
Ether 8 — Built Up to Get Power and Gain — The Secret Combination of Akish, and Moroni's Warning to Our Nation

Ether 8: the founding of the Jaredite secret combinations, and Moroni's most direct warning to the latter-day reader. Omer's son Jared, having lost the kingdom, sets his heart on the glory of the world; his daughter, exceedingly fair and expert, devises a plan from the records of old — she will dance before the warrior Akish, and the price of her hand will be the head of her grandfather the king. Akish binds his kinsmen with the oaths handed down from Cain, the murderer from the beginning, and a secret combination is born. Moroni breaks off the narrative to deliver the gravest warning in the book: these combinations destroyed both the Jaredites and the Nephites, they are had among all nations, and whatsoever nation upholds them shall be destroyed. He pleads with the Gentiles — when ye see these things come among you, awake to a sense of your awful situation. It is the chapter that traces the deepest evil to its source and aims the warning straight at the reader's own nation.

Ether 8 is the darkest origin-story in the Book of Mormon and the occasion for one of Moroni's most urgent and direct warnings to the latter days. The chapter traces the founding of the Jaredite secret combinations — the conspiracies of murder for power and gain that will ultimately destroy the entire civilization — and it traces them to their ancient root: *the oaths which were given by them of old who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning* (v. 15). The narrative is sordid and exact: a deposed prince, his ambitious daughter, a seductive dance, a bargain for a king's head, and a brotherhood bound by murderous oaths. But the chapter's true weight falls in its second half, where Moroni stops the story and speaks straight to us. He has been *commanded* to expose these combinations — not their secret oaths, which he withholds, but their existence and their danger — because *they are had among all people, they destroyed both the Jaredites and the Nephites, and whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations... shall be destroyed* (v. 22). The chapter is the Book of Mormon's clearest teaching on the nature and danger of organized, secret, conspiratorial evil, and its most explicit warning that such evil threatens the reader's own nation.

Hebrew Word Studies

shevuah / *damim* / *chofesh* (שְׁוֹאָה / דָּמִים / חֹפֶשׁ) — **oath, sworn vow / blood, bloodshed, bloodguilt / freedom, liberty vv. 13–15, 22, 24; v. 25.** Three Hebrew words frame the chapter's evil. *Shevuah* — oath — is the binding mechanism of the combination (vv. 13–15). An oath, in Hebrew thought, is the most sacred of bonds, invoking God as witness and guarantor; the same root *shava* gave us the holy covenant-oaths of Abraham and Israel. The combinations pervert the *shevuah* into its opposite: an oath sworn not before God but *by the power of the devil* (v. 16), binding men to murder rather than to righteousness. The most sacred form of human commitment is hijacked to seal the most abominable evil — which is why the secret combination is called *most abominable and wicked above all, in the sight of God* (v. 18): it takes the machinery of covenant and turns it against the covenant-giver. *Damim* — blood, in its plural form denoting bloodshed and bloodguilt — stands behind *the blood of his saints... cry unto him from the ground for vengeance* (v. 22). It is the word of Genesis 4:10, where Abel's *bloods* (the Hebrew is plural, *demei*) cry to God from the ground — the first murder, the source from which the combinations descend (v. 15). The combinations are, at root, the institutionalizing of *damim* — organized bloodguilt — and the *damim* they shed cries from the ground until God's justice answers. *Chofesh* — freedom — is what the combinations destroy (v. 25): *whoso buildeth it up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands*. The choice land was promised to be *free from bondage* to those who serve God (Ether 2:12); the combinations are the precise enemy of that freedom, the internal bondage that destroys a free people from within. The chapter's three words trace the whole anatomy of the evil: a perverted *shevuah* (oath) that produces *damim* (bloodshed) and destroys *chofesh* (freedom) — the oath of Cain, the blood of the saints, and the overthrow of liberty.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 4:8–11 (Cain slays Abel, and the blood cries from the ground — the source of v. 15 and the crying blood of v. 22); Gen. 4:23–24 (Lamech's boast of murder — the line of Cain's violence, v. 15); Deut. 27:24–25 (cursed is he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person — the bargain for the king's head, vv. 10–12); 2 Sam. 13–14 (Absalom's seduction-and-murder plot for the throne — the dynastic conspiracy of vv. 1–18); Ps. 9:12 (when he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them — the avenged blood of v. 22); Ps. 64:2–6 (the secret counsel of evildoers who encourage themselves in an evil matter and plot in secret — the secret combination of vv. 13–18); Prov. 1:10–19 (if sinners entice thee... let us lay wait for blood... cast in thy lot among us — the recruitment by murderous oath, vv. 13–16); Prov. 28:17 (a man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit — the bloodguilt of v. 22); Isa. 29:15 (woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark — the secret combinations, vv. 16–18); Matt. 6:24 (the impossibility of serving God and mammon — the power and gain motive of v. 22); Jn. 8:44 (the devil a murderer from the beginning... a liar, and the father of it — verbatim behind vv. 15, 25); Moses 5:29–33 (Cain's covenant with Satan and the oath of Master Mahan — the original combination from which v. 15 descends); Hel. 6:21–30 (the Gadianton combinations descended from the same Cain-source, and Satan as their author — the direct parallel to vv. 15–25); Hel. 2:8 (the secret band that seeks to murder for the judgment-seat — the combinations of vv. 18–22); 3 Ne. 7:6–9 (secret combinations destroy the Nephite government — the destruction of v. 21); 3 Ne. 9:9 (the secret combinations that built up works of darkness, destroyed — v. 22); Alma 37:21–32 (Alma's charge to seal the Jaredite oaths and reveal only the wickedness — the discipline Moroni follows at v. 20); Ether 11:15, 22 (the secret combinations bring on the final Jaredite destruction — the fulfillment of v. 21); Ether 13:18 (the secret combination of Coriantumr's day — v. 22); D&C 42:79, 84–86 (the law of God against murder and bloodshed — v. 19); D&C 38:13, 28 (secret combinations and those who plot in darkness against the saints — vv. 24–25). ``