
Ether 2 — Serve the God of the Land — The Journey, the Barges, and the Decree Upon the Choice Land

Ether 2: the Jaredite migration from the tower toward the sea, and the building of the barges. Led by the Lord himself going before them in a cloud, the company gathers flocks and seeds and even swarms of honey bees (deseret), crosses many waters, and comes at last to the great sea that divides the lands, where they dwell in tents for four years. Moroni interrupts the narrative to lay down the great decree that governs this promised land — that whatever nation possesses it must serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, or be swept off when ripened in iniquity — and addresses it as a warning to the latter-day Gentiles. Then the Lord chastens the brother of Jared for four years of prayerlessness, commands the building of sealed barges, and the chapter ends on a problem the barges cannot solve: they are watertight and airtight, but they have no light, and the brother of Jared cries, wilt thou suffer that we shall cross this great water in darkness?

Ether 2 is the journey chapter, and it carries the Jaredites from the tower to the edge of the great deep. Led by the Lord *in a cloud* who *did go before them* (vv. 4–5) — the same pillar-of-cloud guidance that led Israel out of Egypt — the company travels through trackless wilderness *where there never had man been*, crossing many waters in barges, until they reach *that great sea which divideth the lands* (v. 13). There they camp for four years. The chapter has a documentary, migratory texture — flocks gathered, seeds and bees carried, barges built — but Moroni twice breaks into it with material of the highest importance. First he interrupts to lay down the foundational *decree* that governs this promised land for all time, addressing it directly to the latter-day Gentiles. Then, after a sobering account of the brother of Jared's chastening for prayerlessness, the chapter ends by posing the problem that chapter 3 will resolve: the barges are perfect vessels except for one thing — they have no light, and no ordinary means of light will work.

Hebrew Word Studies

anan / *deseret* / 'or (אָנָן / — / רוֹא) — **cloud (the visible veil of the divine presence) / (Jaredite) honey bee / light** vv. 4–5, 3, 19–25. Three words frame the chapter. *Anan* — cloud — is the form in which the Lord leads and speaks (vv. 4–5), and it is one of the great theophany-words of the Hebrew Bible: the Lord goes before Israel in a pillar of *anan* (Ex. 13:21), descends in the *anan* on Sinai (Ex. 19:9), fills the tabernacle with the *anan* of his glory (Ex. 40:34), and meets the high priest in the *anan* over the mercy seat (Lev. 16:2). The *anan* is the visible sign of God's presence and, at the same time, the veil that hides his form — God truly present, truly speaking, yet unseen. The brother of Jared's whole journey is lived under the *anan*: he hears the Lord, is led by the Lord, is even chastened by the Lord, all from within the cloud, *and... saw him not* (v. 4). This makes the tearing of the veil in chapter 3 the more startling — the man who knew God in the *anan* will see him face to face. *Deseret* — the Jaredite word Moroni glosses as *honey bee* (v. 3) — is one of the rare preserved Jaredite terms, and it is a small marvel of the record: a people carrying *swarms of bees* across the world to a new land, a detail of agricultural foresight and an emblem of industry and sweetness brought to the promised land. 'Or — light — is the chapter's closing problem and the whole book's deepest theme. The first word God speaks in creation is *yehi 'or, let there be light* (Gen. 1:3); and here, at the founding of a new world for the Jaredites, the problem is again 'or — how to have light in the darkness of the deep. The Lord who said *let there be light* now asks a man to propose how light shall come — and the answer, in chapter 3, will be light kindled by the touch of the finger of the very God who first made light, the Light of the World illuminating the vessels that carry his people to the promised land.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 1:3 (let there be light / yehi 'or — the first light, behind the problem of light, vv. 19–25); Gen. 6:14–16; 7:1–3 (Noah commanded to build the ark, gather the animals male and female, and be sealed in — the direct parallel to the barges and the gathered flocks, vv. 1–3, 16–17); Gen. 11:1–9 (the tower from which they came, v. 1's valley of Nimrod); Ex. 13:21–22 (the pillar of cloud by day leading Israel — the Lord in the anan going before them, vv. 4–5); Ex. 19:9; 24:15–18 (the Lord speaks from the cloud on Sinai — the veiled communion of vv. 4–5, 14); Ex. 40:34–38 (the cloud of glory leading Israel's journeys — vv. 4–6); Lev. 16:2 (the Lord appears in the cloud upon the mercy seat — the unseen presence of v. 4); Deut. 8:2–3 (the Lord humbled and proved Israel in the wilderness — the chastening of v. 14); 1 Sam. 16:7 (the Lord's power looks small unto the understanding of men, cf. Ether 3:5 — the divine working through small means); Ps. 107:23–30 (those who go down to the sea in ships, tossed in the deep until the Lord brings them to their haven — the crossing of vv. 24–25); Isa. 49:9–10 (they shall not hunger nor thirst... he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them — the led journey of vv. 5–6); Gen. 6:3 (my spirit shall not always strive with man — verbatim at v. 15); Matt. 5:14; Jn. 8:12 (Christ the light of the world — the light that will fill the barges, vv. 19–25); Jn. 14:21–23 (the promise that Christ will manifest himself to those who love and keep his word — the veiled-to-unveiled movement, v. 4 toward Ether 3); 2 Cor. 3:14–18 (the veil taken away in Christ, we all, with open face, beholding... the glory of the Lord — the veil of v. 4 lifted in Ether 3:6); 1 Ne. 17:8–16 (Nephi commanded to build a ship not after the manner of men and led across the sea — the close parallel to the barges, vv. 16–25); 2 Ne. 1:5–11 (Lehi's teaching that this is a choice land whose possessors must serve God or be swept off — the decree of vv. 8–12); Mosiah 13:29 (my Spirit will not always strive with man echoed — v. 15); Alma 37:38–47 (the Liahona, light/guidance prepared by the Lord for a sea-and-wilderness journey — the prepared-light theme of vv. 23–25); Ether 3:1–6 (the sixteen stones and the touch of the finger — the answer to the question of v. 25); Ether 6:2–11 (the barges launched and the crossing completed — the fulfillment of vv. 16–25); D&C 88:6–13 (Christ the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things — the light of vv. 19–25). ``