

Ether 14

Ether 14:1-2

1 And now there began to be a great curse upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land.

2 Wherefore every man did cleave unto that which was his own, with his hands, and would not borrow neither would he lend; and every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand, in the defense of his property and his own life and of his wives and children.

Redaction: Moroni patterns the history of the Jaredites to emphasize the covenant of the land. He also highlights the theme that his father wove into the Nephite chronicle: that of destruction by secret combinations. (See Helaman, Part 1: Context, Chapter 3, "The Gadianton Robbers in Mormon's Theological History: Their Structural Role and Plausible Identification.") Those intentional patternings suggest that this particular passage is probably due to Moroni. When Mormon described the approaching Nephite collapse, he stated: "And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again" (Morm. 1:18).

This slipperiness is paralleled by verses 1-2 in this chapter of Ether. What makes the correlation even more important is the association of slipperiness with "robbers." Mormon had juxtaposed robbers and slippery belongings in the same verse. In Ether, the reference to the robbers comes in Ether 13:26, the end of the previous chapter: "And there were robbers, and in fine, all manner of wickedness upon all the face of the land" (Ether 13:26). The chapter break was added in the 1879 edition. When Moroni wrote, they were only a few sentences apart and in the same chapter.

It is no coincidence that the slippery possessions and presence of robbers occur in both Mormon's and Moroni's narratives. No doubt Moroni picked up the association from his father's record and replicated it in the Jaredite story, just as I have suggested that Moroni emphasized the parallel dissolution into clans. It is not possible to determine how much of this information was in Ether's original record.

Culture: The reference to "every man" defending "his wives and children" again suggests the possibility of polygamy among the Jaredites. Daniel H. Ludlow comments:

The early Nephite records indicate quite clearly that the Nephites were not to practice polygamy. The prophet Jacob was commanded by the Lord to say to his people:

“... there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife” (Jacob 2:27). However, Jacob later makes it clear that if the Lord wants his people to “raise up seed” unto him, then he might command them to practice polygamy (Jacob 2:30). It is not clear, however, whether or not the Jaredites were commanded by the Lord to practice polygamy. The following evidences have been cited which might indicate that they did practice polygamy: (1) Many of the men had large numbers of sons and daughters. For example, the brother of Jared had 22 sons and daughters (Ether 6:20) and Orihah had 31 sons and daughters (Ether 7:2).

(2) Riplakish had “many wives and concubines” (Ether 10:5). He was condemned by the Lord for his wickedness, but it is not clear whether or not this condemnation was because of his “many wives.”

(3) Ether 14:2 states that “every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand, in the defense of his property and his own life and of his wives and children.” This verse seems to indicate that the people practiced polygamy, but whether or not it was sanctioned by the Lord is not made clear in the record.¹

When combined with the evidence from the cultural area,² it seems probable that polygamy was indeed practiced, though condemned only when Moroni was describing a wicked king. (See commentary accompanying Ether 10:5.)

Ether 14:3–6

3 And now, after the space of two years, and after the death of Shared, behold, there arose the brother of Shared and he gave battle unto Coriantumr, in which Coriantumr did beat him and did pursue him to the wilderness of Akish.

4 And it came to pass that the brother of Shared did give battle unto him in the wilderness of Akish; and the battle became exceedingly sore, and many thousands fell by the sword.

5 And it came to pass that Coriantumr did lay siege to the wilderness; and the brother of Shared did march forth out of the wilderness by night, and slew a part of the army of Coriantumr, as they were drunken.

6 And he came forth to the land of Moron, and placed himself upon the throne of Coriantumr.

The kin-group continues the struggle even after Coriantumr kills Shared. Shared's brother, Gilead (v. 8), perpetuates the war, and Coriantumr is once again in the field with his army. In the wilderness of Akish, they besiege the other army, suggesting that it is somehow hemmed in; apparently Coriantumr believes that he

¹Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 327.

²John E. Clark and Michael Blake, “The Power of Prestige: Competitive Generosity and the Emergence of Rank Societies in Lowland Mesoamerica,” in *The Ancient Civilizations of Mesoamerica*, edited by Michael E. Smith and Marilyn A. Masson (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 252, 253, 255. See also Susan Toby Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America: Archaeology and Culture History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 170.

Second Witness

Analytical and Contextual
Commentary
on the Book of Mormon

Volume 6

Fourth Nephi–Moroni

Brant A. Gardner

GREG KOFFORD BOOKS
SALT LAKE CITY, 2007