nephites.<sup>26</sup> Providentially, the Lord gave the brother of Jared the interpreters, which were prepared “for the purpose of interpreting languages.”<sup>27</sup> There are questions as to whether Mosiah<sub>2</sub> used his own “interpreters” or the two stones given to the brother of Jared.<sup>28</sup> I personally conclude they were the same as those given to the brother

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shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness and come unto the knowledge of the people, and it shall be done by the power of God.”

22. Ether 3:1–6; 6:1–3.

23. Ether 3:21–4:7, Mosiah 8:12–18, Mosiah 28:11–19, D&C 17:1, JS — H 1:35.

24. Mosiah 28:13, see also JS — H 1:35.

25. Mosiah 28:11–19.

26. Mosiah 8:11. “[T]here is no one in the land that is able to interpret the language or the engravings that are on the plates.”

27. Mosiah 28:14.

28. Mackay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, 96–102.

of Jared (which were also the same that Joseph Smith used) and that the first reference to these interpreters being used is when Mosiah<sub>1</sub> translated a large stone containing the writings of Coriantumr, a lone Jaredite survivor who had lived with the people of Mulek for a short time.<sup>29</sup> Decades later, Mosiah<sub>1</sub>'s grandson, Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, used the interpreters to translate the 24 Jaredite plates which had been found by the people of King Limhi.<sup>30</sup> We do not know how Mosiah<sub>1</sub> came to possess the brother of Jared's interpreters or why the interpreters and the Jaredite plates were not deposited together — the Nephites recovered them separately as the passage below demonstrates. However these questions are answered, for the sake of this discussion it only matters that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was a seer who used the interpreters to translate the 24 Jaredite plates, then publish them.

Ammon, who aided the return of the people of King Limhi, was familiar with the abilities of a seer and the functioning of the interpreters. He told King Limhi:

I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records;  
for he hath wherewith that he can look  
and translate all records that are of ancient date,  
and it is a gift from God.  
And the things are called interpreters,  
and no man can look in them except he be commanded.  
(Mosiah 8:13)

He continues with the description of a seer, which can be applied to the brother of Jared, Gazelem, Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, Joseph Smith, and others in the scriptures.

But a seer can know of things which are passed,  
and also of things which are to come;  
and by them shall all things be revealed  
— or rather shall secret things be made manifest —  
and hidden things shall come to light,  
and things which is not known shall be made known by them,  
and also things shall be made known by them

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29. Omni 1:20 “And it came to pass in the days of Mosiah there was a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it, and he did interpret the engravings by the gift and power of God.” Joseph Smith used the same phrase, “by the gift and power of God” to describe his experience with the translation of the Book of Mormon (The Book of Mormon, 1830, *Preface*).

30. Mosiah 28:11–19.

which otherwise could not be known.

(Mosiah 8:17)

He further declared, “a gift which is greater can no man have.”<sup>31</sup>

Alma taught Helaman the crucial role that these interpreters played in revealing the Jaredite secret combinations by quoting a second passage from the Jaredite plates. In this second Jaredite quotation, the use of the connecting pronouns “they” and “their” — referring to those who indulge in secret combinations — suggests that it is a continuation of the first Jaredite quotation.<sup>32</sup>

And now my son, these directors were prepared  
that the word of God might be fulfilled which he spake, saying:  
***I will bring forth out of darkness unto light  
all their secret works and their abominations.  
And except they repent, I will destroy them from off the face of the  
earth.***

***And I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations  
unto every nation which shall hereafter possess the land.***

And now my son, we see that they did not repent;  
therefore they have been destroyed.

And thus far the word of God hath been fulfilled;  
yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness  
and made known unto us.

(Alma 37:24–26)

This second Jaredite quotation has three important parts. The first two lines are a continuation of the first Jaredite quotation. The next line is the source for the words that Alma paraphrased to Helaman as he began his discussion of the 24 plates: “[T]he Lord said if they did not repent, they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth.”<sup>33</sup> The last two lines are a prophecy that future nations would know of the Jaredite secret combinations. After quoting this prophecy, Alma pointed out its fulfillment to Helaman. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had used the interpreters to translate the Jaredite plates and publish them to the Nephites. Alma emphasized, “And thus far the word of God hath

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31. Mosiah 8:16.

32. The bold italic text indicates suspected quotations from the Jaredite plates. The interpreters may not have been explicitly mentioned in the original Jaredite quotation here. Alma apparently saw how the interpreters fulfilled this prophecy and inserted his comment into the middle of the original quotation.

33. Alma 37:22.

been fulfilled; yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us.”

According to Alma, the fulfillment of this prophecy is one of the purposes of the interpreters. They “were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled.” Their instrumentality brought the secret combinations of the Jaredites to the knowledge of the Nephites. However, this prophecy includes more than just the Nephites; it also predicts that a knowledge of the Jaredite secret combinations will come to “every nation which shall hereafter possess the land.” Hence Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon and our knowledge of its contents, especially Moroni’s abridgement of the Book of Ether, continues its fulfillment in our day.

### The Book of Ether

Having considered the idea that Gazelem was a Jaredite and that he brought the secret combinations and oaths of the wicked Jaredites to light through revelations from the Lord, which were subsequently written in the Jaredite plates, the question then arises: When did Gazelem live among the Jaredites?

Moroni abridged the Jaredite plates (or their earlier Nephite translation) and included it with his writings at the end of the Book of Mormon.<sup>34</sup> His abridgement is relatively small, and includes many of his own thoughts. In the course of his account, he wrote the names of 55 individuals; 30 are the same as those given at the beginning of the book, in the genealogy from Ether to Jared, but in reverse order.<sup>35</sup> Of the 55 named individuals, 34 were kings. Non-specific groups of “prophets” are mentioned seven times, but none of the prophets are named except Ether.<sup>36</sup> Even the brother of Jared isn’t named. It isn’t surprising then, that Gazelem’s name wasn’t included in the abridgment. Moroni said, “I could not make a full account of these things which are written” and “the hundredth part I have not written.”<sup>37</sup> We can therefore appreciate how much of the record he was able to append.

Without any specifics about Gazelem from the Book of Ether, we can only guess as to a possible time that he lived. Alma prefaced his reference to Gazelem by saying, “The Lord saw that his people *began* to work in darkness.”<sup>38</sup> Using this information as a starting point, we can find

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34. Ether 1:1–2.

35. Ether 1:6–33.

36. Ether 7:23–26; 9:26–29; 11:1–3; 11:5–8; 11:12–13; 11:20–22; 12:2.

37. Ether 3:17, 15:33.

38. Alma 37:22.

multiple times in the Book of Ether when the Jaredites were involved in secret combinations. However, the first instance of secret combinations is notable because Moroni included many details of its establishment, mentioned the oaths, inserted his own commentary, and added a warning about secret combinations to latter-day readers.<sup>39</sup> This beginning was in the days of Jared, the son of Omer, five generations from the original Jared.

### **Jaredite Secret Combinations**

Jared's daughter was "expert" and inspired him in a plot to kill his father and obtain the kingdom. She asked her father:

Hath he not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep?  
Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old,  
that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?  
(Ether 8:8-9)

Moroni appropriately placed the blame on the three individuals who initiated the secret combinations that plagued the Jaredites until their destruction:

And it was the daughter of Jared  
which put it into his heart to search up these things of old;  
and Jared put it into the heart of Akish.  
(Ether 8:17)

Akish willingly led the coup, following the plans of Jared and his daughter:

And Akish did administer unto them [his kindred and friends] the oaths  
which was given by them of old, who also sought power,  
... And they [the secret combinations] were kept up by the power of the devil,  
to administer these oaths unto the people, to keep them in darkness,  
to help such as sought power to gain power  
and to murder and to plunder and to lie

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39. Ether 8.



and to commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms.  
(Ether 8:15–16)

Akish eventually had Jared beheaded using these same secret combinations. He then assumed the throne.<sup>40</sup>

With this historical backdrop, Moroni broke from his abridgment to discuss, at length, the evils of secret combinations:

For the Lord worketh not in secret combinations,  
neither doth he will that man should shed blood;  
but in all things hath forbidden it from the beginning of man.  
(Ether 8:19)<sup>41</sup>

Moroni's entire discourse there is worth reading. He added a warning to his future readers about secret combinations in their day, but he also obeyed Alma's commandment not to disclose the specific oaths:

And now I Moroni do not write the manner of their oaths and combinations,  
for it hath been made known unto me that they are had among all people;  
... And they have caused the destruction of this people of which I am now speaking,  
and also the destruction of the people of Nephi.  
(Ether 8:20–21)

Moroni's declaration that he would not include their oaths at this point in his abridgment implies that the oaths were written in the Jaredite record in connection with the history of Jared and Akish. If the Lord revealed the oaths proximate to the same time they happened in Jaredite history, the association between Alma's discussion with Helaman and these historical events is strengthened. For the righteous Jaredites (who presumably kept the records), knowledge of these specific conversations between Jared and his daughter, the secret meetings of Akish and his kindred, and the specific oaths they used would have required revelation from the Lord.<sup>42</sup> The detailed record of their deeds corresponds with Alma's description: when the Lord "saw that his people began to work in

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40. Ether 9:5–6.

41. See also 2 Nephi 9:9.

42. In this and other secret combinations, revealing the secrets is discouraged by being punishable by death. See Helaman 6:24, Moses 5:29.

darkness,” he declared that he would “discover to (his people) the works of their brethren ... all their secret works and abominations.”<sup>43</sup>

Close reading of the events that led to the first Jaredite secret combinations, coupled with a close look at Moroni’s commentary therein, leads to the dating of Gazelem’s lifetime sometime within the generations surrounding the reign of Jared and Akish.<sup>44</sup>

### **Gazelem the Jaredite**

The Lord mercifully warned King Omer in a dream to flee before Akish could assassinate him.<sup>45</sup> His family (and a few others who eventually joined them) fled to the seashore, to a place called Ablom.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps Gazelem was a member of Omer’s household, who fled with him. If he didn’t, the prospects for survival under the reign of Akish weren’t very good. “So great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people.”<sup>47</sup> A civil war “which lasted for the

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43. Alma 37:22–25.

44. Besides the time of Jared and Akish, there are five other times when secret combinations are mentioned, which are also candidates for when Gazelem lived: (1) The reign of Heth, 8 generations from the original Jared: “Heth began to embrace the secret plans again of old,” killed his father, and commanded his people to kill the prophets (Ether 9:26–29). (2) The reign of Com, ~22 generations from Jared: “there began to be robbers in the land, and they adopted the old plans and administered oaths after the manner of the ancients” (Ether 10:33). Com fought against the robbers and protected the prophets who prophesied of the destruction of the people. (3) The reign of Shiblön, ~23 generations from Jared: his brother (who is not named) caused that the prophets should be put to death (Ether 11:4–8). There was a great calamity; “they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord because of their wicked combinations.” (4) The days of Ethem ~26 generations from Jared: “there came many prophets and prophesied again unto the people; ... the Lord would utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth except they repented” (Ether 11:12–13). The people hardened their hearts and “the prophets mourned and withdrew from among the people.” The similar wording here to Alma 37 should be noted; Alma 37 may be the actual quotation from the Lord and Ether 11:12 may be a summary or paraphrase made by Moroni. (5) The days of Coriantör ~28 generations from Jared: “many prophets ... prophesied of great and marvelous things and cried repentance unto the people” (Ether 11:20–22). The Lord would utterly destroy them, and “bring forth another people to possess the land ... they did reject all the words of the prophets because of their secret society and wicked abominations.”

45. Ether 9:1–3.

46. Ether 9:3.

47. Ether 9:6.

space of many years,” between Akish and his own sons left only 30 people alive.<sup>48</sup> Omer then returned to reclaim his kingdom unopposed.

The Lord speaks of Gazelem in the third person — “my servant Gazelem”<sup>49</sup> — which includes the possibility that the Lord is speaking about Gazelem to someone else. Perhaps these words of the Lord that Alma quoted were part of Omer’s dream.<sup>50</sup> The Lord may have instructed Omer to take Gazelem and the others with him and promised Omer “I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone.”<sup>51</sup> Those people who fled with Omer to the seashore may have been the righteous servants to whom Lord revealed the secret combinations through Gazelem: “That I may discover unto my people which serve me (Omer and his people) — that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren (Jared and Akish), yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations.”<sup>52</sup>

Their proximity to the seashore may have reminded Omer’s people of the voyage their ancestors made across the sea. The description of the 16 stones the brother of Jared put in each end of the barges shares similar wording with the description of Gazelem’s stone — “Thus the Lord caused *stones to shine in darkness, to give light* unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness.”<sup>53</sup> When the Lord said he would prepare for Gazelem “a *stone which shall shine forth in darkness unto light*,”<sup>54</sup> perhaps he was drawing a parallel that had deep cultural meaning for the descendants of those who crossed the sea with lighted stones.

It’s possible Gazelem found his stone at the seashore. But it seems too speculative to glean any more from the Book of Ether. We don’t know what became of Gazelem or his seer stone.

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48. Ether 9:12. The almost entire destruction of Akish’s kingdom may be a partial fulfillment of the promise of the Lord that “except they repent, I will destroy them from off of the face of the earth.”

49. Alma 37:23.

50. Similarly, the prophet Lehi also received specific revelations from the Lord in a dream — when he was told to flee Jerusalem, eventually journeying to the seashore. See 1 Nephi 2:1–3.

51. Alma 37:23.

52. Alma 37:23.

53. Ether 6:3; see also Ether 3:4. Matthew Roper, “A Fragment from the Unabridged Record of Ether,” <http://etherscave.blogspot.com/2014/10/a-fragment-from-unabridged-record-of.html>, September 19, 2017.

54. Alma 37:23.

## Questions

The concept of Gazelem as a Jaredite prophet raises several questions. Why would the Lord reveal these things to Gazelem through his own stone and not the interpreters given to the brother of Jared? Did Gazelem have access to the interpreters? It is possible that none of the Jaredites did. The brother of Jared was commanded “that he should seal up the two stones which he had received and shew them not until the Lord should shew them unto the children of men.”<sup>55</sup> What we know from the text is that the Nephites found the interpreters and the 24 plates independently.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the prophet Ether may not have inherited the interpreters in the end — they aren’t specifically mentioned as being in his possession. If he did have them, why would he deposit them apart from the 24 plates? Perhaps the brother of Jared buried or hid the interpreters with his sealed record. Moroni comments that he was commanded to hide the sealed portion and the interpreters “again in the earth.”<sup>57</sup> This implies that they were hidden in the earth previously. Mosiah<sub>1</sub> may have been guided to where the Brother of Jared buried them.<sup>58</sup> Some of these questions may have been answered on the lost 116 pages.<sup>59</sup> In any case, if Gazelem didn’t have access to the interpreters, it makes sense for the Lord to prepare a seer stone for him.

## Gazelam

When Joseph Smith and his associates were preparing the publication of the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, the names of many individuals and places were substituted with other names to protect the identity of church leaders. Joseph Smith’s name was replaced with the

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55. Ether 3:28.

56. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> already possessed the interpreters when Limhi’s people discovered the Jaredite plates. See Mosiah 8:6–21.

57. Ether 4:3.

58. Ether 4:1–7. Perhaps the sealed portion was buried with the interpreters and Mosiah<sub>1</sub> found them together. If so, then the 24 plates that Limhi found would not have had the sealed portion written on them. The Nephites may not have known about Mosiah<sub>1</sub>’s possession of this sealed record. It was “forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that [Christ] should be lifted up upon the cross. And for this cause did king Benjamin keep them, that they should not come unto the world”. After Christ came, “he commanded that they should be made manifest”. Moroni again sealed up this record and reburied it in the earth.

59. See Don Bradley, “Piercing the Veil: Temple Worship in the Lost 116 Pages,” FairMormon.org, 2012, <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2012/piercing-the-veil-temple-worship-in-the-lost-116-pages>.

names “Enoch,” “Baurak Ale,” and “Gazelam.”<sup>60</sup> This may have been an alternate spelling or misspelling of “Gazelem.” Joseph Smith’s and early church members’ interest in learning Hebrew or the language of Adam may have played a role in which names they selected.<sup>61</sup> These names were gradually removed from subsequent editions of the Doctrine and Covenants and the real names inserted.

Many early Latter-Day Saints used the name Gazelam (Gazelem) to refer to Joseph Smith or his seer stone. The following are some notable examples, compiled by Mark Ashurst-McGee:<sup>62</sup>

- Of Wilford Woodruff, it was written: “In his possession he had many relics, among which was the seer stone, known as ‘Gazelem,’ which was shown of the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith.”<sup>63</sup> It is not clear whether the unknown author of this statement was quoting President Woodruff or if they interjected the phrase about Gazelem themselves.
- In 1855, approximately 11 years after the funeral of Joseph Smith, William W. Phelps wrote down the sermon he gave on that occasion, according to his memory. He wrote: “Joseph Smith, who was Gazelam in the spirit world, was, and is, and will be in the progress of Eternity: — The Prince of Light. ‘Tis so; and who can dispute it?”<sup>64</sup>
- Brigham Young and Willard Richards included an index to the 1841 edition of the Book of Mormon which had the entry: “Gazelem, a stone, (secret).”<sup>65</sup>

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60. *Joseph Smith Papers*, “Substitute Words in the 1835 and 1844 Editions of the Doctrine and Covenants.” <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/bc-jsp/content/jsp/images/content/library/pdf/chart7.pdf>.

61. *Ibid.*, 1.

62. Mark Ashurst-McGee, *A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet* (MA Thesis, Utah State University, 2000). Ashurst-McGee conjectured that Gazelem may have been both Joseph’s spirit/temple name and also the name of his white seer stone, a theory that combines all these sources.

63. No author, untitled statement, George A. Smith Papers, Box 174, folder 26, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

64. William Wines Phelps, “The Funeral Sermon,” MS, 13 June 1866, Church History Library. Phelps reconstructed his funeral sermon in 1855.

65. *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, trans. Joseph Smith (Liverpool, UK: Printed by

How do these usages of the name reconcile with the idea of Gazelem as a Jaredite prophet? One line of reasoning is that our knowledge of the name Gazelem began when early Latter-Day Saints became familiar with the Book of Mormon. Since Alma 37 is one of the few places in the Book of Mormon that mentions the act of receiving revelations through a stone, early church members readily repurposed the name Gazelem and associated it with elements of Joseph Smith’s divine calling as a seer.<sup>66</sup> In addition, for the early saints, this passage initiated the question of whether Gazelem is the name of the person or the name of the stone, with no apparent consensus. The same question persists among the saints today, also without a consensus. The substitution of “Gazelam” for Joseph’s name in the Doctrine and Covenants reinforced the perception that it was a prophecy of Joseph. After his death, that perception would have been amplified by a nostalgia for Joseph by those who knew him, or a desire to elevate his prophetic station.

We don’t know whether Joseph saw himself as a fulfillment of these verses, just felt a kinship with whoever Gazelem was, or even chose the substitute name himself. There are no surviving statements from Joseph declaring that he or his seer stone was named Gazelem.

A prophecy concerning Joseph Smith already exists in the Book of Mormon, in 2 Nephi chapter 3, and it mentions his given name “Joseph” explicitly. This prophecy actually comes from the plates of brass — the writings of Joseph of Egypt — with which Alma would have been very familiar. Immediately before giving Helaman the 24 plates, Alma had entrusted him with the plates of brass.<sup>67</sup> But Alma doesn’t appear to be prophesying of future events. He points out that these prophecies and words he quotes have already been fulfilled “thus far,” including the use of the interpreters.

And *thus far* the word of God hath been fulfilled;  
yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness  
and made known unto us.

(Alma 37:26)

In this context, it doesn’t seem that Alma is prophesying of the then-future restoration to be accomplished by Joseph Smith in the latter-days, other than the quotation of the Lord that he would “bring to light all their secrets and abominations unto every nation which shall

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J. Tompkins for Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Parley P. Pratt, 1841), 640, col. 1.

66. Mackay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, 105–106.

67. Alma 37:3–20.

hereafter possess the land.”<sup>68</sup> Interpreting Gazelem as a Jaredite prophet does not diminish Joseph Smith’s foreordained calling or his important work of translating the Book of Mormon.

### Summary

This article is an attempt to determine who Gazelem was, placing the burden of proof on the text of the Book of Mormon instead of the myriad subsequent interpretations or applications of the name.

The purpose of this article is also to provide a scriptural framework for interpreting Gazelem as a Jaredite prophet. Some important points for understanding this concept are summarized below:

- In these verses about Gazelem, Alma speaks to Helaman about the Jaredites — the Jaredite record, the Jaredite secret combinations, and their destruction.
- Alma quotes twice from the Jaredite plates.
- Alma uses the quotations to teach about both the seer stone of Gazelem and the use of the interpreters by Mosiah<sub>2</sub>.
- Gazelem was a servant of the Lord, whose revelations were recorded on the Jaredite plates.
- Alma is speaking to Helaman about history — prophecies already fulfilled. The Jaredite secrets had been revealed. Gazelem was a seer in their past, not the future.
- Gazelem’s seer stone is a different revelatory instrument than the interpreters. Thus, the Book of Mormon describes the prophetic use of both a seer stone and the interpreters as examples we can study to understand Joseph Smith’s experience in translating and receiving revelation.
- Gazelem’s stone and the brother of Jared’s interpreters were both used to reveal the Jaredite secret combinations to the Nephites in a two-step process. The stone was used at the time the secret combinations began and the interpreters were used during the time of the Nephites.

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68. Alma 37:25–26.

- Gazelem is not mentioned by name in the Book of Ether because the names included in the abridgment are typically the Jaredite kings or their political relatives.
- Alma recounts a history when secret combinations started, when “the Lord saw that his people *began* to work in darkness.” One possibility for Gazelem’s ministry, then, is the reign of Omer, when Jared and Akish founded the first secret combinations of the Jaredites.
- “Gazelam” was used as a substitute for the name of Joseph Smith in early publications of the Doctrine and Covenants. He may have seen the language in Alma 37 as echoing his own experience with a seer stone, and adopted the name as a fitting substitute.

### Conclusion

The text indicates that Gazelem was a Jaredite prophet, that he lived among the Jaredites at a time when they had begun to indulge in secret combinations, and that a seer stone had enabled him to reveal those secret combinations to the righteous Jaredites. These revelations were written down on the Jaredite plates — to justify and record the reason the Jaredites were destroyed. After the people of Limhi discovered those plates, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> used the interpreters to translate them. This included the revelations that had been received by Gazelem through his seer stone. Alma referred to both instruments, quoted twice from the Jaredite plates, and noted the fulfillment of those prophecies as he taught his son Helaman about Jaredite history, their secret combinations, how those secret combinations were brought to the knowledge of the Nephites, and why the Nephites should reject such wickedness.

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