

Ether 6 — Driven Forth Before the Wind — The Crossing of the Deep, and a People That Sang in the Storm

Ether 6: the crossing of the great deep and the first days in the promised land. The brother of Jared sets the shining stones in the barges, the company loads their flocks and seeds, commends themselves to the Lord, and launches into the sea. For three hundred and forty-four days a furious wind drives them toward the promised land; they are buried again and again in the mountain waves and brought up again, and through it all they sing praises to the Lord all the day long and into the night. They land, fall down, and shed tears of joy at the multitude of God's tender mercies. The chapter then records the first generation in the new land: the people multiply, are taught to walk humbly and from on high, and — against the brother of Jared's warning that it leads to captivity — desire a king. It is the chapter of a people carried through the storm by a God they trusted enough to praise even while buried in the deep.

Ether 6 is the crossing, and it is one of the most quietly beautiful chapters in the Book of Mormon. After the towering theophany of chapter 3 and Moroni's commentary in chapters 4–5, the narrative returns to the barges and carries the Jaredites across the great deep to the promised land. The chapter is the fulfillment of everything chapters 2 and 3 set up: the shining stones give light, the sealed vessels hold, and the company makes the impossible crossing. But the chapter's deepest note is not the engineering or the miracle of the stones; it is the *singing*. For three hundred and forty-four days, *driven forth before the wind*, buried again and again in the mountain waves, the brother of Jared and his people *did sing praises unto the Lord... all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord* (v. 9). The chapter is a portrait of faith in the storm — a people who trusted God so completely that they praised him from inside the very waves that buried them. And it closes by recording the first generation in the new land and the first fateful choice: the people, against warning, ask for a king.

Hebrew Word Studies

***zamar* / *rachamim* / *tevah* (זָמַר / רַחֲמִים / תֵּבָה) — to sing, to make music, to praise with song / tender mercies, compassion (from *rechem*, the womb) / ark, chest, vessel (the word for Noah's ark and Moses' basket) v. 9, v. 12, vv. 7, 1–11.** Three Hebrew words illuminate the crossing. *Zamar* — to sing praises — is the verb behind *they did sing praises unto the Lord* (v. 9). It is the root of *mizmor* (psalm) and of *zimrah* (song, melody); the Psalter is full of the command to *zamar* — *sing praises to God, sing praises* (Ps. 47:6). The remarkable thing is *where* the Jaredites *zamar*: not in the safety of the temple but in the belly of sealed barges, buried in the deep. Their *zamar* through the storm is the lived form of the psalmist's *I will sing of thy power... in the morning... for thou hast been my defence* (Ps. 59:16) — praise as the native language of trust, sung loudest in the dark. *Rachamim* — tender mercies — stands behind *the multitude of his tender mercies* (v. 12). It is the deepest Hebrew word for compassion, the womb-love of God (from *rechem*, womb), the same tenderness Nephi praised (*the tender mercies of the Lord*, 1 Ne. 1:20) and Alma named at Gideon. The Jaredites' tears of joy are tears at *rachamim* — at the womb-deep compassion that carried a whole people, their children and their flocks, safely through an ocean. *Tevah* — ark, vessel — is the precise link the text itself draws: the barges were *tight like unto the ark of Noah* (v. 7). *Tevah* is the rare word used for only two things in the Hebrew Bible: Noah's *ark* (Gen. 6:14) and the *basket* of bulrushes in which the infant Moses was sealed and floated to safety (Ex. 2:3). In both, a *tevah* is a sealed vessel in which the faithful are shut up by God and carried through deadly waters to deliverance and a new beginning. The Jaredite barges are a third *tevah* — sealed, God-shut, carried through the flood — and the pattern is the same each time: those whom God seals into the *tevah* he brings through the deep to a new world.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 6:14–22; 7:17–24 (Noah's ark / tevah, sealed by God and carried through the flood — the explicit parallel of v. 7); Ex. 2:3 (the infant Moses sealed in a tevah / ark of bulrushes and drawn safely from the water — the tevah deliverance pattern, v. 7); Ex. 14:21–22 (the Lord drives back the sea with a strong wind and Israel passes through — the wind-driven crossing of vv. 5–8); Ex. 15:1–21 (the song of Moses and Miriam after the crossing, I will sing unto the Lord — the zamar of v. 9, sung after deliverance as the Jaredites sing through it); 1 Sam. 8:4–22 (Israel demands a king and Samuel warns it will bring bondage — the direct parallel to vv. 22–23); Job 38:8–11 (God sets bounds for the sea, hitherto shalt thou come, but no further — the controlled deep of vv. 6–7); Ps. 47:6–7 (sing praises to God, sing praises... sing ye praises with understanding — the zamar of v. 9); Ps. 89:9 (thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them — vv. 6–7); Ps. 107:23–32 (they that go down to the sea, their soul is melted... he bringeth them out of their distresses... oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness — the master parallel to the whole crossing, vv. 4–12); Ps. 126:5–6 (they that sow in tears shall reap in joy — the tears of joy of v. 12); Isa. 43:2 (when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee... they shall not overflow thee — the buried-and-preserved of vv. 6–7); Jonah 2:1–9 (the prophet in the deep who, from the belly, will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving — singing from within the sea, v. 9); Matt. 8:23–27 (Christ stills the storm, what manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him — the God who rules the crossing, vv. 5–7); Acts 27:21–25 (Paul in the storm, be of good cheer... I believe God — faith and praise through the tempest, v. 9); Mosiah 29:16–23 (Mosiah's warning against kings, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause — the captivity of v. 23); 1 Ne. 18:8–23 (Lehi's family crossing the sea, the storm caused by rebellion, deliverance through prayer — the close parallel to vv. 4–12); Ether 2:16–25 (the barges and the problem of light — fulfilled at vv. 1–7); Ether 7–11 (the cycles of dynastic captivity the warning of v. 23 foretells); D&C 123:16–17 (let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then... stand still... to see the salvation of God — the commending-themselves and singing of vv. 4, 9). ``