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Rending the Veil of Unbelief

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RENDING THE VEIL OF UNBELIEF

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

If one were to ask a casual reader of the Book of Mormon to name the principal character in that book, the responses would undoubtedly vary. For one thing, any record covering more than a thousand years of history—with all the persons such a history would include—is unlikely to have any single, central figure emerge over such an extended period as the principal character. Nonetheless, after acknowledging that limitation, perhaps some might list any one of several favorite, or at least memorable, persons. Such names as Mormon, the abridger for whom the book is named; or Nephi, the book's early and very recognizable young prophet; or Alma, to whom so many pages are devoted; or Moroni, the fearless captain who flew the title of liberty; or his namesake, who concluded the book and delivered it some fourteen hundred years later to the young Joseph Smith—these would undoubtedly be among some of those figures mentioned.

All of these responses would be provocative, but they would also be decidedly incorrect. The principal and commanding figure in the Book of Mormon, from first chapter to last, is the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the book is truly “another testament.” From the first page—indeed, from the book's title page—to the last declaration in the text,

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this testament reveals, demonstrates, examines, and underscores the divine mission of Jesus Christ as recorded in the sacred accounts of two New World dispensations, accounts written for the benefit of a third dispensation, the last and greatest of all dispensations, the dispensation of the fulness of times. This sacred record, written by prophets and preserved by angels, was written for one crucial, fundamental, eternally essential reason: “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations” (Book of Mormon, title page).

In a remarkable vision recorded early in the Book of Mormon, the young prophet Nephi sees the eventual preparation and circulation of the Holy Bible, “a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 13:23). But, alarmingly, he also sees the abuse and doctrinal decimation of that book as it moves down through the ages and passes through many hands.

It was foretold in this vision that the Bible record would be clear and untarnished in the meridian of time, that in its beginning “it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord,” with both Old and New Testaments going “from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:24–25). But over time, through both innocent error and malicious design, many doctrines and principles, especially those emphasizing covenantal elements of “the gospel of the Lamb,” were lost—and sometimes were simply willfully expunged—from “the book of the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 13:26, 28). Unfortunately, these missing elements were both “plain and precious” (1 Nephi 13:28)—plain, we presume, in their clarity and power and ability to be understood; precious surely in their profound worth, gospel significance, and eternal importance. Whatever the reason for or source of the loss of these truths from the biblical record, that loss has resulted in “pervert[ing] the right ways of the Lord, . . . blind[ing] the eyes and harden[ing] the hearts of the children of men” (1 Nephi 13:27). In painful understatement, “an exceedingly great many do stumble” (1 Nephi 13:29). Honest women and men are less informed of gospel truths and less secure in the salvation of

Christ than they deserve to be because of the loss of vital truths from the biblical canon as we have it in modernity (see 1 Nephi 13:21–29).

But in His love and foreknowledge, the great Jehovah, the pre-mortal Christ, promised Nephi, and all who have received Nephi's record, that "after the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly, because of the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back . . . I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb.

"For, behold, saith the Lamb: I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious. . . .

"And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation" (1 Nephi 13:34, 36).

This promised record, now known to the world as the Book of Mormon, along with "other books" that have now come forth by the revelatory power of the Lamb, "shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from [the Bible]; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, *that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.*

"And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in [the Bible]; wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth" (1 Nephi 13:39–41; emphasis added).

Surely the most plain and precious of all truths lost from the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, are the clear, unequivocal, and extensive declarations regarding the coming of Christ and the eternal, essential covenantal elements of His gospel that have been taught beginning with Adam and continuing in each dispensation of time. Thus, the highest and most revered purpose of the Book of Mormon is to restore to Abraham's seed that crucial message declaring Christ's divinity, convincing all who read its pages "with a sincere heart, with real intent" that Jesus is the Christ (Moroni 10:4).

The fact that four-fifths of this record comes out of a period *before* Christ's birth, the fact that it is a record of an otherwise unknown people, the fact that inspiring insights and deep doctrines regarding Jesus are revealed here and found nowhere else in the biblical canon—or all of Christendom, for that matter—and the fact that the Book of Mormon reaffirms the truthfulness and divinity of that Bible insofar as the latter has been translated correctly are just a few of the reasons that the book should rightly be considered the most remarkable and important religious text produced since the New Testament gospels were compiled nearly two millennia ago. Indeed, in light of the plain and precious portions that have been lost from the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, it could be said that in restoring ancient biblical truths and adding scores of new ones about the Only Begotten Son of the Living God of us all, the Book of Mormon links with the Holy Bible to form the most remarkable and important religious text ever given to the world in any age of time.

The Book of Mormon has many purposes, and it contains many true and stimulating principles, but one purpose transcends all others in both kind and degree. That purpose is “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ” (Book of Mormon, title page).

A very special contribution the Book of Mormon makes in this matter is to our knowledge of the *premortals* Christ. Christ as Jehovah, Christ as the God of Lehi and Nephi and the brother of Jared before His birth as well as the Redeemer of Mormon and Moroni after it, is one of the prominent messages of this record.

In modern times many students of religion have great difficulty in linking Old Testament theology and divinity with that which is presented in the New Testament. The Book of Mormon does so very much to bridge that gap, not only in terms of actual history, beginning six hundred years before Christ and ending four hundred years afterward, but also in the continuity of doctrine and consistent image of divinity that is taught through that period. We talk about the two sticks of Judah and Joseph coming together, as prophesied by Ezekiel, as one of the great latter-day contributions of the Book of Mormon (see Ezekiel 37:15–28); however, I think it is nearly as important to note,

in bringing “sticks” together, what the Book of Mormon does to unite the Old Testament with the New Testament in a way that is not recognized or sometimes even seen as a possibility in other religious traditions.

EARLY WITNESSES OF CHRIST

Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah—all living and prophesying before Christ—are positioned where they are at the beginning of the book to serve as the three ancient witnesses of the Book of Mormon or, more specifically, three special Book of Mormon witnesses of Christ, which surely they are. But that role of witness is shared by many, many others in the Book of Mormon, most of them prior to Christ’s birth and ministry in mortality.

Amulek says to his fellow citizens of Ammonihah (about 74 B.C.), “My brethren, I think that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God; yea, *I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully* before your dissension from among us” (Alma 34:2; emphasis added).

The coming of Christ and the particulars of His mission and message were taught bountifully throughout the entire course of the Book of Mormon. It should not be surprising that the book as we now have it begins with a vision of “One descending out of the midst of heaven, and [Lehi] beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day” (1 Nephi 1:9). This vision of the premortal Christ, accompanied in spirit by “twelve others,” brought forth a book in which Lehi was bidden to read. The book spoke of “many great and marvelous things,” including the plain declaration “of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world” (1 Nephi 1:14, 19).

From these opening passages onward, the Book of Mormon speaks continually of Christ before His mortal birth, during His sojourn among both the Jews and the Nephites, and in His postmortal rule and reign in the eternities that follow. Even though His contemporaries in Jerusalem rejected that message given by Lehi, that great prophet nevertheless continued his prophecies of “a Messiah, or, in other words, a

Savior of the world” (1 Nephi 10:4). Included in Lehi’s very specific knowledge of the coming of Christ to mortality were such revelatory details as a vision that the Messiah would be slain and “should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 10:11).

Whether it was this kind of revelation or something even more definitive (a personal appearance of Christ?) we do not know, but Lehi obviously had some very special manifestations regarding the Son of God. Shortly before his death, he testified to his sons, “Behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; *I have beheld his glory*, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15; emphasis added).

As early as Nephi’s writings we learn the name which the Messiah shall carry, but that same Nephi is quick to acknowledge that other ancient prophets knew the name as well. “For according to the words of the prophets,” he writes, “the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (2 Nephi 25:19).

Nephi’s brother Jacob follows that acknowledgment with a powerful testimony of the breadth of revelation and widespread knowledge of Christ that had been given to those ancient prophets. He writes:

“For this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

“Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him. . . .

“Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea” (Jacob 4:4–6).

In that bold and persuasive spirit he pleads with his brethren:

“Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have spoken concerning him; and deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which hath been laid for you?” (Jacob 6:8).

But soon enough one came doing exactly those things: Sherem, the first of the anti-Christis in the Book of Mormon. Sherem came declaring “that there should be no Christ” and in every way attempted to “overthrow the doctrine of Christ” (Jacob 7:2). Knowing that Jacob “had faith in Christ who should come,” Sherem sardonically made particular effort to confront and challenge him on the practice of what Sherem called “preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ” (Jacob 7:3, 6). His argument was based on the feeble and tediously predictable reasoning of all anti-Christis—that “no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come” (Jacob 7:7).

Of Sherem, Jacob asks: “Believest thou the scriptures? And he said, Yea.

“And I said unto him: Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ. Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:10–11).

THE BROTHER OF JARED

One of the greatest of those prophets in the Book of Mormon—indeed, a very strong case could be made for calling him *the* greatest of the prophets in the Book of Mormon—goes unnamed in the record that documents Christ’s remarkable life. That prophet is identified to the modern reader only as “the brother of Jared.” Yet even in such near anonymity, the revelation that unfolded before this man’s eyes was so extraordinary that his life and legacy to us have become synonymous with bold, consummate, perfect faith.

In the dispersion required of them at the time of the Tower of Babel, the people of Jared arrived at “the great sea which divideth the

lands” (Ether 2:13), where they pitched their tents, awaiting further revelation regarding the crossing of a mighty ocean. For four years they awaited divine direction, but apparently they waited too casually—without supplication and exertion. Then this rather remarkable moment presented itself:

“And it came to pass at the end of four years that the Lord came again unto the brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him. And for the space of three hours did the Lord talk with the brother of Jared, and chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord” (Ether 2:14).

It is difficult to imagine what a three-hour rebuke from the Lord might be like, but the brother of Jared endured it. With immediate repentance and immediate prayer, this prophet once again sought guidance for the journey they had been assigned and for those who were to pursue it. God accepted his repentance and lovingly gave further direction for this crucial mission.

For such an oceanic crossing, these families and their flocks needed seaworthy crafts similar to the barges they had constructed for earlier water travel—small, light, dish-shaped vessels identical in design above and beneath so that they were capable of staying afloat even when facing overwhelming waves or, worse yet, when they might be overturned by them. These “exceedingly tight” crafts (Ether 2:17) were obviously boats of unprecedented design and undiminished capability, made under the direction of Him who ruled the seas and the winds that rend them, to the end that the vessels might travel with the “lightness of a fowl upon the water” (Ether 2:16).

These were miraculously designed and meticulously constructed ships. But they had one major, seemingly insoluble limitation. In such a tight, seaworthy design, there was no means of allowing light for the seafarers who would travel in them. The brother of Jared “cried again unto the Lord saying: O Lord, behold I have done even as thou hast commanded me; and I have prepared the vessels for my people, and behold there is no light in them. Behold, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that we shall cross this great water in darkness?” (Ether 2:22).

Then comes an extraordinary and unexpected response from the

Creator of heaven and earth and all things that in them are, He who boldly declared to Abraham, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14): “And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: *What will ye that I should do* that ye may have light in your vessels?” (Ether 2:23; emphasis added).

Then, as if such a disarming inquiry from omnipotent deity is not enough, the Lord proceeds to verbalize the very problems that the brother of Jared already knows only too well.

“For behold, ye cannot have windows, for they will be dashed in pieces; neither shall ye take fire with you, for ye shall not go by the light of fire.

“For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you. . . . *Therefore what will ye that I should prepare for you* that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?” (Ether 2:23–25; emphasis added).

Clearly the brother of Jared was being tested. The Lord had done His part—miraculously, profoundly, ingeniously. Unique, resolutely seaworthy ships for crossing the ocean had been provided. The brilliant engineering had been done. The hard part of this construction project was over. Now He wanted to know what the brother of Jared would do about incidentals.

After what has undoubtedly been a great deal of soul-searching and head-scratching, the brother of Jared comes before the Lord—perhaps red-faced but not empty-handed. In a clearly apologetic tone, he says:

“Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires.

“Behold, O Lord, thou hast smitten us because of our iniquity, and hast driven us forth, and for these many years we have been in the wilderness; nevertheless, thou hast been merciful unto us. O Lord, look upon me in pity, and turn away thine anger from this thy people, and suffer not that they shall go forth across this raging deep in darkness;

but behold these things which I have molten out of the rock” (Ether 3:2–3).

Things—the brother of Jared hardly knows what to call them. *Rocks* probably doesn’t sound any more inspiring. Here, standing next to the Lord’s magnificent handiwork, these *ne plus ultra*, impeccably designed, and marvelously unique seagoing barges, the brother of Jared offers for his contribution: *rocks*. As he eyes the sleek ships the Lord has provided, it is a moment of genuine humility.

He hurries on: “And I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea.

“Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this. We know that thou art able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men” (Ether 3:4–5).

For all of his self-abasement, the faith of the brother of Jared is apparent. In fact, we might better say *transparent* in light of the purpose for which these stones will be used. Surely God, as well as the reader, feels something very striking in the childlike innocence and fervor of this man’s faith. “Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this.” Perhaps there is no more powerful single line of faith spoken by man in scripture. It is almost as if he is encouraging God, emboldening Him, reassuring Him. Not “Behold, O Lord, I am sure that thou canst do this.” Not “Behold, O Lord, thou hast done many greater things than this.” However uncertain the prophet is about his own ability, he has *no* uncertainty about God’s power. There is nothing here but a single, clear, bold, and assertive declaration with no hint or element of vacillation. It is encouragement to Him who needs no encouragement but who surely must have been touched by it. “Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this.”

THE RENDING OF THE VEIL

What happened next ranks among the greatest moments in recorded history, surely among the greatest moments in recorded faith.

It forever established the brother of Jared among the greatest of God's prophets. As the Lord reaches forth to touch the stones one by one with His finger—a response, it would seem, coming in undeniable response to the commanding faith of the brother of Jared—"the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood; and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear" (Ether 3:6).

The Lord, seeing the brother of Jared fall to the earth, commands him to rise and asks, "Why hast thou fallen?" (Ether 3:7).

The reply: "I saw the finger of the Lord, and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood" (Ether 3:8).

Then this marvelous declaration from the Lord: "Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger. Sawest thou more than this?" (Ether 3:9).

The brother of Jared answers, "Nay; Lord, show thyself unto me" (Ether 3:10). The Lord removed the veil completely from the eyes of the brother of Jared and came into full view of this resolutely faithful man.

Then this most remarkable revelation of the premortal Jehovah: "Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people," He said. "Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.

"And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after my own image.

"Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear

unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh” (Ether 3:14–16).

Before examining the doctrinal truths taught in this divine encounter, it will be useful to note two seemingly problematic issues here, issues that would seem to have reasonable and acceptable resolutions.

The first issue is suggested in two questions the Lord asks the brother of Jared during the vision as it unfolds: “Why hast thou fallen?” and “Sawest thou more than this?” It is a basic premise of Latter-day Saint theology that God “knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it” (2 Nephi 9:20). The scriptures, both ancient and modern, are replete with this assertion of omniscience. Nevertheless, God has frequently asked questions of men, usually as a way to test their faith, measure their honesty, or allow their knowledge greater development. For example, he called unto Adam in the Garden of Eden, “Where art thou?” and later asked Eve, “What is this that thou hast done?” (Genesis 3:9, 13), yet an omniscient parent clearly knew the answer to both questions, for He could see where Adam was and He had watched what Eve had done. It is obvious that the questions are for the children’s sake, giving Adam and Eve the responsibility of replying honestly. Later, in trying Abraham’s faith, God repeatedly called out regarding Abraham’s whereabouts, to which the faithful patriarch would answer: “Here am I” (Genesis 22:11). The purpose in this scriptural moment was not to provide God with information He already knew but to reaffirm Abraham’s fixed faith and unwavering position in the most difficult of all parental tests. These kinds of rhetorical questions are frequently used by God, particularly in assessing faith, honesty, and the full measure of agency, allowing the “students” the freedom and opportunity to express themselves as revealingly as they wish, even though God knows the answer to His own and all other questions.

The second issue that requires preliminary comment stems from the Lord’s exclamation, “Never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger” (Ether 3:9). And later, “Never have I showed myself unto

man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast" (Ether 3:15). The potential for confusion here comes with the realization that many—indeed, we would assume all—of the major prophets living prior to the brother of Jared had seen God. How then does one account for the Lord's declaration? Adam's face-to-face conversations with God in the Garden of Eden can be exempted because of the paradisiacal, prefallen state of that setting and relationship. Furthermore, other prophets' visions of God, such as those of Moses and Isaiah in the Bible, or Nephi and Jacob in the Book of Mormon, came after this "never before" experience of the brother of Jared. But before the era of the Tower of Babel, the Lord did appear unto Adam and "the residue of his posterity who were righteous" in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman three years before Adam's death (see D&C 107:53–55). And we are left with Enoch, who said very explicitly, "I saw the Lord; and he stood before my face, and he talked with me, even as a man talketh one with another, face to face" (Moses 7:4). We assume there would have been other prophets living in the period between Adam's leaving the Garden of Eden and the building of the Tower of Babel who also saw God in a similar manner, including Noah, who "found grace in the eyes of the Lord" and "walked with God" (Genesis 6:8–9), the same scriptural phrase used to describe Enoch's relationship with the Lord (see Genesis 5:24).

This issue has been much discussed by Latter-day Saint writers, and there are several possible explanations, any one—or all—of which may cast some light upon the larger truth of this passage. Nevertheless, without additional scriptural revelation or commentary on the matter, any conjecture is only that—conjecture—and as such is inadequate and incomplete.

One possibility is that this is simply a comment made in the context of one dispensation and as such applies only to the Jaredites and Jaredite prophets—that Jehovah has never before revealed Himself to one of their seers and revelators. Obviously this theory has severe limitations when measured against such phrases as "never before" and "never has man" and combined with the realization that Jared and his

brother are the fathers of this dispensation, the first to whom God could have revealed Himself in their era.

Another suggestion is that the lowercase reference to “man” is the key to this passage, suggesting that the Lord has never revealed Himself to the unsanctified, to the nonbeliever, to temporal, earthy, natural man. The implication here is that only those who have put off the natural man, only those who are untainted by the world—in short, the sanctified (such as Adam, Enoch, and now the brother of Jared)—are entitled to this privilege.

Some have believed that the Lord here means He has never before revealed Himself to this degree or to this extent. This theory would suggest that divine appearances to earlier prophets had not been with this same “fulness,” that never before had the veil been lifted to give such a complete revelation of Christ’s nature and being.

A further possibility is that this is the first time Jehovah has appeared and identified Himself as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, thus the interpretation of the passage being “never have I showed myself [as Jesus Christ] unto man whom I have created” (Ether 3:15). This possibility is reinforced by one way of reading Moroni’s later editorial comment: “Having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw *Jesus*” (Ether 3:20; emphasis added).

Yet another interpretation of this passage is that the faith of the brother of Jared was so great he saw not only the *spirit* finger and body of the premortal Jesus (which presumably many other prophets had also seen) but also had some distinctly more revealing aspect of Christ’s body of flesh, blood, and bone. Exactly what insight into the flesh-and-blood nature of Christ’s future body the brother of Jared might have had is not clear, but Jehovah does say to him, “Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood” (Ether 3:9), and Moroni does say that Christ revealed Himself in this instance “in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites” (Ether 3:17). Some have taken that to mean literally “the same body” the Nephites would see—a body of flesh and blood. A safer position would be that it was at least the exact spiritual likeness of that future body. Jehovah says, “Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit . . .

and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Ether 3:16), and Moroni says, "Jesus showed himself unto this man in the spirit" (Ether 3:17).

A final—and in terms of the faith of the brother of Jared (which is the issue at hand) surely the most persuasive—explanation for me is that Christ is saying to the brother of Jared, "Never have I showed myself unto man *in this manner, without my volition, driven solely by the faith of the beholder.*" As a rule, prophets are invited into the presence of the Lord, are bidden to enter His presence by Him and only with His sanction. The brother of Jared, on the other hand, stands alone then (and we assume now) in having thrust himself through the veil, not as an unwelcome guest but perhaps technically an uninvited one. Says Jehovah, "*Never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger. . . . Never has man believed in me as thou hast*" (Ether 3:9, 15; emphasis added). Obviously the Lord Himself is linking unprecedented faith with this unprecedented vision. If the vision is not unique, then it has to be the faith—and how the vision is obtained—that is so remarkable. The only way this faith could be so remarkable would be in its ability to take this prophet, uninvited, where others had only been able to go by invitation.

Indeed it would appear that this is Moroni's own understanding of the circumstance, for he later writes, "Because of the knowledge [which has come as a result of faith] of this man *he could not be kept from beholding within the veil. . . .*"

"Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, *he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus*" (Ether 3:19–20; emphasis added).

This may be one of those very provocative examples (except that it is real life and not hypothetical) about God's power. Schoolboy philosophers sometimes ask, "Can God make a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it?" or "Can God hide an item so skillfully that He cannot find it?" Far more movingly and importantly we may ask here, "Could God have stopped the brother of Jared from seeing through the veil?" At first blush one is inclined to say, "Surely God could block such an experience if He wished to." But think again. Or, more precisely, read again.

“This man . . . *could not be kept from beholding within the veil; . . . he could not be kept from within the veil*” (Ether 3:19–20; emphasis added).

No, this may be an absolutely unprecedented case of a prophet’s will and faith and purity so closely approaching that of heaven’s that the man moves from understanding God to being actually like Him, with His same thrust of will and faith, at least in this one instance. What a remarkable doctrinal statement about the power of a mortal man’s faith! And not an ethereal, unreachable, select category of a man, either. This is one who once forgot to call upon the Lord, one whose best ideas focused on rocks, and one who doesn’t even have a traditional name in the book that has immortalized his remarkable feat of faith. Given such a man with such faith, it should not be surprising that the Lord would show this prophet much, show him visions that would be relevant to the mission of all the Book of Mormon prophets and to the events of the latter-day dispensation in which the book would be received.

After the prophet stepped through the veil to behold the Savior of the world, he was not limited in seeing the rest of what the eternal world revealed. Indeed, the Lord showed him “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25). The staying power for such an experience was once again the faith of the brother of Jared, for “the Lord could not withhold anything from him, for he knew that the Lord could show him all things” (Ether 3:26).

A REMARKABLE VISION

This vision of “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be, . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25) was similar to that given to Moses and others of the prophets (see Moses 1:27–29). In this case, however, it was written down in great detail and then sealed up. Moroni, who had access to this recorded vision, wrote on his plates “the very things which the brother of Jared saw” (Ether 4:4). Then he, too, sealed them up and hid them again in the earth before his death and the final destruction of the Nephite civilization. Of this vision given to the brother of Jared, Moroni wrote,

“There never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared” (Ether 4:4).

Those sealed plates constitute the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon which Joseph Smith did not translate. Furthermore, they will remain sealed, literally as well as figuratively, until “they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are” (Ether 4:7).

The full measure of this unprecedented and unexcelled vision—“there never were greater things made manifest”—is yet to be made known to the children of men. But consider what was made known in one man’s experience in receiving it, consider that the time was approximately two thousand years before Christ’s birth, and consider what is *not* presently contained in the Old Testament canon of that period regarding Jehovah and His true characteristics. These twenty-five items are all drawn from Ether 3 and 4:

1. Jehovah, the God of the pre-Christian era, was the premortal Jesus Christ, identified here by that name (see Ether 3:14).

2. Christ is both a Father and a Son in His divine relationship with the children of men (see Ether 3:14).

3. Christ was “prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem [his] people” (Ether 3:14), knowledge which had been shared before with Enoch and later would be shared with John the Revelator (see Moses 7:47; Revelation 13:8).

4. Christ had a spirit body, which looked like and was in the premortal form of His physical body, “like unto flesh and blood,” including fingers, voice, face, and all other physical features (Ether 3:6).

5. Christ assisted in the creation of man, fashioning the human family “after the body of my spirit” (Ether 3:16).

6. With a spirit body and the divinity of His calling, the premortal Christ spoke audibly, in words and language understood by mortals (see Ether 3:16).

7. Christ is a God, acting for and with His Father, who is also a God (see Ether 3:14; 4:7).

8. Christ reveals some truths to some that are to be kept from others until an appointed time—His “own due time” (Ether 3:24).

9. Christ uses a variety of tools and techniques in revelation, including the interpreting power of “two stones”: the Urim and Thummim (see Ether 3:23–24; D&C 17:1).

10. Christ’s later atoning, redeeming role is clearly stated even before it has been realized in His mortal life. Furthermore, in a most blessed way for the brother of Jared, it is immediately efficacious. “I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people,” Christ says. “In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters” (Ether 3:14).

Then the brother of Jared has his redemption pronounced, as though the Atonement had already been carried out. “Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall,” Christ promises him, “therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you” (Ether 3:13).

This statement underscores the eternal nature of the Atonement, its effects reaching out to all those who lived before the Savior’s birth as well as all those living after it. All who in Old Testament times were baptized in Christ’s name had the same claim upon eternal life that the brother of Jared had, even though Christ had not yet even been born. In matters of the Atonement, as in all other eternal promises, “time only is measured unto men” (Alma 40:8).

11. Christ had past knowledge of “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been” and foreknowledge of “all that would be,” showing all of these to the brother of Jared (Ether 3:25).

Moroni, in recording the experience of the brother of Jared, adds these insights and revelations which come from the same encounter:

12. Future Saints will need to be sanctified in Christ to receive all of His revelations (see Ether 4:6).

13. Those who reject the vision of the brother of Jared will be shown “no greater things” by Christ (Ether 4:8).

14. At Christ's command "the heavens are opened and are shut," "the earth shall shake," and "the inhabitants thereof shall pass away, even so as by fire" (Ether 4:9).

15. Believers in the vision of the brother of Jared will be given manifestations of Christ's spirit. Because of such spiritual experience, belief shall turn to knowledge and they "shall know that these things are true" (Ether 4:11).

16. "Whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good" is of Christ. Good comes of none except Christ (Ether 4:12).

17. Those who do not believe Christ's words would not believe Him personally (see Ether 4:12).

18. Those who do not believe Christ would not believe God the Father, who sent Him (see Ether 4:12).

19. Christ is the light and the life and the truth of the world (see Ether 4:12).

20. Christ will reveal "greater things" (Ether 4:13), "great and marvelous things" (Ether 4:15), and knowledge hidden "from the foundation of the world" (Ether 4:14) to those who rend the veil of unbelief and come unto Him.

21. Believers are to call upon the Father in the name of Christ "with a broken heart and a contrite spirit" if they are to "know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made" unto the house of Israel (Ether 4:15).

22. Christ's revelations to John the Revelator will be "unfolded in the eyes of all the people" in the last days, even as they are about to be fulfilled (Ether 4:16).

23. Christ commands all the ends of the earth to come unto Him, believe in His gospel, and be baptized in His name (see Ether 4:18).

24. Signs shall follow those who believe in Christ's name (see Ether 4:18).

25. Those faithful to Christ's name at the last day shall be "lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world" (Ether 4:19).

Indeed, an appeal like that of the brother of Jared is given by the

Father to both Gentile and Israelite, to whom this record is sent. Asking the latter-day reader to pierce the limits of shallow faith, Christ cries:

“Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.

“Come unto me, O ye house of Israel, and it shall be made manifest unto you how great things the Father hath laid up for you, from the foundation of the world; and it hath not come unto you, because of unbelief.

“Behold, *when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief* which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel” (Ether 4:13–15; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon is predicated on the willingness of men and women to “rend that veil of unbelief” in order to behold the revelations—and the Revelation—of God (Ether 4:15). It would seem that the humbling experience of the brother of Jared in his failure to pray and his consternation over the sixteen stones were included in this account to show just how mortal and just how normal he was—so very much like the men and women we know and at least in some ways so much like ourselves. His belief in himself and his view of himself may have been limited—much like our view of ourselves. But his belief in God was unprecedented. It was without doubt or limit: “I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger” (Ether 3:4).

And from that command given to the Lord, for it does seem to be something of a command, the brother of Jared and the reader of the Book of Mormon would never be the same again. Ordinary individuals with ordinary challenges could rend the veil of unbelief and enter the realms of eternity. And Christ, who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem His people, would be standing at the edge of that veil to usher the believer through.