



2017

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Axelgard, Frederick W. (2017) "More Than Meets the Eye: How Nephite Prophets Managed the Jaredite Legacy," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 26: No. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol26/iss1/6>

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More Than Meets the Eye: How Nephite Prophets Managed the Jaredite Legacy

Frederick W Axelgard

THIS PAPER LOOKS CLOSELY AND CRITICALLY at how the Nephite prophets dealt with the records of the Jaredites as the text of the Book of Mormon itself presents these dealings.¹ It questions unspoken assumptions that often pervade discussions of these records and of how record keepers from King Mosiah₂ to Moroni managed them. It asks, for example, whether Mormon could realistically have taken on the task of preparing the abridgment of Jaredite history found in the book of Ether. It also challenges the idea that Moroni wrote the book of Ether only because Mormon did not have time to do so, suggesting instead that Moroni's role in preserving the Jaredite legacy was his own unique commission from the Lord. These questions are part of my appeal for a fundamental reconsideration of the roles played by the key actors who handled the Jaredite records.

I place particular importance on consideration of how the Nephite record keepers dealt with the account of the universal vision of the

1. The phrase "records of the Jaredites" is intended to cover the full legacy of Jaredite record keeping. It includes the large, engraved stone of Coriantumr (Omni 1:20–22); the twenty-four gold plates that contained the book of Ether; the source text from which Ether abridged his account (Ether 1:2); the source text from which Moroni transcribed the visions of the brother of Jared (Ether 4:5); and any other Jaredite records that were received by the Nephite prophets.

brother of Jared, in which he saw “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25). This vast vision was transcribed by Moroni on the plates of Mormon (Ether 4:5), but because of its sacred nature it is not contained in the published Book of Mormon.² Nevertheless, this vision was part of the challenge the Nephite prophets faced in managing the Jaredite legacy, and it leads us to ask questions such as the following: Was this expansive vision part of Mosiah₂'s translation of Jaredite records? Did Mormon see it as part of the Jaredite account that he said should be “written hereafter” in his record (Mosiah 28:19)? How did Moroni's transcribing of this vision impact his approach to writing of the book of Ether? These are just some of the issues that arise when one considers how the Nephite prophets might have dealt with the Lord's spiritual outpourings to the brother of Jared.

The discussion that follows below presents a detailed look at what the Nephite record keepers did with the records of the Jaredites. It focuses on three record keepers: Mosiah₂, Mormon, and Moroni. Mosiah₂, the first Nephite prophet to take custody of the Jaredite records, used sacred interpreters to translate the twenty-four gold plates of Ether. Mormon was aware of this translation, felt it was important, and promised that

2. This vision is believed to make up the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon. Grant Hardy, in summarizing the plates of the Book of Mormon for the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, notes that “the sealed portion containing the vision of the Brother of Jared” was part of the trove of records buried in the earth by Mormon's son Moroni. See Grant R. Hardy, “Book of Mormon Plates and Records” (accessed January 11, 2017, at http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Book_of_Mormon_Plates_and_Records).

In another useful summary we read: “When Moroni was finishing the Book of Mormon record, he was commanded to seal up some of the plates, and Joseph Smith was later commanded not to translate them. This sealed portion contains the complete record of the vision of the brother of Jared (see Ether 4:4–5). This vision included “all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof” (2 Nephi 27:10–11; see also Ether 3:25). So basically the Lord revealed to the brother of Jared the history of mankind, and the sealed portion of the plates was Moroni's translated copy of it.” *New Era*, October 2011 (accessed January 11, 2017, at <https://www.lds.org/new-era/2011/10/to-the-point/what-is-the-sealed-portion-of-the-book-of-mormon-and-will-we-ever-know-whats-in-it?>).

an account of the Jaredites would be included at a later point in his own record. In the end, it was his son Moroni who followed up on this promise by making an abridgment of Jaredite history that became the book of Ether (Mosiah 28:11–20; Ether 1:1–3). That, in essence, is the story of how the Nephite prophets preserved and conveyed the Jaredite legacy, so far as students of the Book of Mormon generally perceive it. But I submit there is much more to the story.

A brief word about methodology: This paper assumes the historicity of the Book of Mormon. In it I make a point of trying to discern the circumstances in which the authorial voices represented there produced their contributions and thereby presuppose a historical world that lies *behind* the text of the book. I recognize that this might invalidate my discussion and conclusions for certain readers, but there should be merit in approaching the text on its own historical terms in an effort to make real sense of an important but often overlooked segment of the Book of Mormon. In the end, I trust some of my more crucial conclusions will be valuable for all readers of the Book of Mormon, believing or otherwise.

A legacy in two parts

Much of my presentation is premised on the idea that when we think of the Jaredite records, we typically consider only the book of Ether. This, however, is a narrow perspective. The book of Ether represents for the most part the historical aspects of the Jaredite story. Its main thrust is to depict the origins of the Jaredites and their eventual destruction as a consequence of extreme wickedness, a close parallel to the story of Nephite civilization. There is, however, a second and vitally important element to this legacy in the visions of the brother of Jared. Readers of the Book of Mormon will recall that the book of Ether contains a rather detailed description of the brother of Jared's vision of and conversation with Jesus Christ (Ether 3:1–24). It also briefly mentions that the Lord

showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth. . . . [T]he Lord could not withhold anything from him, for he knew that the Lord could show him all things. (Ether 3:25–26)

As these things were being revealed to him, the Lord instructed the brother of Jared to write them down, adding that it should be done in a secret language that could not be read without the aid of divine interpreters. The brother of Jared obeyed this instruction (Ether 3:22; 4:1).

Although it is often overlooked, I submit that the vision of the brother of Jared should be considered an integral part of the Jaredite record-keeping legacy. Even though it is not detailed in the present-day Book of Mormon, Nephite prophets, starting with Mosiah², had the responsibility of preserving the account of this vision in accordance with the Lord's will (Ether 4:1–2). Nor should it be forgotten that at the end of Nephite history, when the time came to incorporate the Jaredite story into the plates of Mormon, the theophany of the brother of Jared was very much a part of the picture. Moroni was charged not only with abridging the book of Ether but also with making a complete record of the things the brother of Jared saw.

Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared. Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to write them; and I have written them. (Ether 4:4–5)

We do not know how much time it took or under what circumstances Moroni inscribed his comprehensive account of the vision of the brother of Jared. A close reading of the text does suggest that he made it prior to his abridgment of the writings of Ether, inasmuch as the above passage (which appears early in Ether) speaks of Moroni having already recorded the vision. In other words, it can be assumed that writing the far-reaching vision of the brother of Jared was probably part of Moroni's spiritual preparation to write the book of Ether, as well as a centerpiece

of his prophetic legacy to future generations. This by itself is perhaps sufficient reason not to overlook the place of the brother of Jared's vision in the broader legacy of the Book of Mormon.

A complex custodianship: King Mosiah₂

The Nephite prophets exercised a complex custodianship over the Jaredite records they inherited. The Book of Mormon states that they handed down these records (and the interpreters needed to read them) from one generation to another. Mosiah₂ used these interpreters to make a translation of the twenty-four gold plates, which made the judgments that came upon the Jaredites common knowledge among the Nephites (Mosiah 28:11–17). At the same time, other parts of the Jaredite story were consciously kept from public awareness (Ether 4:1). These limitations are discussed in greater detail below. For now, it suffices to say that Nephite prophets for centuries had an intricate responsibility that involved both revealing *and* concealing the content of the Jaredite records.

Nephite prophets first learned about the Jaredite civilization when King Mosiah₁ and his people came to Zarahemla. There the Nephites learned of Coriantumr, the last Jaredite survivor, who had been discovered by the Mulekites. Mosiah₁ interpreted a record of Coriantumr and his slain people by “the gift and power of God” from engravings found on a large stone (Omni 1:20–22).³ Whether Mosiah₁ recorded

3. Although it is difficult to say with certainty, it seems unlikely that there was any appreciable connection between the stone engravings of Coriantumr and the twenty-four plates of Ether. The two records came into Nephite hands at separate times and by different means: Coriantumr's record was given to Mosiah₁ by the Mulekites some time after his arrival in Zarahemla; while two generations later, Mosiah₂ received the twenty-four gold plates from Limhi, whose men had discovered them quite accidentally among the ruins of Jaredite civilization. From the little we know about the stone record, it seems that it overlapped to some degree with the account made by Ether. That record told that Coriantumr's ancestors “came out from the tower [of Babel], at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people,” and that the “severity of the Lord fell upon [Coriantumr's people],” leaving their “bones . . . scattered in the land

his translation on the large plates of Nephi is not known, but it appears that an awareness of the Jaredites failed to make a lasting impression on the Nephite people at this time.⁴

Two generations later, Nephite knowledge of the Jaredites took a quantum leap forward. When Limhi and his people returned to Zarahemla, they passed on to Mosiah₂ the twenty-four gold plates found by Limhi's people (Mosiah 22:14). Limhi was anxious for the record to be translated, which he believed Mosiah₂ could do; indeed, Mosiah's own people "were desirous beyond measure" to learn of the people who had been destroyed (Mosiah 8:6–19; 28:11–12). Using the interpreters, Mosiah₂ translated an account that revealed the ancient origins of the Jaredites and their eventual destruction (Mosiah 28:11–19).⁵ Mosiah's people responded with deep emotion to this new understanding (Mosiah 28:18), and it seems clear that knowledge of the Jaredites also became general among the Nephites since succeeding generations knew that this great civilization had been destroyed because of its wickedness.⁶

northward" (Omni 1:22). This information coincides with the history written by Ether, but his record also contained a great deal of significant prophetic material (see Ether 3–5, 12). It seems quite certain that the two records were prepared independently, by men of very different backgrounds, and that the record of Ether provided the dominant if not exclusive narrative of Jaredite history for the Nephites.

4. The dramatic reaction of Mosiah₂'s people when he told them about the contents of the plates of Ether (Mosiah 28:17–18) suggests this was new information for them. If knowledge of the earlier record of Coriantumr were widespread among the Nephites, they would probably not have reacted in this fashion.

5. Based on early Book of Mormon manuscripts, some confusion exists as to whether Mosiah₂'s father, King Benjamin, might have translated the Jaredite writings from the plates of Ether. Some scholars who have examined this question seem to agree that Mosiah₂ did indeed make this translation. See John W. Welch, "Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986), 9–10. Nevertheless, one's view on this issue does not affect consideration of the question of whether what was translated at this time (that is, in the Benjamin–Mosiah₂ era) was only an account of Jaredite history or also includes the Lord's extensive spiritual manifestations to the brother of Jared.

6. In his abridgment Mormon made a number of references to the Jaredites' destruction in the land northward (see Alma 22:30; 46:22; Helaman 3:5–6; and 3 Nephi 3:24). This suggests that the Nephites over the centuries were well aware that the judgments of God had been visited upon the Jaredites. Mormon's letter to Moroni, written centuries later,

However, much more can be said about both the contents of the Jaredite records and Mosiah₂'s responsibilities for them. As already noted, we learn from the book of Ether that the Jaredite records also included some transcendent spiritual manifestations in which the brother of Jared saw the premortal Christ and then was vouchsafed a vision of the entire history of the world (Ether 3:6–26). The Lord commanded that a record be made of these visions, but, in order that it not “go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh,” the brother of Jared was told to write them “in a language that they cannot be read” and to “seal them up” (Ether 3:21–22).

The book of Ether also reveals that Mosiah₂ knew about the brother of Jared's visions and of the restrictions the Lord had placed on their distribution: “For this cause did king Mosiah keep them [the visions of the brother of Jared], that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people” (Ether 4:1). The question then arises: What did it mean for Mosiah₂ to “keep” these visions? How did he and the succeeding Nephite prophets protect this sacred material? When he obtained the Jaredite records and learned what they contained, Mosiah₂ faced a choice. Should he translate both the historical account and the vision of the brother of Jared, or should he leave the sacred writings untranslated as the surest way to prevent their wider distribution? Although it is usually assumed that Mosiah₂ translated everything, I want to highlight the possibility that he decided against translating the visionary material at that time. Such a course of action would make good sense for several reasons. First, there is an issue of size. The brother of Jared's visionary experiences were voluminous, to say the least. Estimates suggest that the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon plates (where Moroni ultimately recorded these visions) was by itself two or three times the size of Mormon's abridgment.⁷ For

shows that there was still a vivid awareness of the Jaredites' story and its applicability even in his own day: “And if [the Nephites] perish it will be like unto the Jaredites, because of the wilfulness of their hearts, seeking for blood and revenge” (Moroni 9:23).

7. Such estimates rely on statements by David Whitmer, an eyewitness to the plates, and Orson Pratt. See Alexander L. Baugh, “Sealed Portion of the Gold Plates,” in *Book*

Mosiah₂ to translate and inscribe such a large text would have been a vast burden to assume.

Second, as suggested already, a decision not to translate the visions of the brother of Jared would be an effective means of protecting them. Translating them into a language that was well known among the Nephites would make them vulnerable to unauthorized access. It would also impose a significant, added burden of responsibility (to safeguard the translation) on all future custodians of the plates. The Lord's own solution, given to the brother of Jared, was to protect these visions by recording them in a language that was impossible to understand until the time came to reveal them. It seems probable, if not highly likely, that Mosiah₂ and his successors would respect the line the Lord had drawn and leave this visionary material untranslated.

What then should we understand when the book of Mosiah states that Mosiah₂ “translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi” (Mosiah 28:11)? I suggest it means that Mosiah₂ translated the entirety of the twenty-four plates but that they contained only the historical portion of Jaredite history and not the visions of the brother of Jared. Similarly, Mormon's comment just a few verses later that “all people should know the things which are written” in Mosiah₂'s translation (Mosiah 28:9) should be construed as saying that it is important for “all people” to know the historical reality that the Jaredites were destroyed because of their wickedness. I don't believe Mormon was advocating that “all people” should know of the visions of the brother of Jared, which strengthens my belief that neither the twenty-four plates nor Mosiah₂'s translation included the account of the brother of Jared's vast visionary experience.⁸

of Mormon Reference Companion, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 707; and Valentin Arts, “A Third Jaredite Record: The Sealed Portion of the Gold Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11/1 (2002): 53, who estimates that the sealed portion of the plates would be about twice as long as our current Book of Mormon.

8. One other Book of Mormon passage needs to be considered in the same light. When Moroni introduces his abridgment of the account of Ether by saying, “I take mine account from the twenty and four plates which were found by the people of Limhi” (Ether 1:2), are we to understand that he took both his historical account of the

The suggestion that the expansive visions of the brother of Jared were not part of the twenty-four gold plates of Ether should not be entirely surprising. Logic might suggest that twenty-four plates would not have been enough space to contain both the history of the Jaredites and a record of everything that the brother of Jared saw. There is also valuable scholarly opinion that suggests the brother of Jared's sacred experiences were not written on the plates of Ether. John Welch, for example, has written that Ether himself may not have been familiar with these visions. Instead, he suggests, when it came time for Ether to prepare his twenty-four plates, he may have "simply attached [the brother of Jared's] esoteric record to his own book"⁹ in much the same way that Mormon appended the small plates of Nephi to the plates of Mormon. Alan Miner has written in similar terms, saying that the plates of Ether were "primarily a record of [Ether's] family and their right to kingship, and probably *did not* contain the detailed vision of the brother of Jared."¹⁰ Finally, in the most detailed scholarly treatment to date, Valentin Arts offers seven different reasons to suggest that the brother of Jared's visions were contained in a separate record that was part of the Jaredite heritage handed down among the Nephite prophets.¹¹ On the basis of the above discussion, I submit that the brother of Jared's visions were not part of the twenty-four gold plates of Ether but were contained

Jaredites and the record that he transcribed of the brother of Jared's vast vision from the twenty-four plates? I don't believe so. As noted above, it seems reasonable to conclude that Moroni had already transcribed that vision when he began his abridgment of Ether's record. Thus, this passage can readily be understood as Moroni saying that he was using the twenty-four plates to make an "account" that was primarily historical, rather than visionary in nature.

9. See Welch, "Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether," 4–5.

10. Alan C. Miner, See *Step by Step through the Book of Mormon: A Cultural Commentary* (accessed online at stepbystep.alancminer.com, on November 19, 2013), volume 7, Commentary on Ether 4:1 (emphasis in original). Grant Hardy also entertains the possibility that Moroni had access to other Jaredite records besides the twenty-four plates as he made his abridgment of Jaredite history. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 244.

11. Arts, "Third Jaredite Record."

in a separate record that was passed down in its original untranslated state until it fell into the hands of Moroni.

A similarly detailed study should be made of the Nephite prophets' handling of the Jaredites' secret covenants and oaths. We first learn from the instructions of Alma₂ to his son Helaman of an additional constraint placed on the Jaredite records so that the wicked covenants and secret plans of the Jaredites would not be made public knowledge (Alma 37:21–32). Again, Welch offers the perceptive suggestion that this restriction did not originate with Alma₂ but most likely dated back to Mosiah₂.¹² For Mosiah₂ to conceal this wicked material, it would have made the greatest sense not to translate it in the first place, thus making it necessary to use the interpreters to gain access to this forbidden material. Alma₂'s words to Helaman suggest that this was the arrangement he followed. When he instructed his son, Alma₂ did not mention Mosiah₂'s translation of the gold plates, but spoke only about the plates themselves: “And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them” (Alma 37:21). He also went on at length about the importance of preserving the interpreters, saying God had prepared them to bring the Jaredites' wickedness to light and that his word was fulfilled because “their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us” (Alma 37:22–26). It is a solid interpretation of these words to conclude that for the Nephite prophets themselves, knowledge of the wicked plans and covenants of the Jaredites was to be had only through use of the sacred interpreters. This in turn suggests that Mosiah₂ never translated these wicked things and explains why Alma₂ placed such emphasis on safeguarding the interpreters as part of his admonition to Helaman.¹³

The main point to draw from this first part of the study is that while Mosiah₂ was aware of the entire Jaredite record legacy, he may not have

12. Welch, “Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether,” 13–14.

13. Helaman 6:25–26 stresses that Gadianton did not gain possession of these wicked oaths and covenants from the *plates*, but from Satan directly. By saying nothing about Mosiah₂'s translation, this passage underscores that the plates contained this information and strongly implies that the translation did not.

translated all of it. The best way for him and subsequent prophets to conceal the visions of the brother of Jared and the secret oaths of the Jaredites was to leave them protected by a language barrier that required the use of the interpreters to overcome. It thus seems possible, if not in fact quite likely, that Mosiah₂ translated only the account of the Jaredite history, leaving for later the work of translating these two sensitive sources of information.

Mormon and the plates of Ether

When it comes to Mormon's relationship to the records of the Jaredites, the key question is why he himself did not abridge their history but instead left this task for his son Moroni. Almost everything Mormon had to say about the twenty-four gold plates of Ether appears in the book of Mosiah. He took pains to account for their discovery and translation but in fact said little about their actual contents. He provided two separate accounts of Limhi's people finding the plates (in Mosiah 8:7–9, and then again in Mosiah 21:25–27). The first of these features a long conversation about Limhi's curiosity regarding the plates and about the fact that Mosiah₂ possessed the means to interpret them (Mosiah 8:10–19). Mormon later described Limhi's handing over the twenty-four gold plates to Mosiah₂ (Mosiah 22:14) but again said nothing about their contents either at this point or when he described Mosiah₂'s reading of the record of Zeniff to his own people in Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:5).

Mormon's reticence to delve into the Jaredite account continues in Mosiah 28. This chapter contains Mormon's most important writing about the Jaredite records, but strangely it appears that he did so only as an afterthought, in an unforeseen digression (see Mosiah 28:11–20). The chapter begins with a poignant discussion of the desire of the sons of Mosiah₂ to go preach to the Lamanites, leaving the king with no heir to the throne and no one to take over custody of the sacred records (Mosiah 28:1–10). At this point, Mormon was apparently ready to describe how Mosiah₂ dealt with this difficult situation. But as he started to do so, he abruptly shifted focus. He suddenly decided to make note

of the unrelated fact that Mosiah₂ had already “translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold” (Mosiah 28:11) and to discuss the sacred interpreters (Mosiah 28:13–16). Mormon continued in this vein, talking about the translation of the gold plates but said only that “it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower” (Mosiah 28:17). He punctuated this lengthy digression by adding an editorial comment, promising that “this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account” (Mosiah 28:19).

As noted, this short, tangential burst of narration contains almost all of Mormon’s writing about the Jaredite record.¹⁴ It is a mysterious passage, and it leaves one puzzled as to how Mormon viewed this record and his relationship to it. On one hand he clearly thought it was a vital record, saying that “all people” should know about it. On the other hand his discussion of it is clearly spontaneous, inserted on the spur of the moment without planned intent and with only a bare-bones summary of its content. Even Mormon’s promise that “this account shall be written hereafter” is comparatively indefinite and impersonal. Just a few lines earlier, he had made a bold personal promise where he took direct responsibility for including a later record of the missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah₂, saying, “And *I* shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter” (Mosiah 28:9). His words about the Jaredite record don’t have the same tone. Rather they appear to suggest to Mormon’s readers, as Brant Gardner has also noted, that the record “will be available, [but] there is no indication that he personally planned to abridge it as part of his own record.”¹⁵ Ultimately, as we see later, it was Moroni, not Mormon, who inscribed the account onto the plates of Mormon.

Thus, even Mormon’s most extensive discussion of the Jaredites gives a good indication that their history was not a primary focus for

14. Mormon made only two other direct references to the plates of Ether: in Alma 37, during Alma₂’s discourse to Helaman, and in Helaman 6, where he likened the secret evil works of the Gadianton band to those of the Jaredites.

15. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 3:226.

him. Indeed, it has been suggested that he probably would have been content not to refer to it at all.¹⁶ This mindset is not what we expect from the man we think of as having comprehensive responsibility for the Book of Mormon. However, it is important to recognize this nuance in Mormon's attitude and understand the reasons for it. There may be a deeper explanation as to why he is not the one who incorporated the Jaredite account into the Book of Mormon—deeper than saying he ran out of time or perhaps stumbled somehow in his duties as a record keeper. To understand what the task of dealing with the Jaredite records might have meant for Mormon, consider these questions: (1) How large a task was it? Was it manageable? (2) Could it have been done without putting the Nephite abridgment at risk? (3) Was it part of Mormon's calling? Basic to these questions is an effort to appreciate the challenge Mormon faced in preparing an abridgment of Nephite history while also leading the Nephite civilization through the final stages of its collapse. We will address each question separately.

The first question concerns how large an undertaking it would have been for Mormon to take responsibility for making an abridgment of Jaredite history. At first glance, it doesn't seem like much of a job. We look at the book of Ether and see a genealogy, a handful of historical chapters, and a measure of commentary by Moroni. It doesn't seem like too much to expect that Mormon could have written this text or something like it.¹⁷ But what was really involved here? Are we justified in assuming that Mormon knew Jaredite history as well as he knew Nephite history and that he thus would have been able, with relatively little additional effort, to sift and abridge and comment on the records of the

16. Brant Gardner labels Mormon's short summary of the Jaredite story in Mosiah 28 as "quite disappointing" and suggests that "Mormon might have been content to omit this text entirely, despite the obvious significance attached" to it. *Second Witness*, 3:467–68.

17. "A twenty-four-plate account does not seem like a dauntingly lengthy text. Mosiah, after all, had managed a translation to which Mormon presumably had access and could have integrated into his own book or simply appended to his record, much as he did with the small plates of Nephi. But he chose not to." Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 228.

Jaredite saga? Probably not. Alan Miner has thoughtfully suggested that far from being a straightforward and simple thing to do, this task might have taken years to complete. It would require studying Jaredite history carefully from beginning to end so as to know what to include and what to omit, obtaining the inspiration to comment with authority and to apply the text to conditions in the latter days, and finding the time and circumstances needed to do these things, make the plates, and actually inscribe the record itself.¹⁸ These points are worth considering before making the assumption that Mormon could have gone effortlessly from abridging the Nephite records to abridging the Jaredite ones. It is valid to leave room for the probability that the process of preparing for and abridging the book of Ether might have taken Mormon much more time and effort than he had to spare.

But is that all there is to it? Was writing an abridged history of the Jaredites (that is, the book of Ether) the only thing that was required to do justice to the Jaredite record-keeping legacy? I ask this question because it seems clear that for Moroni, the task of dealing with the Jaredite records involved much more; it also included translating and inscribing the vision of the brother of Jared onto his father's plates (Ether 4:4–5). Would Mormon have shouldered the same burden if he had taken on responsibility for the Jaredite records? In view of what happened with Moroni, I suggest that preserving the brother of Jared's visions may well

18. Following is a useful description of the painstaking effort that Moroni had to invest in writing the book of Ether: "Whether Moroni was retranslating the Book of Ether (from an unknown language to 'reformed Egyptian'), or whether he was translating what Mosiah had written (from Hebrew to 'reformed Egyptian'—Mormon 9:32), it could conceivably have taken Moroni years to abridge 'from the tower down until they were destroyed' (Ether 1:5). Moroni notes that he only wrote 'the hundredth part' of what was contained in the Book of Ether (Ether 15:33). He would have had to painstakingly inscribe the text onto numerous metal plates which he would have had to either acquire or make. And in making his abridgment, he could not have proceeded little by little, he would have had to have understood the whole from the beginning in order to know what to leave in and what to take out so that his abridgment of Jaredite history would parallel aspects of Nephite history. He also would have needed to gain insight as to when he might insert comments relative to conditions among the people in the latter-days (see Ether 4, 5, 12)." See Miner, *Step by Step through the Book of Mormon*, volume 7, appendix A.

have been part and parcel of the calling to deal with the Jaredite records. If so, Mormon would have had to find a way to inscribe a text that perhaps would have been two to three times as long as his abridgment of Nephite history. Moreover, if I am correct that Mosiah₂ did not translate this vision, then Mormon would have had to find time for that job as well.

Thus, the short answer to the first question seems to be that proper handling of the Jaredite records was likely *not* a manageable task for Mormon to assume. For him to write those things that the Lord wanted preserved from this earlier era would have constituted an immense undertaking, and it was probably a responsibility that Mormon was never in a position to consider seriously. Instead, we should perhaps try to imagine the faith it took for him to predict that somehow the account of the Jaredites would eventually make its way into his record, knowing that the task would fall upon Moroni's shoulders if he survived the destruction that was coming upon the Nephite nation.

This leads to the second question: Would Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi have been at risk if he had widened his focus to include the Jaredite records? We have addressed this question to some degree already by pointing out how large a task this extra assignment would have been. Another point to bear in mind, however, is the vulnerability of Mormon's abridgment. Because we have known the Book of Mormon only as a finished product, we often forget that Mormon never saw it that way. At the time he made his comment that the Jaredite account would be included "hereafter," Mormon's abridgment was far from done: the books of Alma, Helaman, 3 and 4 Nephi, and Mormon did not exist. Nor was it a foregone conclusion that he would be able to write them. The times in which he lived and the circumstances under which he labored were unpredictable at best. Many scholars believe that Mormon worked on his abridgment during the last, most desperate, years of his life, when he was leading an army and a people who were on the path to extinction.¹⁹ Here is Mormon's account of these conditions and the threat they posed to his abridging work:

19. Brant Gardner believes Mormon composed his abridgment between AD 379 and 385; see "Mormon's Editorial Method and Meta-Message," *FARMS Review* 21/1

And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest the wickedness of this people; thou knowest that they are without principle, and past feeling; and their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites. . . . [W]herefore, write somewhat a few things, if thou art spared *and I shall perish and not see thee; but I trust that I may see thee soon; for I have sacred records that I would deliver up unto thee.* (Moroni 9:20, 24, emphasis added)

In this passage Mormon acknowledged the possibility that he might perish before finishing everything he planned to do with his abridgment. He did not take his own survival for granted, and his uncertain surroundings put his work on the abridgment at some degree of risk. Under such circumstances, could Mormon have entertained the idea of writing the Jaredite account as well? The idea hardly seems feasible. For Mormon to take on a major new task would have posed a dangerous distraction from his primary aim of finishing the Nephite record. To understand why Mormon did not deal with the plates of Ether, one must soberly assess his environment and the extreme difficulties he faced in trying to complete his first priority, his abridged history of the rise and fall of Nephite civilization.

Finally, let us ask the third question: Was preserving the Jaredite account part of Mormon's calling? This question might seem curious to some, given Mormon's role as custodian of the plates that made up the Nephite prophetic legacy. Wouldn't that automatically mean he had

(2009): 84. H. Donl Peterson estimates Mormon took two years to complete his abridgment between the years AD 380 and 385; see *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 13. Thomas W. Mackay believes Mormon wrote the book of Helaman sometime in AD 380–384; see “Mormon's Philosophy of History: Helaman 12 in the Perspective of Mormon's Editing Procedure,” in *Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 130. My own estimate is that Mormon did not begin abridging any of the books of his that we have until after AD 375, when he apparently first took possession of the full Nephite library (Mormon 4:16, 23). All these estimates point to the likelihood that Mormon abridged much (if not all) of the Nephite record during an extremely dangerous and unstable period.

primary responsibility for the Jaredite records as well? Not necessarily. To make such an assumption is to overlay a static picture onto a dynamic situation. Mormon was not principally a librarian. He was a leader, a warrior, and a historian of his times writing under great duress. To take on a vast new project like the writing of the Jaredite account would not be a natural thing to do unless he had been called to do so.

In this regard, note how clear and precise Mormon's first record-keeping assignment was. It took place when he was ten years of age. Ammaron approached Mormon and told him to go to the hill Shim when he was twenty-four years old, take only the large plates of Nephi from their hiding place, and write on those plates a complete record of his own day (Mormon 1:2–4). Mormon's second record-keeping assignment had a similarly precise focus. His commission was to

make a record of these things which have been done—Yea, a small record of that which hath taken place from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem, even down until the present time. Therefore I do make my record from the accounts which have been given by those who were before me, until the commencement of my day. (3 Nephi 5:14–16)

This statement is clear; Mormon knew that his second record—his abridgment onto the plates of Mormon—was to be small in size, that it should deal with events from the days of Lehi down to his own time, and that it should be drawn from the records of his Nephite predecessors. Given the precise clarity of Mormon's earlier assignments, one would expect that a calling to make a Jaredite record would be made in similarly precise terms. Moreover, given his past performance in fulfilling the many different responsibilities he was given, Mormon would likely have made a Jaredite record had he been told to do so. Without better evidence to the contrary, I submit we can assume that Mormon did not feel this task was an inherent part of his prophetic duty.

To sum up Mormon's relationship to the Jaredite records, it seems fair to say that he never showed a systematic commitment to writing them up. He recognized their importance, but this does not mean he felt a direct responsibility for abridging or transcribing them. Perhaps

more clearly than we can, Mormon saw that challenge in its full light: it would likely have taken much more time and effort than he had available and would have conflicted sharply with his duties to finish the Nephite abridgment and lead his people during the last stages of their existence. Nevertheless, he had great faith that this work would be done, faith that centered on his son Moroni.

Moroni's legacy and the Jaredite accounts

Moroni's writing of the history and visions of the Jaredite people fulfilled the hopes of prophets from two extinct civilizations, and he fulfilled these hopes while he himself was fleeing for his life. How Moroni dealt with this unique burden needs to be studied on its own terms²⁰ and with a far-sighted lens. To begin, I propose to address two misperceptions that tend to limit appreciation of Moroni's work with the Jaredite records. The first misperception is that his effort consisted mainly of going over material Mosiah₂ had already translated, and the second is that this task was not central to Moroni's prophetic role—that is, that he only did it because Mormon was unable to. The persistence of these notions is unfortunate since preserving what the Lord intended from the Jaredite experience may well have been the hardest work of Moroni's later life. He did it, as already noted, under extreme circumstances. He also had other record-keeping duties—wrapping up the account of the destruction of the Nephites and writing a book of scripture of his own—although those latter projects likely took significantly less time and effort to complete. As the following discussion will show, Moroni's efforts with the Jaredite records went well beyond that of a passive scribe or an attentive son focused on filling gaps in his father's record.

The starting point is to separate the two tasks Moroni carried out with the Jaredite records, something discussed at length in preceding pages. The distinction I refer to is between Moroni's preparation of the abridged history found in the book of Ether on the one hand and

20. Hardy offers an extensive and insightful literary analysis of Moroni's writings in the book of Ether in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 217–67.

his production of a transcript of the visions of the brother of Jared on the other. Similar questions need to be asked about both of these jobs: What textual sources did he use? Was translation required or “just” abridgment and transcription? Such questions address the issue of what Moroni went through to deal with these records and provide a basis for appreciating the significance of his achievement.

With respect to his writing the book of Ether, Book of Mormon scholars seem to agree that Moroni probably used Mosiah₂'s translation of the twenty-four gold plates as his source text. Their premise is that this translation, most likely found on the large plates of Nephi, was available to Moroni, and that if he had access to it, it would be “wholly unnecessary” for him to retranslate the Jaredite account.²¹ But stop and consider that although having Mosiah₂'s translation was doubtless a tremendous help, it marked only the beginning of Moroni's work on the book of Ether, not the end. He did not *transcribe* Mosiah₂'s translation, he *abridged* it. This means that at some point, he had to find time and space to read and digest the account thoroughly. He would also have needed to conceive a structure for his abridgment, decide what to include and what to exclude, and where to weave in his own commentary, revelation from the Lord, and passages from the Nephite records. He also had to create the plates themselves, and all this had to be done after Mormon's death.²² The point made here is that one cannot readily assume that

21. Sidney B. Sperry set the tone for this point of view many years ago by saying that for Moroni to translate the plates of Ether “would entail a tremendous amount of labor” and would be “a wholly unnecessary preliminary to the abridging process” if he had access to Mosiah₂'s translation. See his *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 22. Others who follow this lead include Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, 39; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:160 and 4:511; and Welch, “Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether,” 9–12. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjödahl just assert that Moroni's account is, “substantially, a summary of the translation of Mosiah of the twenty-four gold plates.” See *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Philip C. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 6:44.

22. It is possible that Moroni may have learned Jaredite history to some degree while Mormon was still alive. But it is highly debatable that he had access to the Jaredite records and could have gained a deep understanding of their history (sufficient to make a meaningful abridgment) while he and his father were actively involved in the final tumultuous years of the Nephite struggle.

Moroni's work to prepare the book of Ether was an easy or short-lived task. If we wanted to compare it to Mormon's work, it would probably not be far off to suggest that Moroni had to condense a history that was at least as large as the large plates of Nephi into a text of fifteen chapters. It was no doubt a massively difficult, time-consuming task, carried out under extremely threatening conditions.

Now let us add consideration of Moroni's work with the visions of the brother of Jared. What was his source text for this effort? Was it a translation made by Mosiah₂ or another earlier prophet, or did he have to interpret the original record himself and then transcribe it? As I have already argued, the best approach for Mosiah₂ would have been to hand down the original record of these visions untranslated, along with the directive not to "touch" them until the Lord gave further instruction (Ether 5:1). This assumption would make it likely that Moroni had to translate the record himself.

Other evidence supports this line of reasoning. This evidence is found in the way Moroni spoke about the power of the language used by the brother of Jared. The reverent, even intense way in which Moroni wrote about the record of the brother of Jared suggests that he had direct experience with the original account rather than a translation. On one hand, Moroni was moved by the wondrous content of the visions he read of, saying, "I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest" (Ether 4:4). On the other hand, Moroni was also deeply affected by the power of expression the brother of Jared used: "Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that *the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them*" (Ether 12:24). I think, in agreement with John Welch, that these observations by Moroni were the result of his firsthand experience with the record written by the brother of Jared himself, which language he found to be overpowering,²³ and that Moroni could only have had this kind of experience if he

23. Welch, "Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether," 5, 11–12.

was translating it.²⁴ Taken together, these details lead me to conclude that Moroni was indeed both the translator and the transcriber of the account of the brother of Jared's vision and not merely a copyist reproducing someone else's translation of them.

A second misperception about Moroni's work with the Jaredite records is the tendency to think of it as secondary, as a task that should have been Mormon's and thus was not central to Moroni's calling. This misjudgment is based largely on a supposition that Mormon had responsibility over all records that emerged from the Nephite era. However, we have already seen that Mormon expressed only a tentative connection to the Jaredite record set. We have also seen that Moroni's work with the Jaredite records was no small effort but rather a monumental task, one that held spiritual significance for both him and future generations. The following discussion delves into Moroni's strong personal connection to the Jaredite account and how his labor with it involved a significant amount of direct revelation from the Lord. The conclusion I draw from it is that Moroni was called by the Lord to work with these records.

The writings of Mormon and Moroni make clear that Moroni inherited the mantle of record keeper. However, nowhere prior to the book of Ether is anything said about Moroni having the responsibility to write the history of the Jaredites or the visions of the brother of Jared.²⁵ Yet when Moroni started the book of Ether, he began as if it were the most natural thing in the world: "And now I, Moroni, proceed to give an account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the

24. Valentin Arts has postulated that the brother of Jared's vision was translated at the time of, or soon after the Savior's visit to the Nephites, and that this was done by the prophet/disciple Nephi (see Arts, "Third Jaredite Record," 57–58). This interesting hypothesis merits consideration, but it leaves open the question of why Moroni felt so intensely about the power of the brother of Jared's language if it had already been translated.

25. Mormon wrote in several places that he planned to pass the record he had made to Moroni, so he would write "somewhat a few things" about Christ and the destruction of the Nephites; notably, he never spoke about giving Moroni the plates of Ether (Moroni 9:24; Words of Mormon 1:1–2; Mormon 6:6). After Mormon's death, Moroni said he was to write "a few things" that had been "commanded by my father" regarding "the sad tale of the destruction of my people" (Mormon 8:1, 3–5).

hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country” (Ether 1:1). This matter-of-fact opening has led scholars to believe that Moroni was simply taking over a task Mormon had given him²⁶ or that Moroni realized the Jaredite story needed to be written after making a careful study of his father’s record.²⁷ But these interpretations understate Moroni’s own connection to the Jaredite records.

In fact, Moroni’s connection to the Jaredite records was deep and unique, on another level entirely than that of a passive scribe or obliging manager of his father’s legacy. Rather, it was through his handling of these records that we see him rise to his full stature as a prophet. He emerges as a self-aware seer who knowingly fulfilled ancient prophecy and wrote things that reached far into the future, while receiving extensive, direct revelation from the Lord to guide him in doing so.

Scholars have noted that Moroni consciously filled his writings with allusions to earlier Nephite prophets.²⁸ This pattern is directly relevant to this discussion because of three specific prophecies from the writings of Nephi that Moroni recapitulates in the book of Ether. First, Moroni’s reference to the brother of Jared’s vision of “*all* the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25) is a direct echo of Nephi’s multiple references to a book in which “shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof” (2 Nephi 27: 7, 10–11). Moroni was the first prophet since Nephi to mention this unique aspect of the “sealed book” Isaiah prophesied about. Second, Moroni also instructed the future translator of his writings to “touch not” the sealed portion of

26. See, for example, Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 4:259; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:158.

27. Peterson stresses this possibility because Moroni had a pattern of fulfilling promises that Mormon had made. See *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, 37.

28. Hardy has made an extensive analysis of this pattern in Moroni’s writing in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, “Strategies of Conclusion: Allusion.” He emphasizes Moroni’s allusions to Nephi’s writings but does not mention the sealed book references discussed here. Gardner also sees Ether 12:24 and Moroni 10:28 as evidence of Moroni drawing on the writings of the small plates of Nephi (*Second Witness*, 6:292 and 419).

this record. This directive repeated yet another prophecy that no one had mentioned since Nephi's day and used words directly taken from Nephi's writing (see Ether 5:1; 2 Nephi 27:21). Third, Moroni predicted that three witnesses would see the record when it came forth, another unique prophecy mentioned nowhere else except in Nephi's commentary on Isaiah (see Ether 5:2–4; 2 Nephi 27:13, 22).

Moroni mentioned these prophecies virtually one right after the other, much as Nephi had done in his own writings, and used language he borrowed from Nephi. Clearly he knew Nephi's prophecies well, but more to the point, Moroni's careful handling of these passages shows that he knew his work on the Jaredite record was not a random assignment. Moroni straightforwardly connected Nephi's prophecies to his own commission to preserve Isaiah's "sealed" book and also to offer instruction to the future translator of that book. Moroni understood that his work with the Jaredite records hearkened back to the very beginnings of Nephite spiritual history—that he was, in effect, fulfilling Nephi's prophecies—and also connected him to important events far in the future. Far from being incidental or an afterthought, Moroni's work with the Jaredite records was central to his role as the last prophet of the Nephite era.

There is another impressive visionary dimension to Moroni's labor. I refer here to the extensive amount of direct revelation that he received concerning his errand with the Jaredite records. The Lord was deeply involved in tutoring and encouraging Moroni in this work. He gave him specific commands to write the visions of the brother of Jared and share warnings about the evils of secret combinations (Ether 4:5; 8:26).²⁹ In addition, most of Ether 4 consists of the Lord giving Moroni instruction about the future handling of the visions of the brother of Jared (Ether 4:6–19). Similarly, Ether 12 records an extended conversation in

29. One can infer from these specific instructions that Moroni was commanded by the Lord to translate the Jaredite record as a whole, but Moroni gave no details about when or under what circumstances this broader command might have been given. Similarly, Mormon never said just when or how the Lord commanded him to make his abridgment, although it becomes clear in the course of his record that he wrote under command of the Lord (see 3 Nephi 5:14).

which the Lord gave Moroni much-needed assurance about his worries over the weakness of his written record (Ether 12:22–41). Finally, Moroni was forbidden to write all of Ether’s prophecies, a restriction that no doubt came through inspiration (Ether 13:13). An important implication of all this instruction relates to Mormon. Perhaps one of the main reasons he did not deal with the Jaredite records himself was because he had not been tutored like this. Nor could he have given Moroni meaningfully precise instruction about how to do this task. Indeed, the fact that Moroni received so much clear, precise revelation on this matter is perhaps the best indication that he was, and always had been, the Lord’s man for the job of preserving the Jaredite record.

To summarize this discussion of Moroni’s work with the Jaredite records, it seems clear that his efforts involved much more than reworking material that Mosiah₂ had already translated. It also seems clear that this work was not just an incidental aspect of Moroni’s mission, something that he handled because Mormon was unable to get to it. Rather, it was a time-consuming, far-reaching, and vital part of Moroni’s prophetic contribution, and an assignment for which the Lord took significant pains to tutor him.

The Jaredite records and Christ’s coming to the Nephites

Our discussion thus far can be encapsulated in the following brief scenario that describes the way the Nephite prophets dealt with the Jaredite records.

- Mosiah₂ received the twenty-four gold plates of Ether from Limhi and possibly a separate record as well containing the brother of Jared’s record of his vision of the history of the world. Mosiah₂ translated the plates of Ether, which yielded a history of the Jaredites, but he likely did not translate either the vision of the brother of Jared or the secret oaths and covenants of the Jaredites.

- The Jaredite record-keeping legacy—consisting of Mosiah₂'s translation, the twenty-four gold plates, and the brother of Jared's record of his vision—was handed down from generation to generation through the Nephite prophets until Mormon received it—along with the sacred records of the Nephites.
- In his abridgment, Mormon described the finding and translation of the plates of Ether and gave a brief summary of their historical content. But although he must have known of them, he maintained a respectful silence about the brother of Jared and his vision. It seems that Mormon was never directly told to write the Jaredite story but focused on fulfilling his divine commission to abridge a history of the Nephites.
- Moroni was the last prophet to receive the Jaredite records. He probably used Mosiah₂'s translation as the basis for the book of Ether. However, it appears that before writing the book of Ether, he read the original account of the vision of the brother of Jared, translated it, and transcribed it onto the plates of Mormon. He also received extensive, personal instruction from the Lord in these tasks.

A final dimension of this story remains to be considered—the “unsealing” of the brother of Jared’s vision at the time of the Savior’s visit to the Nephites. This rarely discussed episode merits attention as a milestone in the history of Nephite exposure to the Jaredite records. As mentioned earlier, Moroni’s writings indicate that the Lord had instructed the brother of Jared that the things he had seen should not “go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh” (Ether 3:21) and that the Nephite prophets had respected this restriction (Ether 4:1). But in virtually the same breath, Moroni goes on to disclose that “after Christ truly had showed himself unto his people he commanded that [the things that the brother of Jared saw] should be made manifest” (Ether 4:2).

Just how these things were “made manifest” to the Nephites has important implications for this study. In particular, it would be useful to know whether the Nephites at the time of the Savior’s visit were taught about the brother of Jared’s vision from a textual translation of the original account.³⁰ If such a text existed or was prepared at this time, it is possible that Moroni would have used that text when he transcribed the vision of the brother of Jared onto the plates of Mormon (assuming, again, that Mosiah₂ himself did not translate it). To make such a transcription would represent a monumental task but would have been less challenging than having to use the interpreters to make a translation as well. Unfortunately, the record makes no mention of the people being shown any such translated text at the time of the Savior’s visit. The closest evidence it gives as to how knowledge of the brother of Jared’s vision was shared with the Nephites comes in the passage below. Toward the end of the book of 3 Nephi, we read that the Savior quoted from the writings of Malachi, after which he

expounded [these writings] unto the multitude; and he did expound all things unto them, both great and small. . . . And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away. (3 Nephi 26:1, 3)

Mormon did not say here that the Savior shared or expounded the record of the brother of Jared. However, his description of what the Savior taught sounds very much like what the brother of Jared was shown, namely “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25).³¹ For

30. As noted earlier, Arts has suggested that such a translation was made. See “Third Jaredite Record,” 57–58.

31. Notably, Moroni himself drew a connection between the Savior’s appearance to the brother of Jared and his appearance to the Nephites: “And now, as I, Moroni, said I

purposes of this study, I submit that this passage shows that the Savior himself “made manifest” to the multitude teachings that were clearly similar or equivalent to what he shared with the brother of Jared. It also shows that the Nephites were capable of being instructed in such things verbally, without the use of a text or translation.

A written record was indeed made to capture what the Savior taught. Mormon records that “the plates of Nephi” contained “the *more part* of the things which [Jesus] taught the people” at this time (3 Nephi 26:7, emphasis added). Mormon longed to include this extensive, precious account of the Savior’s words on his own plates, but he was forbidden by the Lord to do so (3 Nephi 26:11).³² Instead, he had to be content with writing only a “lesser part of the things which [the Savior] taught the people” (3 Nephi 26:8).³³ Taken together, these comments seem to

could not make a full account of these things which are written, therefore it sufficeth me to say that Jesus showed himself unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites” (Ether 3:17). This comment by Moroni indicates that these two experiences, though centuries apart, were comparable in terms of their revelatory power, and it reinforces the idea that the Savior likely shared with the Nephites the same expansive vision that he gave to the brother of Jared.

32. This restriction fits into a wider pattern of restraint and constraint in hearing or recording the words of the Lord as they were manifest during his ministry among the Nephites. The pattern begins when they were at first unable to comprehend the Father’s voice (3 Nephi 11:3–7); in addition, the multitude’s inability to understand what the Savior had taught them was an important prelude to the experiences recorded in 3 Nephi 17, in which they were unable to articulate what he said while praying for them (3 Nephi 17:1–3, 15–18). Similarly, the multitude could not hear the Savior’s words as he blessed his disciples (3 Nephi 18:36–37), and they were once again unable to express in words the things that he prayed for them (3 Nephi 19:31–36). The record later goes on to say that it was forbidden to record the things that babes and children were given to utter as well as the “unspeakable things” that “many” baptized Nephites beheld (3 Nephi 26:16–18). Finally, we note that Mormon was forbidden to write the names of the three Nephite disciples who chose to tarry in the flesh (3 Nephi 28: 25).

33. It is interesting that, without ever mentioning the vision of the brother of Jared, Mormon makes the same point in 3 Nephi 26 that Moroni later makes about the eventual accessibility of that vision. Mormon writes that if future readers believe his abbreviated account, “which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith . . . then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them” (3 Nephi 26:9). This coincides with

suggest that if a textual translation of the brother of Jared's great vision of earth's history existed among the Nephites at the time of the Savior's visit, Mormon was unaware of it. In other words, the available evidence suggests that the vision of the brother of Jared was less likely to have been *circulated* and more likely to have been *directly experienced* by the people at the time of Christ's visit.

Just as we do not know exactly how knowledge of the brother of Jared's vision was dispensed to the Nephites, we do not know exactly how long they were privileged to retain this knowledge. Evidently, the Nephites' hold on such sacred things was lost at some point, probably between approximately AD 200 and 325, because of the wickedness of the people. Mormon reported that by the time of his ministry, the Lord had removed the three Nephite disciples, spiritual gifts, miracles, and healing from among the Nephites "because of their wickedness and unbelief" (Mormon 1:13–14). Thus it would appear that at most, the Nephites may have retained an appreciable awareness of the brother of Jared's vision for just under three centuries.

For purposes of our discussion of Moroni's handling of the brother of Jared's vision, I conclude from the evidence presented above that whatever means were used to share this vision at the time of the Savior's visit, it had little impact on the way Moroni dealt with the vision. By his time, any popular knowledge of the vision had long since disappeared, and there seems to have been no record or translation of the vision that he could draw on. Rather, when it came time for Moroni to make his record of this precious revelation, his appointed commission was to engage directly with the original account written by the brother of Jared and translate it by means of the interpreters provided for this purpose, thereby having an overpowering experience (Ether 3:22–24; 12:24). The plates of Nephi, which contained the "more part" of the visionary things

Moroni's statement: "And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord ... then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations" (Ether 4:7). One wonders whether Mormon was stating a general principle of faith or if he was possibly inferring that he knew of the brother of Jared's vision and the sacred limitations imposed on its distribution.

Jesus had expounded to the Nephites, written in reformed Egyptian, evidently were not suitable for Moroni's purposes (3 Nephi 26:11–12). Rather, he felt the need to delve into the brother of Jared's own account, to translate it, and to transcribe it in full onto the plates of Mormon. One can scarcely imagine what it meant for Moroni to know he was vouchsafing to future generations a magnificent vision that had been painstakingly preserved through the duration of two, already-extinct civilizations. To us it is a mysterious, "sealed" book, but to him it was a tool to be prepared for the Lord to deploy at some future time as he would see fit (Ether 4:7). Accordingly, Moroni fulfilled the Lord's unique commission to him and made a full account of the "very things" the brother of Jared had seen.

Conclusion

This study has reviewed in detail the history of Nephite dealings with the records of the Jaredites. It has dealt primarily with the work of three men: King Mosiah², Mormon, and Moroni. It also focuses clearly on the record of the universal vision of the brother of Jared as a distinct part of the Jaredite legacy and has tried to shed a separate light on how this important vision was handled by Nephite record keepers. The analysis explores why Mormon himself did not write the book of Ether and why Moroni undertook this task as well as the transcription of the brother of Jared's vision onto the plates of Mormon. This study concludes that it was impractical for Mormon to take on the job of abridging the Jaredite record when his abridgment of Nephite history demanded so much from him. Moreover, I have argued that it was Moroni's commission (rather than Mormon's) to deal with the Jaredite records and that the Lord tutored him specifically in executing this responsibility.

This study also serves as a reminder that appreciation for Book of Mormon record keepers should not be limited by the content of the book as it is now published. We know that the volume we enjoy today does not fully reflect the content of the plates of Mormon—it lacks a major portion of Mormon's abridgment, the translation of which was

lost by Martin Harris in 1828. It also does not contain the vast vision of the brother of Jared that was inscribed in full, by the hand of Moroni, as a worthy capstone for a thousand years of Nephite record keeping. These gaps in mankind's appreciation of the plates of Mormon are not permanent, for the book itself clarifies that the Lord's purposes in them will be fulfilled

in that day that [the Gentiles] shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are. (Ether 4:7)

Thus, even if we now have a clearer picture of the ancient past of the Jaredite records, we still have only a glimpse of their prophetic future. Nevertheless, thanks to Moroni's fulfillment of his divine commission, the impact of this record will reach far into a future that we even now can scarcely imagine.

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