

Ether 1–6: Jaredite Geography

Lesson Supplement

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1. The Great Tower

³³ Jared came forth with his brother and their families, with some others and their families, from the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, and swore ... that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth (Eth 1:33).

When the Jaredites left Babylon, big pyramid-shaped temple platforms called *ziggurats* were being erected. One of them would qualify as ‘the great tower’ (Eth 1:33). (Sorenson, 111)

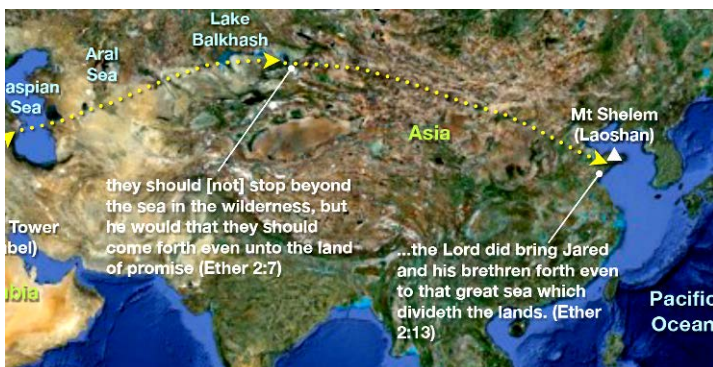


2. Jaredite Journey to the Coast

¹ Jared and his brother, and their families, and also [their] friends ... and their families, went ... northward ... with their flocks. ...³ They did also carry ... deseret, ... [or] a honey bee; and ... seeds of every kind. ...⁵ The Lord commanded them ... [to go] into that quarter where there never had man been. ...⁶ They ... did build barges ... [to] cross many waters.⁷ The Lord would not suffer that they should stop beyond the sea in the wilderness. (Eth 2:1–7)



Sea: large body of salt water. Large enough that one cannot readily see a land mass on the opposite side. (Baja, “Jaredites”) Only the Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Aral Sea remain of what was once a vast inland sea. Some believe the sea mentioned to in verse 7 refers to the Caspian sea while others think it refers to a smaller one beyond it.



¹³ The Lord did bring Jared and his brethren ... to that great sea which divideth the lands. ... They ... dwelt in tents upon the seashore for ... four years. ... ³ ¹ The brother of Jared ... went

forth unto the mount, which they called the mount Shelem, because of its exceeding height. (Eth 2:13; 3:1)

Along the entire 9,000-mile coastline of present-day China there is only one mountain on the coast— Mount Laoshan. This remarkable mountain is of “exceeding” height, rising directly from the seacoast to an elevation of 3,717 feet and covering an area at its base of 172 square miles. (Baja, “Jaredites”)



3. Jaredite barges for crossing the ocean (Ether 2:14–3:4)

¹⁴ At the end of four years ... 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 ... and chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord. ...

¹⁶ And the Lord said: ... Build ... barges. ...¹⁷ And they were built ... exceedingly tight ... like unto a dish ... like unto the ark of Noah. ...¹⁸ And ... the brother of Jared ... [said] I have made the barges. ...¹⁹ And ... in them there is no light. ... And ... in them we cannot breathe, save it is the air which is in them; therefore we shall perish.²⁰ And the Lord said ... thou shalt make a hole in the top, and also in the bottom; and when thou shalt suffer for air thou shalt unstop the hole and receive air. ...

²² And he ... [said] O Lord, ... there is no light in them. ...²³ And the Lord said ... What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels? ... ³:¹ The brother of Jared, (now the number of the vessels ... was eight) went forth unto ... mount Shelem ... and did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass; and he did carry them in his hands upon the top of the mount, and cried again unto the Lord, saying: ...⁴ Touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness ... that we may have light while we shall cross the sea.

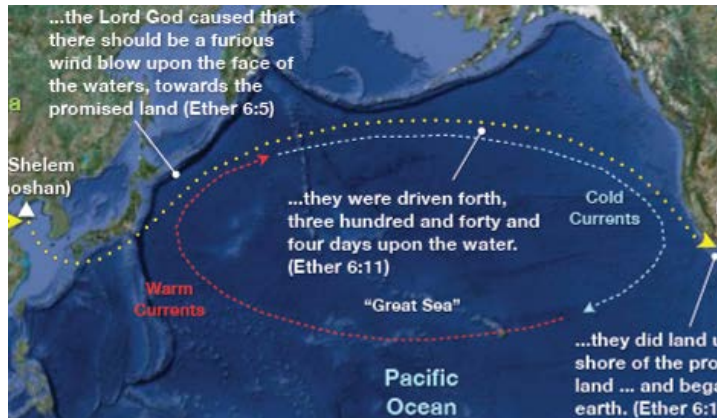
Sandia Labs in New Mexico developed radioluminescent lights to use when no electricity is available. They are bright, intense, and last about 20 years. (*Pressing Forward*, 254)

Why did the Lord tell him how to solve the “air” problem, but not the “light” problem?

“Several early Jewish sources indicate that God told Noah to suspend precious stones or pearls inside the ark to lighten it; in some traditions, it is a jewel-encrusted heavenly book. The gem would glow during the night and grow dim during the day so Noah, shut up in the ark, could tell the time of day and how many days had passed. This was the explanation given by the rabbis for the *sôhar* that the Lord told Noah to construct in the ark. The word is rendered ‘window’ in the King James Version of Genesis 6:16, but ‘light’ in some other translations.” (Tvedtness; Nibley)

4. Jaredite Journey Across the Ocean

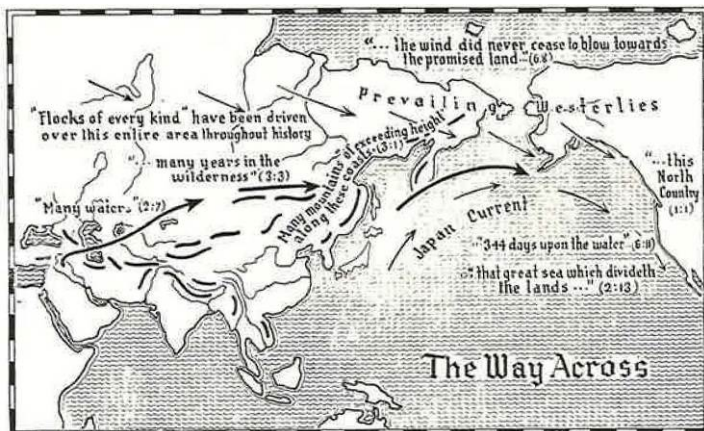
⁴When they had prepared all manner of food, that thereby they might subsist upon the water, and also food for their flocks and herds, and whatsoever beast or animal or fowl that they should carry with them—... they got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea. ...⁵ And ... the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind.⁶ And ... that they were many times buried in the depths of the sea. ...⁸ 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.¹¹ And thus they were driven forth, [344] days upon the water.¹² And they did land upon the shore of the promised land. (Eth 6:4–12)



This 7,250-mile route comprises three major ocean currents. ... These three drift rates ... calculate to a total ocean drift time of some 350 days. ... This is a remarkably close match to the ... 344-day Jaredite voyage over the same route. (Baja, "Jaredites")

The friction of wind on the ocean causes the currents. Without constant wind there is no current. "The ocean currents and the wind patterns in the north Pacific follow a clockwise circular motion because of the movement of the earth's atmospheric circulation around high pressure cells that control the direction of the winds and the water beneath." (Baja, "Jaredites")

A similar map is in Hugh Nibley's *Lehi in the Desert* (1988)



Some Mesoamerican scholars describe a similar route without maps. Ether 1 "is consistent with migration through Central Asia, broadly following what is not called the Silk Road. From a temporary resting place, the Jaredites crossed the Pacific Ocean, landing on the west coast of the New World. A combination of archaeological and chronological information makes it plausible that the core lands of the Jaredites in the New World could well be equated with Mesoamerica." (BMRC 435)

5. Other suggested routes across the ocean

Other people believe Jared and his friends departed from the same place as Lehi and traveled the same way to the northern part of the same land. Some scholars believe they went east, crossed the Pacific Ocean, and landed in Mesoamerica. Others say they went west around the cape of Africa, crossed the Atlantic Ocean and landed in the United States.

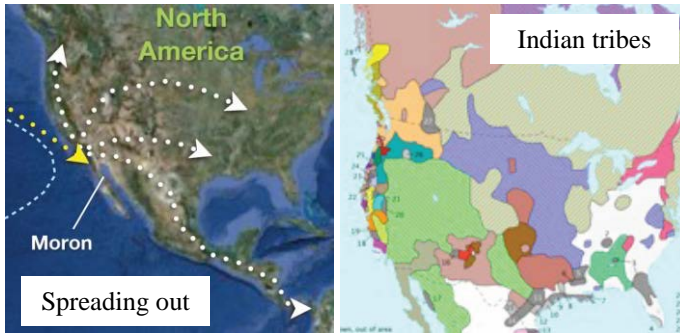


A geographer familiar with ocean currents told me that Jaredite barges could not follow these proposed routes by drifting.

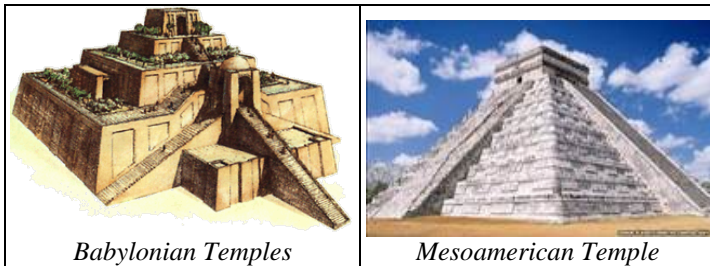
6. Jared and friends spread out (Ether 6:14–20)

¹⁴Jared had four sons. ...¹⁵ The brother of Jared also begat sons and daughters. ¹⁶ And the friends of Jared and his brother were ... about [22] souls; and they also begat sons and daughters. ...¹⁸ They began to spread upon the face of the land, and to multiply ... and they did wax strong in the land. ¹⁹ And the brother of Jared began to be old, and ... he said unto Jared: Let us gather together our people that we may number them. ...²⁰ The sons and the daughters of the brother of Jared were [22] souls; and the ... sons and daughters of Jared were twelve. (Eth 6:14–20)

The friends were 22 souls (22 heads of household or 11 couples). After the people "spread upon the face of the land," the friends and their families are not mentioned any more. Some may have settled in the central and eastern states. Many may have migrated to Central America and become known as Olmecs and Mayans.



Descendants of Jared's friends would have traditions and customs related to the Jaredites. Evidence shows that Olmecs (1500–400 BC) and Mayans (2000 BC–AD 900) lived in Mesoamerica. Olmec traditions talk about a great flood, an ark, a high tower, languages being confounded, and people scattering. Seven men and their wives crossed the waters, landed and wandered for 104 years before settling in southern Mexico. For Mesoamerican scholars, this is evidence that many Jaredites other than Coriantumr (Eth 13:21) survived, prospered in Mesoamerica, and coexisted or intermingled with the Lehiters without being mentioned in the Book of Mormon (Allen, chap.11 & 5; see lesson #1). For Baja scholars, this is evidence of leaving the land of the Jaredites and spreading out before Lehi arrived.



If a similar spreading out occurred when the Nephites were “swept off” (Eth 2:8–10) the face of the land, we would also find Book of Mormon evidence and insights among their descendants like those we find by studying Jewish communities after they left Israel and were scattered among all people.

7. Did some of Jared's friends stay in China?

Jared and his friends lived 4 years on the coast by a tall mountain. After the Lord chastised the brother of Jared for not praying, he climbed the mountain, saw the Lord, and returned with shining stones (Eth 2:13–14; 3:1, 6–15). If some families decided to stay there rather than get in “submarines,” they would probably consider the mountain to be sacred. Mount Laoshan was said to be home of some “supernatural spirits.” At one time there were 8 Taoist temples on Mount Laoshan. If these families later spread out in China, we might expect to see: (a) genetic similarities with the descendants of those who crossed the ocean, (b) temples like those they were familiar with in Babylon, and (c) related legends. There is evidence of each. One related Chinese legend is called, “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea.” Some researchers have found DNA similarities in China and indigenous people in the Americas. Chinese pyramids are similar to those found in Mesoamerica. (Baja, “Jaredites”)

8. Land of the Jaredites

³⁰ The inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast because of the dearth, for there was no rain ... ³¹ [and] poisonous serpents [came] also upon the face of the land, and did poison many people (9:30–31).

When crops were no longer available in Israel, mice moved in search of food and serpents naturally followed them (*Pressing Forward*, 262–263).

A long period of “no rain” does not happen in tropical or subtropical climates. (see my lesson #1).

²⁰ [Jaredites] built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land.²¹ And they did preserve the land southward for a wilderness, to get game. And the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants. (Eth 10:20–21)



Sources:

- Allen = Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 1st ed., 2002; http://www.ancientamerica.org/library/display.php3?catalog_id=1441
- Baja = www.achoiceand.com
- BMRC = Dennis Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*
- Nibley = Hugh Nibley, “Strange Ships and Shining Stones (A Not So Fantastic Story),” <http://mi.byu.edu>
- OED = Oxford English Dictionary
- *Pressing Forward* = John W. Welch, *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, <http://mi.byu.edu>
- Sorenson = John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.
- Tvednes = John A. Tvednes, “Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore,” <http://mi.byu.edu>