
Ether 3 — He Could Not Be Kept From Within the Veil — The Sixteen Stones, the Finger of the Lord, and the Unveiling of Christ

Ether 3: on the mount Shelem, before the crossing of the deep. This is the climax of the Jaredite epic and one of the supreme theophanies in all of scripture. Answering the Lord's question — what will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light? — the brother of Jared molts sixteen small white stones out of a rock, carries them up an exceedingly high mountain, and asks the Lord to touch them with his finger that they may shine in the darkness of the barges. The Lord stretches forth his hand, and the veil is taken from the brother of Jared's eyes: he sees the finger of the Lord, like the finger of a man, and falls in fear. Because of a faith greater than any man's before him, he then sees the premortal Christ in full — the spirit body of the Lord who will take flesh — and hears the great self-revelation: I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. It is the moment the Book of Mormon places at the doctrinal summit of faith: the man whose knowledge became so perfect that he could not be kept from within the veil.

Ether 3 is the cornerstone of the book of Ether and one of the most extraordinary chapters in the entire Book of Mormon. It is the answer to the question the Lord left hanging at the end of chapter 2 — *what will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light?* — and the answer turns out to be the occasion for the unveiling of Jesus Christ to a mortal man centuries before his birth. The chapter records the brother of Jared's solution to the problem of light (sixteen stones to be touched by the Lord), and then it records what that solution unexpectedly produced: a theophany so complete that the brother of Jared sees not merely the finger of the Lord but the whole premortal, spirit body of Christ, and hears Christ declare his own identity and mission. The chapter is the Book of Mormon's master text on the relationship between faith and knowledge, on the premortal Christ, and on the tearing of the veil. It teaches that there is a degree of faith so perfect that it becomes knowledge, and a knowledge of God so complete that the veil itself cannot keep the believer out.

Hebrew Word Studies

paroketh / etsba / tselem (פָּרוֹכֶת / אֶצְבָּא / צֶלֶם) — **the veil (especially the temple veil before the Holy of Holies) / finger / image, likeness, the form in which one is made** vv. 6, 19–20; vv. 4–9; vv. 15–16. Three Hebrew words open the chapter's depths. *Paroketh* — the veil — is the word for the great curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and temple (Ex. 26:31–33), the barrier beyond which only the high priest could pass, and only once a year, into the presence of God. When Moroni says the brother of Jared *could not be kept from within the veil* (v. 20), he is using temple language: the *paroketh* is the boundary of God's immediate presence, and this man's faith carried him past it. The same *paroketh* was rent in twain at Christ's death (Matt. 27:51), opening the way into God's presence for all — but the brother of Jared passed within it centuries early, by faith alone. *Etsba* — finger — is the first thing he sees (vv. 4–9), and it carries its own theology: the *finger of God* wrote the tablets of the law (Ex. 31:18), and by *the finger of God* Christ cast out devils (Lk. 11:20). The *etsba* is the point of contact between the divine and the made world — and here the finger of the premortal Christ, *like unto flesh and blood*, both kindles the stones and reveals the incarnation to come, the finger that will be pierced. *Tselem* — image, likeness — stands behind *ye are created after mine own image... all men were created in the beginning after mine own image* (v. 15). *Tselem* is the word of Genesis 1:27, man made in the *tselem* of God; and Ether 3 gives that verse its fullest commentary in scripture. The brother of Jared sees the spirit body of Christ and is told that man's body is patterned after it — *this body... is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit* (v. 16). The *tselem* of God in which humanity is made is shown, on the mount Shelem, to be the very form of the premortal Christ: we are made in the image of the God who would take our flesh, and the brother of Jared saw the original of which every human form is the *tselem*.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 1:26–27 (man created in the image / tselem of God — the doctrine of vv. 15–16); Gen. 32:30 (Jacob: I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved — the surviving of the divine sight, vv. 6–13); Ex. 24:9–11 (the elders of Israel saw God, and did eat and drink — a mortal beholding of God, vv. 13–20); Ex. 26:31–33 (the veil / paroketh before the Holy of Holies — the temple-veil behind vv. 6, 20); Ex. 31:18 (the tables written by the finger of God — the finger of vv. 4–9); Ex. 33:11, 20–23 (the Lord spoke to Moses face to face; yet there shall no man see me, and live — the tension the brother of Jared's faith overcomes, vv. 6–13); Num. 12:8 (with Moses the Lord speaks mouth to mouth... and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold — vv. 13–16); Deut. 9:10 (the tables written with the finger of God — vv. 4–6); Ps. 8:3 (the work of thy fingers — the creative finger, vv. 4–9); Isa. 6:1–5 (Isaiah sees the Lord and cries woe is me... mine eyes have seen the King — the falling in fear, v. 6); Lk. 11:20 (if I with the finger of God cast out devils — the divine finger, vv. 4–9); Jn. 1:1–3, 14 (the Word who was God and was made flesh — the I shall take upon me flesh and blood, v. 9); Jn. 14:9 (he that hath seen me hath seen the Father — the Father and the Son, v. 14); Matt. 27:51 (the temple veil rent in twain at Christ's death — the veil passed by the brother of Jared, v. 20); 2 Cor. 3:14–18 (the veil done away in Christ, beholding the glory with open face — vv. 6, 20); Heb. 10:19–20 (boldness to enter the holiest by the veil, that is to say, his flesh — the veil and the flesh, vv. 6, 9); Heb. 11:27 (Moses endured, as seeing him who is invisible — faith become sight, v. 19); 1 Ne. 11–14 (Nephi's vision of all things — the comprehensive vision of v. 25); Moses 1:1–11, 27–29 (Moses sees God face to face and beholds all the inhabitants of the earth — the close parallel to vv. 6, 25); Alma 32:21, 34 (faith is not... a perfect knowledge; the seed grown until your knowledge is perfect... and your faith is dormant — the doctrine fulfilled at v. 19); Alma 19:6 (the light of everlasting life lit up in a converted soul — the seeing by faith); Ether 4:7, 13–15 (the sealed vision to come forth when the reader exercises faith like the brother of Jared — the seal of vv. 22–28 explained); Ether 12:19–21 (the brother of Jared's faith named, he could not be kept from within the veil — Moroni's later citation of v. 20); D&C 67:10–13 (the promise that the faithful shall see God... even him who created all things when they strip from jealousies and fears — the veil-passing of v. 20); D&C 93:1 (every soul who... cometh unto me... shall see my face and know that I am — the doctrine of vv. 13–20). ``