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The Years of the Jaredites

Author(s): John L. Sorenson

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Summary:

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FARMS
Brigham Young University
P.O. Box 7113
University Station
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1-800-327-6715
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THE YEARS OF THE JAREDITES

John L. Sorenson

1969

The Book of Mormon has been in print for 140 years. In that time, no one has written a chronology of Jaredite history using the dates and calendar familiar to modern readers. As a result, Jaredite history floats in readers' minds in a chronological limbo.

This lack led to no serious problem as long as there was nothing in secular history with which to compare the civilization described in Ether. Today, however, ancient American cultures known through archaeology and assignable to the period of Jaredite existence are coming to sufficient attention that systematic comparison ought not to be put off longer. To make sound comparisons will require that the events of Jaredite history be dated firmly enough to allow their being lined up with the archaeological record.

This article proposes a plausible chronology for the Jaredites. In the nature of their record as we have it, it is impossible to pin down precisely just when they lived, but inferences can at least be made which have considerable value. That is what is done here--to show when events recorded in the Book of Ether might well have taken place, even if no one can be precise about the details.

There are at least three ways in which such dates can be useful. They give a greater sense of reality to the record, especially by allowing it to be tied to other, more familiar, sequences, such as biblical events. Dates also allow comparison between specific historical events or patterns referred to in Ether and from archaeology. Finally, developing a chronology stimulates inquiry into the meaning and internal consistency of the scriptural record as history, possibly provoking in the process new and broader interpretations and appreciations in our minds of what the book has to say to us.

The method followed here has been quite simple. First it was necessary to settle upon beginning and ending dates for the Jaredite civilization in terms of chronological frameworks outside the Book of Mormon. Next an attempt was made to distribute the events in the Book of Ether over the whole time period marked out in a way which did no violence to the facts in the book.

The beginning date for the Jaredites depends upon historical data from the Old World. Unfortunately even that information is not firmly established, so a certain amount of reasoning must be employed. Ether begins by talking of a "great tower" which is the same as the "tower" referred to in Genesis 11. Can the events surround the construction of that tower be dated? Fundamentalist Christians and some Latter-day Saints have accepted a date of around 2200 B.C. for the tower event. Actually there is no adequate basis in the Bible for such a date. In fact there are strong arguments against it on the basis of the

Bible alone, but that source proves insufficient to settle the matter, for the early chronology of the Old Testament is not precise enough and even appears to be conflicting at a number of points. (Note that in questioning the dating, I do not question that actual events in fact occurred which are more or less correctly described in the brief language of Genesis 11. That language is not, however, clear enough to allow anyone to make a single clear interpretation as to precisely what happened--let alone when it took place.)

The secular history of ancient Mesopotamia, which included what Genesis refers to as the "land of Shinar" where the tower was constructed, refers to a "flood" just as does the Bible. The description is strikingly similar in some features to the account in Genesis, and all serious scholars consider the two accounts to be closely related. In addition there are some evidences from archaeology of several floods in Mesopotamia, one of which could have been the one referred to in the traditions. The annals of rule, or king lists, of the Sumerians who dominated the lower Mesopotamian plain in earliest historical times trace back rulership to a time just following this flood. (Compare Genesis 10:8-10, on Nimrod.)

In the history and archaeology of the land-between-the-rivers, the nature of the "tower" of the Bible and the Book of Mormon becomes clear. It is the ziggurat or temple-tower whose remains still dot the plain of southern Iraq. This architectural form first appears in the concluding centuries of the fourth millennium B.C.

The flood/tower combination of Genesis is undoubtedly derived from the same source as the flood/tower of secular Mesopotamian history. The latter is most comfortably dated in the second half of the fourth millennium B.C. On this basis a date for the beginning of the Jaredite story can be estimated. About 3100 B.C. is acceptable. Possibly it could be a little later.

The end of the Jaredite account cannot be dated without question either. Ether 11:20-21 implies that the later immigrant peoples (of Zarahemla and of Lehi) had not yet reached the promised land in America at a time just before Ether, the last Jaredite prophet, was born. On the other hand Coriantumr, the final Jaredite king, "was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons." (Omni 20-21) We know that the arrival of the people of Zarahemla was some time after 586 B.C., the date of the fall of Jerusalem from which that group of people fled. The encounter with Coriantumr could have taken place at any time in the first decades, or somewhat later, of the Mulekites' inhabiting the new land. (However, if Ether 11:20-21 indeed precedes the arrival of the Isrealite group, Coriantumr could not have lived as late as, say, 400 B.C.) That it was early in their history may be inferred from the fact that more extensive mention of contacts would have been likely had the people of Zarahemla and the Jaredites lived in adjacent lands for any length of time. Also the fact that the Mulek group "discovered" Coriantumr, rather than the reverse, and that he died after only nine lunar months with them, suggests that the fallen king had been incapacitated by his wounds (see Ether 15:32) and so did not live long after the final Jaredite battle.

A reasonable conclusion is that the most likely date for the end of the Jaredite people falls not earlier, and not much later, than 580 B.C. (Of course the "end of the Jaredite people" by no means indicates that all Jaredites were wiped out. That would be far-fetched. There is solid evidence in the Book of Mormon itself, and certainly more from archaeology, indicating that remnants of the old population survived in various spots after the final organized battle. The scripture only talks, after all, of the destruction of the Jaredite people as a social entity, not the extinction of the entire population. Why the later Nephite account does not take more account of the Jaredite remnants could be treated at some length, but not here.)

How confident can we be about the beginning and ending dates decided upon here? They could be off by as much as several centuries on the early end. The possibilities range from perhaps 3250 to 2800 B.C. On the other hand the final date seems to be on firmer ground, but conceivably it could be stretched as late as 400 B.C. In any case the overall duration of about 2500 years has considerable likelihood of being about right--to within a century or so.

The next task is to distribute between 3100 and 580 B.C. the history of the Jaredites as reflected in statements in the Book of Ether. This involves judgment, for on many points the book is cryptic or silent. For example, Ether 10:8-9 tells of the overthrow of a ruler named Riplakish, followed by the statement "And it came to pass after the space of many years, Morianton, (he being a descendant of Riplakish)" gained control. In other

cases terms are used such as "old age," "many days" or "exceeding old age." Durations in years are sometimes added which act to an extent as controls on the language, but not always. An attempt has been made here to be consistent in interpreting the chronological terms, yet admittedly other readers could come to somewhat different conclusions. No one answer can be considered correct. Instead emphasis must be placed on plausibility and reasonableness in the light of the whole.

Once a reasonable distribution of the events through time had been reached, memory-aiding period markers were sought. Significant shifts in Jaredite history seem to be implied at the division points chosen. The period names are hopefully descriptive of the major directions in that history; someone else's labels might be better yet.

Since the dates are approximate at best, minor adjustments were made in order to make the main periods come out in convenient segments. The duration of these periods should be easier for readers to remember because they are in round numbers, which also emphasizes their tentativeness.

Now that a chronological framework is established, comparisons of Jaredite events and tendencies internally can be made, as well as pointing out how that picture relates to what is revealed by archaeology.

A Logic for Jaredite Chronology

I. Pioneering Phase (3100-2920 B.C.)	<u>Years</u>
Departure from the "great tower" to arrive at land	30
Adjustment to choosing a king	70
Orihah's rule ("exceeding many days," 31 children)	80
	<hr/>
Total duration of phase	180
 II. Formation Phase (2920-2320 B.C.)	
A. Early Formation	
Kib begets Corihor after he becomes king, then reigns 32 years until Corihor's flight	34
Corihor prepares to rebel, fathers children who help	32
Corihor rules, with father captive, until latter is very old	25
Kib, the father, begets Shule, who grows to manhood before seizing the throne	25
Shule has children, including Noah who rebels and reigns over half the kingdom	33
Cohor, Noah's son, succeeds him, ruling half the land	15
Nimrod, another son of Cohor, succeeds, then gives up the half kingdom to Shule, reuniting the nation	10
Thereafter Shule begets children in his old age	25
Omer, Shule's son, begets Jared, then the latter has children	30
Jared plots, Omer flees, Jared rules one year	1
Akish kills Jared. Akish's one son is imprisoned; he then has others	35
Akish wars with his sons for many years	35
(Sub-phase total)	(300)
 B. Late Formation	
Omer regains the throne. While old, begets Emer, who	

comes to reign	20
Emer's "house" reigns 62 years	62
Coriantum follows and rules until 142 years of age	142
Com reigns 49 years until Heth is born; Heth grows up then kills his father	30
Heth rules until the drouth becomes unbearable	24
(Sub-phase total)	(300)
Total duration of phase	<u>600</u>
III. Disruption Phase (2320-1720 B.C.)	
A. Early Disruption	
Interval	30
Shez picks up the pieces after drouth, and lives long	88
Interval	100
Riplakish, a descendent of Shez, gains power, then reigns 42 years, until killed in a rebellion	42
Interval	100
(Sub-phase total)	(360)
B. Late Disruption	
Morianton, a descendent of Riplakish, prepares, fights for years to gain contral power	40
He lives to "an exceeding great age"	60
His son Kim succeeds him, reigning 8 years while his father still lives	8
Kim's brother later overthrows him; Kim goes into captivity	15
Kim begets Levi in his old age	65
Levi lives in captivity 42 years after father's death	42
Then Levi fights and gains the throne	10
(Sub-phase total)	(240)
Total duration of phase	<u>600</u>

IV. Elaboration Phase (1720-1120 B.C.)

A. Early Elaboration

Levi rules to "a good old age"	60
Corom replaces Levi and "saw many days"	66
Kish then reigns and passes away	60
Lib next reigns, living many years	60
Hearthom rules for 24 years before being overthrown	24
(Sub-phase total)	(270)

B. Late Elaboration

He then lives in captivity many years	60
Heth lives in captivity all his days	60
Interval	30
Aaron (a "descendent") lives in captivity	60
Amnigaddah also lives in captivity	60
Corianton also was in captivity all his days	60
(Sub-phase total)	(330)
Total duration of phase	<hr/> 600

V. Decline Phase (1120-570 B.C.)

A. Early Decline

Com matures, prepares, and gains control of half of the kingdom	30
He then rules for 42 years (10:32)	42
After that he wars "for many years" with Amgid	30
After Amgid's demise, Com rules to the accession of his son Shiblom	18
Shiblom rules through much trouble, then is slain	35
Seth (apparently the successor) is in captivity all his days	60
His son Ahah retakes the kingdom; "few were his days"	25

Interval	30
(Sub-phase total)	(270)
B. Late Decline	
Ethem (a "descendent") obtains the kingdom, reigns	50
Moron, his son reigns (10), loses half the kingdom (35), fights but loses all (5), then is a captive (20)	70
Coriantor is in captivity all his days	60
Interval	40
Ether (a "descendent") sees the end of the nation	60
(Sub-phase total)	(280)
Total duration of phase	<u>550</u>
Total duration of Jaredite tradition	<u>2530</u>

THE YEARS OF THE JAREDITES

DATE	PHASE	SUB-PHA.	PERSONS	EVENTS, CHARACTERISTICS	MESOAMERICAN ARCHAEOLOG.
600 BC 550	Ebb Phase (540)	Late (270)	Ether	Great final war	Violent end of "Olmecs" Relatively unsettled, decadent time
		Early (270)	Ethem Ahah	War and disruption	
-1000 BC				Com	War, famine, destruction
		Corianton		Years of war Secret groups reappear	
1500 BC	Developed Phase (600)	Late (330)	Heth	Extensive trade, metalwork "City" built at narrow neck	"Olmec" San Lorenzo T Settlements south of Tehua. Isth. star
		Early (270)	Lib Levi		
2000 BC	Conflict Phase (600)	Late (240)	Morianton	Riches, many "cities"	Earliest known agricultural villages Civilization inferrable
		Early (360)	Riplakish Shez	Political disruption	
2500 BC	Building Phase (600)	Late (300)	Emer	Severe drouth Secret groups again Many "cities" built	
		Early (300)	Omer Shule Kib	All but handful destroyed groups First appearance, secret A	
3000 BC	Advance Phase (180)		Jared	First king chosen Journey to new land	

An Alternative
JAREDITE DEVELOPMENT & CHRONOLOGY

Compiled by
 Robert F. Smith

JSD	Lineage	Events, Notes, and References
1	Jared I ↳ Jacom ↳ Gilgah ↳ Mahah ↳ *Brother of Jared (Mahonri Moriancumer) ↳ Pagag ↳ brothers of Pagag	ca. 3139 B.C.; migration from "great tower" (Heb. <i>migdal</i> Gn 11:4); Mt Zerin (Eth 12:30); GMT 3114 B.C. for start of Mayan Long Count, and arrival in New World; choosing of king; fowl, fish, & bees (2:2-3).
2	*Orihah	"whose days were exceeding many" (7:1); begat 31 children (7:2), thus polygynist.
3	*Kib ↳ *Corihor ↳ *Shule	ca. 2920 B.C.; Early Formative; reign of 32 years plus (from begetting Corihor until Corihor's flight, 7:4); in land of Moron; in land of Nehor.
4	*Shule ↳ *Noah ↳ Cohor I ↳ *Cohor II	ca. 2800 B.C.; period of coregency (7:13); hill Ephraim & city Nehor (7:9). ca. 2770 B.C.; rules over "land of their first inheritance" (7:16). ca. 2755 B.C.
5	*Omer ↳ *Nimrod ↳ Jared II ↳ Esrom ↳ Coriantumr I ↳ Kimnor ↳ *Akish ↳ son Nimrah	ca. 2745 B.C.; Late Formative at end of Omer's reign? ca. 2720 B.C.; Jared rebelled and dwelt in land of Heth (8:2). Omer flees to Ablom via the hill Shim (9:3), and Nimrah joins him (9:9).
6	*Emer	ca. 2630 B.C.; reigns 62 years (9:16), with 2-year coregency (9:15); Late Formative: fruit, grain, silk, linen, gold, silver (9:17); cattle, oxen, cows, sheep, swine, goats, etc. (9:18); horses, asses, elephants, cureloms, cumoms (9:19).
7	*Coriantum I	ca. 2568 B.C.; 4-year coregency (9:22); lived 142 years (9:24); "did build many mighty cities" (9:23).
8	*Com I	ca. 2453 B.C.; son of old age (?); ruled 49 years (9:25) in the stead of his father, and then begat Heth.
9	*Heth I	ca. 2380 B.C.; rules until "great famine" and drought (9:28,30), and flocks migrate before serpents into the land southward--Zarahenla to the later Nephites (9:31).

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