

# ETHER 12–15

John W. Welch Notes



## Introduction — Final Farewells of Two Prophets

Steve Walker, a faculty member in the Brigham Young University English department, has written several articles on literature and belief. He once wrote an essay called “Last Words,” as an introduction to the books of 4 Nephi, Mormon, Ether and Moroni. This came at the end of a series of essays on different parts of the Book of Mormon. He is a master of literary analysis. This is what he said:

Looked at from a literary perspective, for its impact in our personal lives, I find the final section of the Book of Mormon to be particularly engaging. Like any good climax, it tends to be the most intense part of the book. It is arguably the most significant section. This culmination of a thousand-year chronicle puts the whole volume into over-view mode—the summary at the end of the book encapsulates what has mattered most. T. S. Eliot [“Little Gidding,” *The Four Quartets*] observed that, ‘What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.’ Endings re-orient us as when Sam from the Lord of the Rings returns to the shrine with all those world-altering adventures involving the ring. ‘Well, I’m back.’

The small books that wrap up the Book of Mormon—Fourth Nephi, Mormon, Ether, and especially Moroni—give us the conclusion to the whole matter. Their endings are emphatic because they take up the theme of endings in a series of death-bed statements, famous last words. That’s dramatic because of the ‘last, the best of all the game’ effect, because of our expectation that the final things said distills overall implications, as in Sidney Carton’s last words in *A Tale of Two Cities*:

'It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done.' The final Book of Mormon words put me in the mind of the last words of Rabelais, for instance, who said: 'I'm going to seek a great perhaps'; and of Lord Nelson's, 'Thank God I have done my duty'; and Goethe, 'More light'. I especially like Pancho Villa's expression that final statements matter, 'Don't let it end like this. Tell them I said something.'

There is weightiness to the last words in the Book of Mormon as it assumes a death-bed whisper, 'low out of the dust' as 'one that hath a familiar spirit ... out of the ground.' The book's mood here is solemn, and that 'whisper out of the dust' haunts us. It is because we are witnessing the death throes of entire peoples and sense the cosmic proportions in that apocalyptic end of all things. Unlike the apocalypses we're used to, the kind of arcane theoretical symbolizing we get in Ezekiel or Revelation, this apocalypse invades actual experience. Mormon gives his last words, Moroni makes a penultimate statement, then his final absolute words, and we hear not so much the echo of a distantly anticipated millennial ending as the immediate death of specific individuals.

This is a great literary comment on what we are seeing here in the Book of Mormon.

#### Further Reading

Steve Walker, "Last Words," in *The Reader's Book of Mormon: Last Words: 4 Nephi – Moroni*, eds. Robert A. Rees and Eugene England (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008), vii-xxii.

## Ether 12

### Ether 12 – Study Questions

- **Ether 12: 3–4** — What process did Ether teach as a means to gain a better world? What provides an anchor for the "souls of men" to help them in their journey?
- **Ether 12:5–6** — To what did Moroni attribute the inability of the people to believe the marvelous things that Ether prophesied? What advice does he give to us about seeking proof of spiritual phenomena before we believe?
- **Ether 12:6–22** — While reading Moroni's discourse on faith, can you detect why the Savior has appeared only to certain witnesses instead of to the whole world? To help answer this question, you may wish to read Acts 10:39–41. Why were the golden plates shown only to a limited number of witnesses? What examples of faith did Moroni offer? Can you list them?

- **Ether 12:23–27** — Why was Moroni so concerned about the gentiles mocking, and especially about “the placement of our words?” Did the Lord say to Moroni, “Oh no, you do not have a weakness in that area!” What did he say?
- **Ether 12:38–41** — What kind of person can you detect that Moroni is after reading this farewell? How does our humility and faith stack up?

### **Ether 12:6–22, 30–31 — A Witness Comes after the Trial of Your Faith.**

Moroni saw the faithlessness of the Jaredites and saw that they did not accept the teachings of Ether. He claimed, “They did not believe, because they saw them not” (Ether 12:5). Then he added a caution to his readers, “Wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

In order to demonstrate the truth of this principle, Moroni drew upon a number of episodes in the Book of Mormon. He wrote, for instance, that it was by faith that “Alma and Amulek ... caused the prison to tumble to the earth” (Ether 12:13). It was by faith that “Ammon and his brethren ... wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites” (v. 15). And it was because of the great faith of the brother of Jared that the Lord “could not withhold anything from his sight” (v. 21, see *KnoWhy* 246). Moroni adds, in verse 19, “And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad.” Most of all, it was by faith and charity that these righteous individuals “obtained a promise” of those blessings that they most desired (12:17, 21, 22, 34, 37).

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Must a Trial of Faith Precede a Witness of Truth? \(Ether 12:6\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 246 (December 6, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can Trials of Faith Lead to Spiritual Growth? \(Ether 12:6\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 356 (August 23, 2017). “Whatever their form, our mortal trials provide essential opportunities for spiritual growth.”

### **Ether 12:23–41 — Moroni Fears That Gentiles Will Mock Him**

Why was Moroni so concerned about the Gentiles mocking “the placement of our words”? After examining the excellent Hebrew poetry of the earlier writers (such as King Benjamin and Alma), it is no wonder he was concerned about the placement of his words. He had directly quoted such brilliant poetic writing.

C.S. Lewis, referring to Hebrew use of parallelism said,

It is (according to one's point of view) either a wonderful piece of luck or a wise provision of God's, that poetry which was to be turned into all languages should have as its chief formal characteristic one that does not disappear (as mere metre does) in translation.

I think we have plenty of reasons to believe that Moroni had very high personal standards. Maybe he expected a little too much of himself, and maybe he was worried about every little detail, but he had given attention to so many details here. Normally, by the time we get to the Book of Ether, we tend to rush through it. Reading it from the perspective of Moroni, we realize that just before Moroni wrote his last chapters in this book, he had spent a great deal of time saturated in these important records. They come to life a lot better and we notice a lot more when we look at the book of Ether from his perspective.

After making apologies for his writing skills, which were considerable even so, Moroni gave his classic promise that if people will come unto the Lord, he "will show unto them their weakness," which he has given them "that they may be humble; ... then I will make weak things become strong unto them" (12:27).

In the end, Moroni expressed a sincere, powerful testimony of the truthfulness of all his words, and in particular of his knowledge of the Savior. Expecting to meet all of us, his readers, someday "before the judgment-seat of Christ" (12:38), he added, "And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things" (12:39), following that with a request that we also "seek Jesus" (12:41)

#### Further Reading

C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego, CA: Harvest Books/Harcourt, Brace and Company: 1958), 4–5.

## Ether 13

### Ether 13 — Study Questions

- **Ether 13:2–4, 6** — What did Ether say about the flood? Also, Ether "saw the days of Christ." Do we know whether he saw Christ during his life on earth, in Bountiful after his resurrection, or both? Where did Ether say the place of the New Jerusalem would be? For a corroborating view, see Doctrine and Covenants 84:2–3.
- **Ether 13:5–6** — How did Ether explain why the Old Jerusalem could not be called the New Jerusalem? For whom was the Old Jerusalem to be the holy land? For whom was the New Jerusalem to be the holy city?

- **Ether 13:10–11** — At the end of the millennium, when the New and the Old Jerusalem return to the earth, who will inhabit the Old Jerusalem? Who will inhabit the New Jerusalem? Which one do you see yourself dwelling in?
- **Ether 13:13–22** — Where did Ether live during this period? Why? What ancient biblical prophet had to similarly hide out?
- **Ether 13:20–21** — Would Coriantumr have been able to get his kingdom back and put things to rights? Under what conditions? Was Coriantumr’s opportunity to live to see “the fulfilling of the prophecies which had been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance” a blessing for him, or a punishment? How do you think he may have felt about Ether’s prophecies when he encountered the new people? What did that say about Ether as a prophet? (see Deuteronomy 13:22).

### **Ether 13:3–11 — Ether Sees the New Jerusalem and the Last Days**

In Ether 13:3–11, what did Moroni want us to see? Here he talks about Ether seeing the future: the days of Christ, the New Jerusalem, the millennial material, a remnant of Lehi’s posterity being preserved. The survival of the remnant was important to Moroni because these were his people. They were his enemies, but they are from the household of Lehi. In Ether 13:11, Moroni wanted us to know that the fulfilling of the covenant with Abraham applied to the Lamanite remnant because they are a part of the House of Israel. The purpose of the Book of Mormon, as indicated in the Title Page, is that we will remember the covenant.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do the Prophets Speak of Multiple Jerusalems?](#)” (Ether 13:3–6), *KnoWhy* 247 (December 7, 2016).

### **Ether 13:21 — Ether Saw the Nephites in Vision**

Moroni wanted to point out that Ether had prophesied that another group of people would be brought forth and would possess the land if Coriantumr and the Jaredites did not repent. In Ether 11:21, Ether had previously seen in a vision and prophesied that another group would sail across the ocean led by God “after the manner by which he brought their fathers.” This group, of course, was led by Lehi. This would have been important for Moroni to include, as it involved his ancestry and posterity.

### **Ether 13:25 — The Final War of the Jaredites Raged throughout the Land**

As Hugh Nibley was riding the troop transport ships that were crossing the English Channel on the morning of June 6, 1944, he was one of the first to hit Utah Beach as one of the Intelligence officers. He was to get behind German lines so he could let everybody know what was happening. He had smuggled a small copy of the Book of Mormon into

his intelligence pockets. They were told that they could not put anything into these pockets except for classified materials. As he was riding across the choppy waters, he was reading Ether 13–15. Brother Nibley said, “I had read these before, but to me it had always been so fancifully absurd, so far out of the realm of anything that I had ever experienced, I could not see how this could even happen. It was so outlandishly awful.” He said, “It was at that moment as I looked out at what I was experiencing, that was when I got my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. It was in the darkness, realizing how real it can be, and so in such a way that you could not make it up that way.”

Moroni himself, in fact, had experienced something like this. He had lived through the destruction of his own people. I have wondered why Moroni detailed over three chapters, the day-by-day, blow-by-blow, count of how many men were left among the Jaredites.

During his own people’s final struggle, Moroni was one of the commanders of a full complement of soldiers, which may have been a maximum of 10,000 people. After the battle every day, he would have counted up who was left. Ether had apparently done the same. When Moroni gave us these diminishing numbers, he had lived through that situation. Like Brother Nibley, that darkness of war allowed Moroni to feel the contrast with the wonderful things that he had learned from the Nephite records and the 24 gold plates of Ether.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Could So Many People Have Died at the Battle of Cumorah?](#) (Mormon 6:114),” *KnoWhy* (November 15, 2016).

Alex Nibley and Hugh Nibley, *Sergeant Nibley: Memories of an Unlikely Screaming Eagle* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain, 2006).

## Ether 14

### Ether 14 — Study Questions

- **Ether 14:1–2** — What do you think Moroni meant by “there began to be a great curse on all the land?” What would likely happen if a man left his tools lying around? Why might that have been so? What did the people do to protect their property and their families? In our day, what measures, defense, or surveillance are taken to defend our property against such a “curse”?
- **Ether 14:8–10** — Ether 14:9–10 sometimes leaves us wondering who killed whom because the pronouns are not clearly defined. Nevertheless, a high priest of either

Shared or Gilead killed his leader. Do you think that corrupt priests were part of the cause of the Jaredite decline?

- **Ether 14:21–23** — These verses present a very realistic sidelight on what war entails. Why do you think Moroni may have added these gruesome details? What do you think he hoped to accomplish? What in Moroni’s background had made him very conscious of such circumstances?
- **Ether 14:24** — Moroni records two purposes for Shiz’s oath to kill Coriantumr. What are they? What does that tell us about the nature of Shiz and the condition of the people of Jared?

## Ether 15

### Ether 15 — Study Questions

- **Ether 15:1–3** — After recovering from injury, Coriantumr began to remember the words of Ether (Ether 13:20–21). He remembered the words of other prophets too. How many people had died before Coriantumr repented? Were there only soldiers, or were there civilian casualties? What did he do to try to right the situation as far as he could?
- **Ether 15:4–6** — What was so tragic about Shiz offering to spare more people, if Coriantumr would give himself up so that Shiz could kill him? Can you imagine how Coriantumr must have felt? Why would it not have been profitable for him to do that? Why would turning himself over likely not have saved the people (Ether 13:20–21)? Had the people repented along with Coriantumr? Who was continuing the bloodshed?
- **Ether 15:15–28** — What was Moroni’s purpose in giving a blow-by-blow account of the destruction of the Jaredites? See Ether 2:11–12.

### Ether 15:11 — Two Final Battles

Moroni, the only known Nephite survivor of the battle at Cumorah, was the narrator of the account in the book of Ether that involves the final Jaredite battle at Ramah. He must have been deeply impressed by the parallels between the two wars of annihilation. In both cases, nations of great promise were wiped away. Because of their wickedness, the Spirit of God “ceased to strive” with both peoples (Mormon 5:16; Ether 15:19). In this chart the dates, places, numbers of soldiers, outcomes, and other statistics of these battles are contrasted. Despite the consequent collapse of these civilizations, a remnant of Lehi’s seed was preserved, fulfilling the promises made by the Lord to Lehi, Nephi, Enos, and other righteous Nephites.

This chart compares the final battles of both the Jaredite and Nephite civilizations, which took place near the same hill (see Ether 15:11).

## The Two Final Battles

	Jaredites	Nephites
when	ca. 300 B.C.	385 A.D.
where	hill Ramah	hill Cumorah (hill Ramah)
who	Coriantumr and Shiz	Nephites and Lamanites
how many	2 million or more	around 230,000 Nephites
who gathered	men, wives, children	men, wives, children
outcome	both sides destroyed	Nephites destroyed
Spirit	ceased to strive with	ceased to strive with
prophet	Ether	Mormon
account	Ether 13–15	Mormon 6–7
record	24 gold plates	plates of Mormon
survivor	Coriantumr	Moroni

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "The Two Final Battles," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 138.

### Ether 15:31 — Shiz Struggled after Coriantumr Slew Him

The decapitation of Shiz, right at the very end of the last chapter of the Book of Ether, is often noted and wondered about. Shiz had his head chopped off, and then he raised up and collapsed. People suppose that it must be mythological. They think it must have been embellished through the ages and doesn't represent an accurate account of what had happened. Enlightening readers about the plausibility of this reported physiological phenomenon, Gary Hatfield, a professor of neuropathology, explains,

Shiz's death struggle illustrates the classic reflex posture that occurs in both humans and animals when the upper brain stem (midbrain/mesencephalon) is disconnected from the brain. The extensor muscles of the arms and legs contract,



and this reflect action could cause Shiz to raise up on his hands. In many patients, it is the sparing of vital respiratory and blood pressure in the central (pons) and lower (medulla) brain stem that permits survival.

The brain stem is located inside the base of the skull and is relatively small. It connects the brain proper, or cerebrum, with the spinal cord in the neck. Coriantumr was obviously too exhausted to do a clean job. His stroke evidently strayed a little too high. He must have cut off Shiz's head through the base of the skull, at the level of the midbrain, instead of lower through the cervical spine in the curvature of the neck. ... Significantly, this nervous system phenomenon (decerebrate rigidity) was first reported in 1898, long after the Book of Mormon was published.

Apparently, when the brain stem is cut at a certain point there is still enough of the brain left that it can give these impulses before the victim dies. Modern scientific knowledge thus offers corroboration of this gruesome account in the Book of Mormon.

#### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Could Shiz Move and Breathe After Being Beheaded?](#) (Ether 15:31), *KnoWhy* 248, (December 8, 2016).

M. Gary Hadfield, "[The 'Decapitation' of Shiz](#)," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin Thorne (Provo UT: FARMS, 1999), 266.

#### **Ether 15:32 — Coriantumr, Being Exhausted, Falls to the Earth**

The last person left in the Book of Ether is Coriantumr. This relates to Omni 1:21, which speaks of the people of Zarahemla finding a man named Coriantumr:

And they [a large stone with engravings] gave an account of one Coriantumr, and the slain of his people. And Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons.

Coriantumr apparently did not die after he cut off Shiz's head. It only says he collapsed "*as if* he had no life." He was exhausted but alive, and it seems that this same Coriantumr is the one who is mentioned as having been found in the book of Omni. He knew his king list; he knew his genealogy. It is possible that certain Nephite names (such as Nehor in Ether 7:4), were first Jaredite names and were passed down by Coriantumr.

#### **Ether 15:33–34 — Ether Finishes His Record**

When most everyone had died, the Lord finally said to Ether, "go forth." He had been watching and he knew that it was safe for him to come out of the cave. Thinking about

both Ether and Mormon, how do you end a book like this? How do you make a conclusion about what you have witnessed? What other options might they have had? There was no point in calling people to repentance; there was no one to call, nor to listen.

In the face of this catastrophe and tragedy, Ether acknowledged that “it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God.” No matter what happens in your life, or what kinds of difficulties you face, salvation is most important. This was spoken by someone who had really seen trials and devastation, and I think that is really something.

When Ether wrote his book, he was not sure what was going to happen. The brother of Jared had been given promises that these teachings would come forth, but Ether did not even know what was going to happen to him next. He poured out his soul in an existential cry hoping that someone, someday, would care. He was doing what many people would do, and that was bearing solid testimony. His confidence and faith were extremely powerful, and his mind and will were submissive to the will of the Lord. Whatever would happen next, he said, “it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God. Amen” (15:34).

### Further Reading

Daniel F. Belnap, ed., *Illuminating the Jaredite Record* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 2020). <https://rsc.byu.edu/book/illuminating-jaredite-records>. This new volume explores the relationship between the Nephite and the Jaredite records culturally, politically, literarily, and theologically. The first approach is a cultural-historical lens, in which elements of Jaredite culture are discussed, including the impact of a Jaredite subculture on Nephite politics during the reign of the judges, and a Mesopotamia perspective as seership and divination, and the brother of Jared’s experience as a spiritual transition. The second grouping looks at the book of Ether through a narratological lens, exploring different aspects of Moroni’s construction of the book of Ether. The third grouping considers the book of Ether’s depiction of women, as it contains one of the most descriptive, yet ambivalent, accounts of females in the Book of Mormon, both historically and contemporarily. The book of Ether is also reviewed pedagogically. For example, in Alma 37, Alma the Younger explained the value of using the Jaredite records in teaching modern audiences.

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Survivors Give Us Hope?](#) (Mormon 8:3),” *KnoWhy* 393 (December 26, 2017).