

Ether 14 — He Sweepeth the Earth Before Him — The Cursed Land, and a War Without Restraint

Ether 14: the war of annihilation gathering force. A curse lies so heavy on the land that tools and swords vanish when set down, and every man must clutch his weapon to keep it; no one can trust his neighbor. The throne passes by murder from hand to hand — Shared's brother Gilead murdered by his own high priest, then Lib, then Lib's brother Shiz, who pursues Coriantumr across the land, overthrowing cities, slaying women and children, burning everything, until the cry goes up: who can stand before Shiz? he sweepeth the earth before him. The dead lie unburied across the whole face of the land, a stench by day and night, and the people march from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood. Moroni names the meaning: the Lord visited them in the fulness of his wrath, and their own wickedness had prepared the way for their everlasting destruction. It is the chapter where a civilization passes the point of no return.

Ether 14 is the chapter where the Jaredite war becomes annihilation, and the curse on the land becomes total. It opens with one of the strangest and most haunting images in the Book of Mormon — a curse so heavy that a man cannot set down a tool or a sword without it vanishing, so that *every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand* (v. 2), unable to lend, borrow, or trust. This is a society in which even property has become impossible, where the basic bonds of trust have dissolved into universal grasping. From there the chapter accelerates into a war without end: the throne passes by murder from claimant to claimant, until Shiz arises and pursues Coriantumr across the whole land, *overthrowing cities, slaying women and children, burning everything*, until the terrified cry goes up — *Who can stand before the army of Shiz? Behold, he sweepeth the earth before him!* (v. 18). The dead lie unburied across the entire face of the land, a stench by day and night, and the people *march forth from the shedding of blood to the shedding of blood* (v. 22). The chapter is the picture of a civilization that has passed the point of no return, visited *in the fulness of his wrath* (v. 25) by the judgment its own wickedness prepared.

Hebrew Word Studies

arur / charon-af / cherev (אַרַּר / פָּאָן אָף / כֶּרֶב) — **cursed, under a curse / the fierceness/fulness of (divine) wrath (lit. "the burning of the nose/anger") / sword** v. 1, v. 25, vv. 2, 22. Three Hebrew words frame the chapter's destruction. *Arur* — cursed — stands behind *a great curse upon all the land* (v. 1). It is the word of the primal curses: the serpent *arur* above all beasts (Gen. 3:14), the ground *arur* for Adam's sake (Gen. 3:17), Cain *arur* from the earth that drank his brother's blood (Gen. 4:11). The Jaredite land, cursed so that nothing can be held, is *arur* — and the link to Cain is exact, for it was Cain's curse upon the ground that the secret combinations descended from (Ether 8:15). A people built on Cain's oaths reaps Cain's curse: a land that will not yield to their hands. *Charon af* — the fierceness of wrath, literally "the burning of the nose/anger" — is behind *the fulness of his wrath* (v. 25). It is the great Hebrew expression for divine wrath fully kindled (Ex. 32:12; Num. 25:4), the burning anger that falls on the unrepentant. But the chapter pairs it carefully with the people's own preparation: the *charon af* falls only where *wickedness and abominations had prepared a way* — the burning wrath travels the road the people built. *Cherev* — sword — is the chapter's omnipresent object: the sword that cannot be set down (v. 2), the sword that fills the land with the dead (v. 22). In the prophets the *cherev* is the recurring instrument of judgment (Ezek. 21, the sword of the Lord); and here the Jaredites' own swords, never out of their hands, become the instrument of their everlasting destruction. The chapter's three words trace the whole judgment: a land *arur* (cursed) so nothing holds, the *charon af* (fulness of wrath) the people's sin prepared, executed by the *cherev* (sword) they could never lay down — the curse, the wrath, and the weapon, all turned upon a people who turned them all upon themselves.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Gen. 3:17 (the ground cursed / arur for man's sake — the cursed land of v. 1); Gen. 4:11–12 (Cain cursed from the earth, which shall not yield to him — the slippery-cursed land of vv. 1–2, descended from Cain's oaths); Lev. 26:36–39 (the curse of terror, fleeing when none pursue, wasting away in the enemies' land — the trustless, sword-clutching society of v. 2); Deut. 28:25–26 (the dead become meat unto all fowls... and no man shall fray them away — the unburied dead of v. 22); Num. 25:3–4 (the fierce anger / charon af of the Lord — the fulness of wrath of v. 25); 2 Kgs. 9:30–37 (the violent end of a dynasty, the unburied body — the murderous throne-passing of vv. 6–10); Ps. 79:2–3 (the dead bodies of thy servants... blood have they shed... and there was none to bury them — verbatim image of v. 22); Isa. 9:19–21 (no man shall spare his brother... they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm — the self-consuming war of vv. 21–25); Jer. 7:33; 16:4 (the carcasses meat for the fowls, none shall... bury them — v. 22); Ezek. 21:3–5 (the sword of the Lord drawn against the land — the cherev of vv. 2, 22); Ezek. 39:11–16 (the multitude of the slain requiring burial — the unburied dead of v. 22); Joel 2:3 (a fire devoureth before them... the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness — he sweepeth the earth before him, v. 18); Hab. 1:6–11 (a bitter and hasty nation that sweeps through, terrible and dreadful — the army of Shiz, v. 18); Hel. 13:30–37 (Samuel's curse of the slippery treasures — the cursed land of v. 1); Mormon 1:18 (the slippery treasures among the Nephites — v. 1); Mormon 6:15 (the Nephite dead left to molder — the parallel to v. 22); Ether 2:8–11 (the choice-land decree, swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come — fulfilled at vv. 18, 25); Ether 8:15–22 (the secret combinations that prepared this destruction — the murders of vv. 6–10); Ether 13:31 (there was none to restrain them — the unrestrained war of this chapter); D&C 63:33 (the wicked shall slay the wicked — the mutual destruction of vv. 6–25). ```