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Ether 6 and the Plan of Salvation

MIKAYLA WOODWARD

Some time ago, I wrote a paper drawing a correlation between the Creation story and the plan of salvation. With the help of my seminary teacher, I discovered that the pattern the earth followed through its creation, development, and completion is similar to, if not the same as, the process the children of God follow in their creation, development, and completion. Since then, I have found that almost every verse in the standard works teaches of the plan of salvation. Every story or anecdote in the scriptures teaches how the plan works or what our part within this plan is, either giving a deeper understanding of a single aspect of the plan or focusing attention on a more panoramic, holistic comprehension of the entire plan.

Ether 6 is one such account. Not only does this chapter enlighten our understanding of specific features within the plan, but it also gives a broader understanding of the plan as a whole. On the surface level, this chapter teaches about faith and obedience by expounding upon the Jaredites' journey to the promised land. Even this surface level of enlightenment teaches two crucial points about the plan of salvation: faith and obedience. However, if we will read deeper into Ether 6, we can discover a much more extensive understanding of the plan of salvation and how it works in our lives. From the Jaredites' journey across the sea, we can draw a parallel connecting mankind's passage through premortal, mortal, and postmortal existence. Through the study of this chapter as a counterpart to the journey of God's children, we can intensify our understanding of the plan and better understand our individual roles within that plan. This understanding will allow personal improvement by applying these understandings to life. Hence, the point of this paper is twofold: first, to draw a relationship between the plan of salvation and the Jaredites' journey; and second, to show that

through the understanding of this relationship we are better equipped for eternal progression.

The first parallel between the plan of salvation and the Jaredites' story is found even before Ether 6 begins. The vessels, which were to carry the Jaredites across the "great waters," had already been fashioned or created (see Ether 2). Ether 6 actually begins with the brother of Jared coming down to his people and placing stones inside each of the boats after communing with the Lord: "For it came to pass after the Lord had prepared the stones which the brother of Jared had carried up into the mount [recall Ether 3, where the Lord touched the stones with his finger and gave light to each], the brother of Jared came down out of the mount, and he did put forth the stones into the vessels which were prepared, one in each end thereof; and behold, they did give light unto the vessels" (Ether 6:2). Symbolically, these vessels (boats) could represent the bodies of the children of God. Notice the use of the word *vessel* within this verse. One definition of *vessel* is "a hollow utensil, such as a cup, vase, or pitcher, used as a container."¹ The boats, in a way, were "containers" of the stones and of the people who crossed to the promised land. Likewise, our bodies are "containers" of sorts that hold the spirits of God's children.

A second definition of vessel sheds even more light on this scripture: A vessel is "a person [or object] seen as the agent or embodiment, as of a quality: [i.e.] *a vessel of mercy*."² The boats in this case are vessels containing light and people. With the added perspective of this definition these boats embody light and spirit. Similarly, our bodies are the vessels of light and spirit, just as one can be a vessel of mercy.

Even further, just as these boats were the vessels by which the Jaredites arrived in the promised land (the Americas), so are bodies the vessels by which the children of God travel through mortality to arrive in their own promised land.

With this analogy drawn between the vessels and bodies it is easy for us to see the resemblance between the plan of salvation and Ether 6. Before the Jaredites could begin their journey across the sea, their vessels (boats) had to be created. Likewise, before we

could begin our journeys through mortality, our vessels (physical bodies) had to be created.

It is interesting to note that the brother of Jared placed a rock of light in each of the vessels. Christ is consistently symbolized as the rock and the light throughout the standard works. Doctrine and Covenants 50:44, for example, illustrates Christ as the rock: “Wherefore, I am in your midst, and am the good shepherd, and the stone of Israel. He that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall.” Although most scriptures simply allude to Christ being the rock, this scripture directly refers to Christ as the stone and the rock. This scripture is especially powerful because the comparison between Christ and the rock is drawn directly from Christ’s lips. To cite another example, Doctrine and Covenants 6:34 reads, “Therefore, fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon *my rock*, they cannot prevail” (emphasis added). Finally, the paramount reference to Christ as the rock is found in Helaman 5:12: “And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation.” Christ is the rock, the immovable foundation upon which the children of God are called to build their lives and find protection.³

Christ is also symbolically represented as the light. Psalm 27:1 reads, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” Christ has consistently acted as a light to His people, both physically and spiritually. For example, Christ physically led the Israelite people through the wilderness as a tangible pillar of fire, but He has also acted as a spiritual light in leading individuals back from sin. Thus, Christ is the physical and spiritual light. Isaiah 60:19 reiterates this analogy of Christ being the light: “The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.”⁴ This scripture is particularly effective in demonstrating Christ as the light because it sets Him as the light above objects that we naturally associate as our source of illumination.

If Christ is the rock and the light, then the brother of Jared, when he put the stones of light in the boats, symbolically placed

Christ in each of the vessels. The brother of Jared's placement of these stones in the vessels is analogous to the bodies of God's children receiving the light of Christ upon their physical creation. Just as God's children received the light of Christ upon their creation (to prepare them for their journey through mortality), the Jaredites received a light from Christ upon the creation of their vessels (to prepare them for their journey across the sea).

This parallel between the plan of salvation and Ether 6 is further developed in verse 3, which explains why the brother of Jared placed the stones in each of the boats. It reads, "And thus the Lord caused stones to shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness." In the Jaredites' situation the Lord provided light in their boats so they would not have to spend the entire 344 days in darkness. Imagine the distress and anxiety the Jaredites would have felt traveling in a cramped and dark space through troubled waters filled with unfamiliar creatures. The Lord did not want His children, the Jaredites, to pass through their journey under these conditions. The Lord desires to make all His children's journeys as pleasant as possible, so He equips them with the essential tools, light, and intelligence to live well.

In the plan of salvation the Lord gives His children the light of Christ for similar reasons before they make their journey on earth. Moroni 7:18 teaches that the Light of Christ is the "light by which ye may judge." This light of Christ is the way by which the children of God are able to navigate choices, direct actions, and form understandings. Imagine life without this light: children would not be able to make simple decisions between right and wrong and adults having gone astray would not know there was a way back, let alone know how to find it. God's children would truly be lost in obscurity, fumbling in the darkness, not knowing which direction to take if it were not for this light given at the journey's beginning. Thus, at the beginning of the Jaredites' journey to the Americas and man's journey through life, both were given a gift of light prepared by the hand of the Lord with the intent of providing comfort and direction.

The next aspect of the Jaredites' journey, which is also analo-

gous to the plan of salvation, is in Ether 6:4: “And it came to pass that when they had prepared all manner of food, that thereby they might subsist upon the water, and also food for their flocks and herds, and whatsoever beast or animal or fowl that they should carry with them—and it came to pass that when they had done all these things they got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God.” In the opening of this verse it is made quite apparent that after being given the commandment to travel the “great waters” the Jaredites were given a period of preparation that they might “subsist upon the waters.” This can be compared to the different preparatory periods given to men during the course of eternity.

Life on earth in itself is given as a probationary or preparatory period for the eternities ahead. Alma 12:24 reads, “There was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken . . . which is after the resurrection of the dead.”⁵ A critical part of the plan of salvation is that people come to earth and prepare for immortality. Consequently, the children of God, like the Jaredites, are given a period of preparation on a grand scale before they ultimately commend themselves to God.

Further, within this probationary period of eternal existence, the Lord designates even more particular periods of preparation, which are also similar to the preparation of the Jaredites. One is the time allotted before baptism into the Church. Another is the time required before making sacred covenants in the temple. In a way, a child younger than eight, an investigator preparing to join the Church, or someone preparing to go to the temple is gathering and preparing spiritual food so that they might subsist throughout the rest of their life journeys. During this period they are gathering knowledge, experience, and skills that will enable them to practice the covenants they will make. Thus, just as the Jaredites were given time to prepare for their journey, the plan of salvation (at many different levels) apportions several intervals of preparation time for the children of God.

Another connection between the plan of salvation and Ether 6

is found in the concluding lines of verse 4: “They got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God.” Just as the Jaredites commended themselves to the Lord after preparing proper supplies for their journey, so too do God’s children, after they have properly prepared, commend themselves to the Lord. Similar to the Jaredites, God’s children commend themselves to the Lord by following His commands. The Jaredites, as instructed, began their journey through the “great waters.” The children of God likewise dedicate themselves through the making of a series of ordinances and covenants—including baptism, the sacrament, the endowment, and celestial marriage—just as the Lord has commanded.

Another perspective on Ether 6:4 builds and strengthens the parallel between the plan of salvation and Ether 6. In 2 Nephi 25:23 we learn that it is “by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” In the plan of salvation, though the children of God are ultimately and entirely saved by grace, they are still expected to strive for their own salvation with all of their ability. The Jaredites set a good example by putting all of their effort into properly preparing for their salvation: their successful trip across the waters. Though the Jaredites’ successful trip through the great waters was ultimately the Lord’s doing, the Jaredites still did everything within their ability to ensure the success of their trip. Perhaps the real point here can be found in considering what the result would have been if they had failed to heed the Lord’s counsel and properly prepare, if they had not done all they could do for their salvation. Would they still have arrived safely in the promised land? The question need not be answered and is not meant to cause doubt in the Lord’s saving grace. It simply points out that both the Jaredites and the rest of God’s children are expected to do all that they can do, even though it is “by grace that [they] are [really] saved” (2 Nephi 25:23).

After the Jaredites did all they could do to ensure their safety while traveling to the promised land, they “commended themselves unto the Lord their God” (Ether 6:4). The definition of *commend* as found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “to give in trust or charge, deliver to one’s care or keeping.”⁶ After the Jaredites did all they

could, they trusted in the Lord for their safety; they trusted that He would take care of them and provide for their happiness. Likewise, the children of God are instructed to commend or entrust themselves to the Lord's will after they have done all that they can do.

The next parallel between Ether 6 and the plan of salvation is found in Ether 6:5–6: “And it came to pass that the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the water, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind. And it came to pass that they were many times buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind.” As depicted within these verses, the Jaredites’ journey, though sanctioned and taken with the protection of the Lord, was not easy. This parallels the scripture in Abraham 3:25 when the Lord stands in the Council in Heaven and explains that by sending God’s children to earth “[Jesus and Heavenly Father would] prove [God’s children] herewith, to see if they [would] do all things whatsoever the Lord their God [should] command them.” The Lord has designated this life as a time of trial and temptation to test and prove the children of God, refining them to be more like their Creator. Similar to the journey of the Jaredites, the journey through mortality is most definitely the will of the Lord and He continually gives His guidance and protection, but it is still not easy. Like the Jaredites, there are many times in life when God’s children feel as though they are “buried in the depths of the sea,” many times when they feel in desperate need of help because of the “mountain waves” crashing upon them. The Jaredites’ experience of “furious winds” and “mountain waves” seems comparable to the trials and temptations found throughout life. Hence, within these verses lies an exceptionally poignant likeness between the two journeys and the trials therein.

To build further upon this parallel of the Jaredites’ “furious winds” being similar to the trials and temptations of God’s children, verse 8 reminds us that God wants His children to succeed. It reads, “And it came to pass that the wind did never cease to blow towards the promised land while they were upon the waters; and thus they

were driven forth before the wind.” As distressing as the violent winds and crashing waves probably were to the Jaredites they “never cease[d] to blow towards the promised land.” Likewise, as upsetting and difficult as trials seem to be in the moment of their aggression, the children of God have been given a promise that “all these things shall give [them] experience, and shall be for [their] good” (D&C 122:7). Like the Jaredites, though God’s children might have “bumps” in the road of the journey and might possibly be “tossed upon the waves of the sea,” the children of God can have their vessels sealed “tight like unto a dish” (Ether 6:7) and “no monster of the sea” (Ether 6:10) or trial of life will have power to break them. In this promise, and in its fulfillment, the Jaredites’ journey and the plan of salvation are the same.

The last parallel between Ether 6 that and the plan of salvation is found in verses 21–25:

And it came to pass that the people desired of [Jared and his brother] that they *should anoint one of their sons to be a king over them.*

And now behold, this was grievous unto them. And the brother of Jared said unto them: Surely this thing leadeth into captivity.

But Jared said unto his brother: Suffer them that they may have a king. And therefore he said unto them: *Choose ye out from among our sons a king, even whom ye will.*

And it came to pass that they chose even the *firstborn of the brother of Jared*; and his name was Pagag. And it came to pass that he refused and would not be their king. And the people would that his father should constrain him, but his father would not; and he commanded them that they should *constrain no man to be their king.* (emphasis added)

A significant part of the plan of salvation is the anointing and accepting of Jesus Christ as the great King of all mankind. *In no way could the anointing of a Jaredite king be a perfect analogue to the anointing of Christ as King of the children of God.* One point upon which the two settings diverge is that unlike the brother of Jared’s eldest son, the firstborn of God voluntarily accepted the role of Savior and King.

Another point of contrast is that while the brother of Jared grieved over the people's desire for a king, God rejoiced in the acceptance of His Only Begotten, Jesus Christ, as their Lord. Finally the third variance between the Jaredites' situation and the children of God's situation is that the 'election' of the Jaredite king eventually caused the society's final destruction and damnation while the 'election' of Christ as King will end in exaltation and eternal happiness. (This contradiction is particularly disturbing. How could one equate the appointment of Christ with an act that only caused destruction, chaos, and unhappiness? I will address this contradiction later.)

However, despite the differences between the two situations, it is enlightening to notice the substantial similarities. Just as the Jaredite king was to come from among the sons of Jared or the brother of Jared, so too was the King of Kings to be the Son of God: both are sons of an ultimate leader. Additionally, just as the Jaredite people initially chose the "firstborn of the brother of Jared," so did the children of God choose Jesus Christ, the firstborn of God, to be their Savior and King. Even further, just as the position of Christ and Savior of all mankind was to be voluntary, so too was position of king among the Jaredites: "they should constrain no man to be their king" (Ether 6:15). Consequently, a resemblance is seen between Ether 6 and the plan of salvation in that both the Jaredites and the children of God appointed a king of similar condition to govern, protect, and save the people.

The chief objection to making this analogy is that the choice of a Jaredite king eventually caused the brutal destruction of the people. If we follow the history of the Jaredites through the rest of the book of Ether it becomes quite evident that the society ended in desolation. This state of depression is especially vivid in the last chapters of Ether, where the entire society, including women and children, were mobilized for war. Finally, this image of devastation is epitomized in the last chapter, where everyone has been killed in war except for Coriantumr.

The problem with the Jaredites' situation is not that they appointed a king, but that they appointed the wrong king. Instead of appointing Christ they appointed a man; they accepted and settled

for a temporal king instead of a spiritual king. The result of appointing the Jaredite king is gruesome indeed and causes one to hesitate to equate the situation with the appointment of Christ. The thing that caused the eldest son of the brother of Jared to refuse the crown and to despair was not that the people wanted a king but that they misunderstood where their king should come from and that they simply chose the wrong one. From this we learn a valuable lesson: the choice to have anyone other than Christ as king will only cause unhappiness and devastation. Thus, through the similarities and discrepancies between these two occasions of appointment, the Jaredites and the book of Ether as a whole encourage the children of God to appoint Christ instead of any other as a personal King.

At this point it is quite clear that Ether 6 repeatedly resembles, even parallels, the plan of salvation, the general journey that humankind follows. However, the main benefit of recognizing these parallels is that we can better learn how to function within the journey. That is, after we see that the Jaredites were in a comparable situation and functioned under a similar plan, we can observe correct or incorrect reactions and the following consequences and apply them accordingly to our lives. Thus, the remainder of this paper will proceed to expand upon the lessons we can gather from drawing this parallel.

One of the first lessons that an individual can learn in drawing this parallel is found in verse 7. As previously stated, the “furious winds” and “mountain waves” that the Jaredites experienced while on their journey are similar to the trials and temptations we experience throughout life. In response to these distressing conditions, the Jaredites, instead of wallowing in discomfort and foolishly remaining in fear, called upon the Lord for assistance. Ether 6:7 reads, “Therefore when they were encompassed about by many waters they did cry unto the Lord, and he did bring them forth again upon the top of the waters.” The faith that the Jaredites practiced in calling upon the Lord proved their relief. Likewise, all the children of God can apply this effective behavior and call upon their Lord and obtain their relief.

Another instance of the Jaredites’ effective behavior that we

can learn from is found in verse 9. It reads, “And they did sing praises unto the Lord; yea, the brother of Jared did sing praises unto the Lord, and he did thank and praise the Lord all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord.” After being given relief from the turmoil of the ocean and after noticing, as stated in verse 8, that they were being continually driven toward the promised land, they expressed gratitude for the blessings, guidance, and comfort the Lord had given them. This effort of gratitude resulted in safety, progression, and continual illumination throughout their journey. Verse 10 reads, “And thus they were driven forth; and no monster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them; and they did have light continually, whether it was above the water or under the water.” From the Jaredites we can learn the necessity of expressing gratitude to the Lord and apply it accordingly in our lives.

The Jaredites teach how to navigate through life in verses 12–17:

And they did land upon the shore of the promised land. And when they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land they *bowed themselves down* upon the face of the land, and did *humble themselves* before the Lord, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them.

And it came to pass that they went forth upon the face of the land, and *began to till the earth*.

And Jared had four sons; and they were called Jacom, and Gilgah, and Mahah, and Orihah.

And the Brother of Jared also begat sons and daughters.

And the friends of Jared and his brother were in number about twenty and two souls; and they also begat sons and daughters before they came to the promised land; and therefore they began to be many.

And they were *taught to walk humbly before the Lord*; and they were also taught from on high. (emphasis added)

After arriving in the promised land, the Jaredites did several things that brought about their blessing in the end. The first thing they did

upon their arrival was to “bow themselves down” in humility and recognize the “multitude of . . . tender mercies” given to them by the Lord. Following the expression of their gratitude the Jaredites went about the Lord’s work in “till[ing] the earth” and teaching their children to “walk humbly before the Lord.” The Jaredites wasted no time in expressing their gratitude and beginning their labor to improve the earth and to raise eternal families, endeavors that are particularly encouraged by the Lord. Verse 18 demonstrates the blessings given to the Jaredites as a result of the choices they made: “And it came to pass that they began to spread upon the face of the land, and to multiply and to till the earth; and they did wax strong in the land.” As a result of the Jaredites’ choices, they were blessed, and they began to prosper in the land. Likewise, the children of God can learn from this behavior and implement similar decisions and then receive the generous blessings given by the Lord.

From the previous portion of this paper we can observe the many instances when the Jaredite people implemented wise choices and garnered the blessings accordingly. However, it is from comparing Ether 6 with the plan of salvation that these observations gain added meaning. As shown in the first section of this paper, many of the elements included with the plan of salvation as critical components in the progression of the children of God (for example, the creation, preparation, commendation, testing and tribulation, and appointing of Jesus as King) are also a part of the Jaredites’ journey across the sea. By noticing the similarities between our lives and the Jaredites’ story, we can build a concrete relationship between the two and benefit from the observations within that relationship. By studying Ether 6 as a parallel to the plan of salvation we can intensify our understanding of the plan, better understand our individual roles, and allow improvement through applying these understandings.

NOTES

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., s.v. “vessel,” www.bartleby.com (accessed 4 February 2003).
2. *American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. “vessel.”
3. More references that allude to Christ being the rock are Isaiah 8:14; 2 Nephi 28:28; 3 Nephi 14:24; D&C 11:24; and “Rock of Ages,” *Hymns*

(Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 111.

4. More references referring to Christ as the light are Micah 7:8; John 8:12; John 12:46; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 21:33; Mosiah 16:9; 3 Nephi 18:16; D&C 88:6–7, 1–20; and “The Lord Is My Light,” *Hymns*, no. 89.

5. More references referring to mortality as a probationary or preparatory period are Alma 34:32; Alma 42:4; and 2 Nephi 2:21.

6. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Commend,” <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed 27 January 2003).