
Ether 1 — From the Great Tower — Moroni Opens the Jaredite Record, and a Brother's Prayer Against the Confounding

Ether 1: the deep past, c. 2200 BC by traditional reckoning, at the time the Lord confounded the language at the great tower (Babel, Genesis 11). Moroni, having finished his father's record, now abridges a second and far older record — the twenty-four gold plates found by the people of Limhi, the Book of Ether — telling the story of a people who came to this land from the tower long before Lehi. The chapter opens with Moroni's framing and a long genealogy traced backward from the prophet Ether to Jared, and then turns to the founding moment: as the Lord confounds the languages and scatters the peoples, Jared sends his brother — a large and mighty man, highly favored of the Lord — to plead that their language, and their friends' language, be spared. The Lord has compassion, spares them, and promises to lead them to a land choice above all the earth. It is the overture to the Book of Mormon's oldest story, and the introduction of one of scripture's greatest men of faith: the brother of Jared.

Ether 1 opens the Book of Mormon's strangest and oldest record — a book within the book, reaching back not to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem but to the great tower of Genesis 11, more than fifteen centuries earlier. Moroni, having finished abridging his father's account, now takes up a second task: to give *an account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country* (v. 1), from *the twenty and four plates which were found by the people of Limhi* (v. 2) — the plates of a vanished civilization, the Jaredites, who possessed this promised land long before the Nephites and were utterly destroyed. The chapter is Moroni's framing of this older record and the beginning of its narrative. It establishes that the Book of Mormon contains two complete cycles of a people rising and falling in the same promised land under the same divine decree — the Jaredites first, the Nephites second — and that both records were preserved to teach the same lesson to whoever should next possess the land.

Hebrew Word Studies

***balal* / *chanan* / *bachir* (בָּלַל / חָנַן / בָּחֵר) — to confound, to mix, to confuse (the verb behind "Babel") / to show compassion, to be gracious, to favor / chosen, favored, elect one vv. 33–35, 35, 34.** Three Hebrew words anchor the chapter. *Balal* — to confound, to mix together — is the verb behind the *confounding* of the language (vv. 34–35) and the very name *Babel*: Genesis 11:9 puns that the place is called *Babel* because there the Lord *balal* (confounded) the language of all the earth. The *balal* is a scattering by confusion — humanity divided by the mixing of its speech. And the chapter's founding miracle is an exception to the *balal*: one family is *not* mixed-and-scattered, their language kept whole, because the brother of Jared prayed. The Jaredites are, etymologically, the un-Babeled — the people the *balal* passed over. *Chanan* — to be gracious, to show compassion — is the word behind *the Lord had compassion* (v. 35), repeated through the chapter (vv. 35, 37, 40). *Chanan* is the root of *chen* (grace, favor) and of names like Hananiah and John (*Yochanan*, "the Lord is gracious"). The chapter is built on repeated *chanan*: the Lord is gracious to Jared, gracious to the friends, gracious in promising the land. The Jaredite founding is an act of divine *chanan* in response to human prayer. *Bachir* — chosen, favored — stands behind *a man highly favored of the Lord* (v. 34). It is the word for the *chosen* servant of Isaiah (Isa. 42:1) and for the elect of God. The brother of Jared is *bachir*, highly favored — but the chapter is careful to show *why*: not by arbitrary selection but in connection with his faith and his persistent prayer (*this long time ye have cried unto me*, v. 43). His favored status, like all true election in the record, is bound to his faithfulness, anticipating the Lord's own explanation in chapter 3 that it was *because of thy faith* that he saw what no man had seen.

From the Chapter's Architecture

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