

# Book of Mormon Sources Project: What Inspired the Stories?

## A Focus on the Book of Ether

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### Abstract

There are several potential sources to the stories in the Book of Mormon that could have been inspirational for Joseph Smith. This paper primarily focuses on the parallels between the *Book of Ether* and *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* by Alexander Hamilton.

## BROTHER OF JARED

As I have begun my journey of seeking out the truth behind the stories in the Book of Mormon, I came across a resource that paralleled the Book of Ether so close that it startled me. I was familiar with Joseph's interest in peep stones and that it could be a potential source to the Brother of Jared's 16 white stones. Moonstone when melted turns into a white transparent glass (Phillips, 1823). When researching the phrase "finger of God" I came across quotes that go into detail about the engravings by the finger "always shining clear light" (Wesley, 1798) and that the finger of God and the spirit of God are synonymous (Worcester, 1810). There is commentary on the bible that mentions that "All that saw Christ by faith, did see the Father in him... In the light of Christ's doctrine, they saw God as the father of light; in the miracles, they saw God as the God of power, the finger of God." (Henry, 1828). And who knows, maybe the popular tale of King Midas and the golden touch played a role in the lighting of the stones. Houshung "first discovered fire by the collision of flint stones, and ordained its worship as the Nour-e-Khuda, or light of God. (Malcolm, 1815). I am also familiar with the connections with the magur boat that Utnapishtim built to survive the flood (lots of similarities!) and a variety of theories on the shining stones (Nibley, 1988); and the idea of the vessels being submarines.

I came across a page in *Voyages from Asia to America, for Completing the Discoveries of the North West Coast of America* that could possibly be inspirational in relating a tight dish to a ship:

" They took a new cable, which never had been in the water, chopped it to pieces, each piece a foot long, then pulled the threads asunder, and **filled a large copper kettle with them, to which they made a tight cover with a hole in the middle. Then they took a wooden vessel, which had a cover made in the same manner as the former, with a hole in the middle, this was stuck into the ground as far as the cover, they set the copper kettle upon it upside down, so that one cover and one hole hit the other.** Then so much earth was laid about the kettle, that no fire could penetrate to the wooden vessel. After which fire was laid round about the kettle, the lower part of which did now stand up, more than half above the earth. From the heat, the tar, contained in the tow melted, and gathered in the wooden vessel below. By this means they got so much tar as was requisite to tar the lower part of the vessel. Her upper part was payd over with melted tallow. **In the same manner they built a canoe, which would hold from eight to ten men.**" (Mueller, 1761)

There was one **MUST READ** book that I came across. Published in 1820, *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus: In a Series of Letters* by Alexander Hamilton comes in two volumes and can be accessed for free on Google Books. The parallels between these two books is undeniable. As a point of reference, Alexander Hamilton's book speaks about Noah and The Great Deluge from a Hindu perspective. I was BLOWN AWAY perusing the text. I will share with you some notable parallels and you can see for yourselves the similarities. While there are similarities throughout both volumes, the 5th letter found in volume 2 (beginning of the book up to page 132) has the most correlations to the *Book of Ether*.

To give you a little background knowledge, *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* is a collection of letters written in 1815 to correct prejudices against the East Indies.

<b>Some Similarities between A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus: In a Series of Letters and the Brother of Jared story/ Book of Ether</b>
Both speak of a man called the brother of Jared
Both speak of a stone that is placed in an ark/vessel to give light (vol. 2 page 28, Ether 6:2-3)
Both speak about Nimrod (mentioned several times throughout both volumes, Ether 2:1, 4 & Ether 7:22)
Both speak about God guiding the vessel through the storm
Both mention records
Both mention the word ether (vol. 2 page 5, 335, 398, Book of Ether)
Both mention the word windows
Both mention the ark/vessel moving due to wind/waves
Number 8 is significant (8 vessels/ 8 people in ark & Noah is the 8th king / 8 corners of the world)
Both mention seeing God
Both mention destructive serpents (vol. 2 page 105, Ether 9:31, 33)
Lord seeing Moses/Moroni "face to face" (vol. 2 page 128, Ether 12:39)
There is a veil that covers deity (vol. 2 page 84, Ether 3:6, 19-20 & Ether 12:19, 21)
Man created in God's image (vol. 2 page 90, 95, Ether 3:15)
Elephants (vol.1 page 15, 230 & vol. 2 page 173, Ether 9:19); "Mr. Wilford adds, "elephants

were called oxen in the west.””
Phrase “curious workmanship” (vol. 2 page 16, Ether 10:27)
Negligent on worshipping God (vol. 2 page 29, Ether 2:14-15)
Faith and good works both mentioned (vol.2 page 35, Ether 12:4)
Both speak about destruction/ bad things happening followed by rain (vol.2 page 36, Ether 9:30-35)
Praying because of mercies shown to them (vol.2 page 40, Ether 6: 12)
Confusion of tongues and Tower of Babel (vol. 1 page 380, 398, vol. 2 page 126, 308 are just some of the references; Ether 1:3, 5, 33)
Both speak of a “contrite heart” (vol. 2 page 188, Ether 4:15)
Both speak about attacks of monsters of the sea/ocean and shark/whale (vol. 1 pages 60 and 61, Ether 6:10)
Jaredsandha’s (brother of Rama Chandra aka Jared) race didn’t prosper due to apostasy (vol.2 page 141/142)
Both mention cattle (several times throughout both volumes, Ether 9:18) and bees (Vol. 2 page 68, Ether 2:3)

Here is a breakdown of categories with the exact quotes and scriptures. All of this information was extremely interesting as I had never heard of this book before. A side note—all bolded text is an emphasis I made to help you see the parallels more easily.

## I. VESSEL

- A. We know how important the vessels are to the brother of Jared in the *book of Ether*. There are theories circulating about the similarities of this story with Noah and the ark. *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* speaks about Noah and gives us some parallels between the two stories. The first quote speaks about the totally shut up vessel (Noah’s ark) and that it was driven at the will of the winds and waves. Those are two striking parallels.

*“Since the account given...which represents ‘Noah and his family as quite shut up, without any opening during the time of the deluge. Berossus (he adds) would hardly suppose a pilot, **where a vessel was totally shut up, and confessedly driven at the will***

*of the winds and waves....’ It does not appear from any of the authors who copy from Berosus, that the persons in the ark were either deprived of light or air: or that the ark was driven at the will of the winds and waves.” vol. 2 page 46*

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*“And it came to pass that 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**. 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**. 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. And thus **they were driven forth...**” Ether 6:5, 8, 10-11*

*“For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you. Nevertheless, I will bring you up again out of the depths of the sea; for the **winds** have gone forth out of my mouth, and also the rains and the floods have I sent forth. And behold, I prepare you against these things; for ye cannot cross this great deep save I prepare you against the **waves** of the sea, and the **winds** which have gone forth, and the floods which shall come. 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 2:24-25*

- B. The phrase “curious workmanship is mentioned in *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* as well as the *book of Ether*.

*“Hence, it is said, that Typhon made an ark of **curious workmanship**...” vol. 2 page 16*

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*“And they did make all manner of weapons of war. And they did work all manner of work of exceedingly **curious workmanship**.” Ether 10:27*

- C. This is an interesting take on the light in the vessels. A theory brought up in *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* mentions that the eight saints were the lights on the ark. Not a direct parallel to the Jaredites and their vessels, but interesting nonetheless. I do need to mention that the eight persons might have inspired the idea of the eight vessels.

*“Yet the most respectable of all Hindu commentators tells us that those saints were not fathers of families; implying that they were seven persons: others, more extravagant, consider the companions, who shone with such radiance, (being seven in number) as the wife of Noah, his three sons, and their wives: and, in a late edition of our Bible, the editor expounds the text of St. Peter, ‘the **eight** person, a preacher of righteousness,’ as denoting that the patriarch actually followed his family, and therefore was the eighth, or last person, that entered the ark: while Mr. Bryant supposes them so many lamps and torches. Those who consider the **divine light afforded by these holy precepts, or Maha-shees, as lamps and torches**, may as well believe that, when St. Matthew recorded the words of his Master, ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,’ he directed the people to illuminate their churches....The word light has been used in the sense in which the Hindus use it, from time immemorial. Jesus pronounced of this disciples, ‘that they were the light of the world;’ and St. John, under the symbol of seven candlesticks, describes the seven churches which were to reflect radiance on the world” vol. 2 pages 53-54*



*Matsya protecting Vaivasvata Manu and the seven sages at the time of Deluge/Great Flood (wikipedia)*

- D. This quote from *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* could have definitely been the inspiration behind the eight vessels. Very similar! The description of the barges in Ether 2 also sound like they would fit the description of a crescent shaped float.

***"During the churning of the milky ocean were thrown up eight great blessings"** The first is a float that is crescent shaped, is an emblem of the ark but is frequently mistaken for the moon. (vol. 2 page 22)*

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*"And it came to pass that the brother of Jared, (now the number of the vessels which had been prepared was **eight**)" Ether 3:1*

*"And it came to pass that 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." Ether 6:5*

*"And they [the vessels] were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight... and the sides thereof were tight like unto a dish; and **the ends thereof were peaked**; and the top thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the length thereof was the length of a tree; and the door thereof, when it was shut, was tight like unto a dish." Ether 2:17*

- E. The light added in the ark (or Jaredite vessels) was given by Buddha (God). Interestingly enough, this quote comes from the definition of Maha-shees and states that maha means great. Could this word have inspired Joseph to come up with Mahonri?

***"No light should be afforded the new world, save the revelations of Buddha, which the prince was commanded to take with him into the ark, and which is contained in the holy Vedas and Sasters."** vol. 2 page 408]*

- F. This is another favorite quote that speaks about getting a stone which would be placed in the ark to give light. Sound familiar?

*"Nevertheless, as the Chaldean verb, from which the **window** in the ark was taken, denoted to shine or give light, their paraphraser Jonathan, absurdly expounds the command as follows, '**Go thou to Phison, and take from thence a precious stone, and place it in the ark to give light to you.**'"* vol. 2 page 28



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*"...Therefore touch these **stones**, O Lord..... 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.**"* Ether 3:4

*"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."* Ether 6:2

- G. A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus mentions Noah needing to collect things for the journey, and that their journey would not have light except the radiance of the saints.

*"O thou, tamer of enemies, the three worlds will be plunged in an ocean of death; but in the midst of the **destroying waves**, a large **vessel** sent by me for thy use, shall stand before thee. **Then shalt thou take all medicinal herbs, all the variety of seeds; and accompanied by seven saints, encircled by pairs of all brute animals, thou shalt enter the spacious ark, and continue in it, secure from the flood, on one immense ocean, without light, except the radiance of they holy companions.**"* vol. 1 pages 62-63

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*"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.” Ether 6:4*

- H. Noah was directed to make the ark impervious to the waters and THEN makes the window. I always thought that was odd that the holes in the Jaredite barges were made after they were completed, almost like an afterthought. This does mention that the window would allow both light and air.

*“For it was not until the earth was sufficiently dry for their reception, that God ordered them to quit their temporary abode; which completely refutes the assertion, that ‘Noah and his family were quite shut up without any opening:’ ‘that he was a prisoner in a torpid state, a state of death,’ ‘inclosed in an ark, or covered float, wherein was only one **window** of a cubit in dimensions. This was of small proportion in respect to the bulk of the machine, which was above five hundred feet in length. It was moreover closed up and fastened; so that the persons therein were consigned to darkness, having no light, but what must have been administered to them from lamps and torches.’ **In no part of our Scripture, does it appear that there was only one window; that the size of it was only one cubit, or that it was so closed up, and fastened, that the patriarch remained without light, during his stay in the ark. The text is as follows, ‘A **window** shalt thou make in the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above, and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof.’ The meaning of which appears obvious. **The Lord, having previously directed Noah to pitch the ark within and without, so as to render it impervious to the waters, next orders the window, which was intended to admit a portion of light and air, to be so constructed that it might admit both, without any inconvenience accruing from the impending storm. ‘In a cubit shalt thou finish it above.’ This evidently alludes exclusively to height, or that the lower part of the aperture should not be more than one cuit from the **top of the vessel.**”***** vol. 2 pages 47-48

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*“And behold, O Lord, in them there is no light; whither shall we steer? And also we shall perish, for in them **we cannot breathe, save it is the air which is in them**; therefore we shall perish.”*  
Ether 2:19

*“And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have **light in your vessels**? 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.”*  
Ether 2:23

## II. “BROTHER OF JARED”

- A. When I came across the phrase “brother of Jared” in *A Key to the Chronology of Hindus* I was astonished. It is such a distinctly different name than anything in the *Book of Mormon*. Something that I found interesting was that Jarasandha (according to this book is the real name of the brother of Jared) is still referred to frequently as the brother of Jared.

This first quote is the definition of Jarasandha in the glossary found in *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus*.

*“Jarasandha.- The brother of Rama Chandra, named Titan by the Greeks, the apostate brother of Jared.”* vol. 2 page 414

*“That the war of the giants was carried on by the descendants of Mahalaleel, has been generally admitted. And it is as generally believed, that the apostate son of that patriarch, the **brother of Jared**, was the cause thereof.”* vol.2 page 303

*“But from the period, when **Jarasandha**, the **apostate brother of Rama** (aka Jared), formed a new dynasty at Magadha... the solar race never prosper.”* vol.2 page 312

*“And the historic writers on Scripture supply the third, by that son of Mahalaleel; who, in despite of the oath he had sworn to his father, and in direct disobedience to his **brother Jared**, who was become his prince and ruler, not only descended from the Holy*

*Mount, but carried his brethren down; so that there was a general apostasy from the religion of the living God.” vol.2 page 313*

*“For admitting Osiris to be Enoch, Typho or Thyphos, (**the apostate brother of Jared**) one of the fallen giants was his uncle” vol.2 page 385*

- B. One super interesting correlation: **Jared is also known as Rama or Rama Chandra** (vol. 1 page 180, 202, vol. 2 glossary). **The hill that the plates were buried by Mormon** (as mentioned in Ether 15:11) **Ramah.**

### III. EVERYONE DIED OF TWO RACES WITH JUST ONE SURVIVOR

- A. You know how there is a great war in the Book of Ether and everyone dies except Coriantumr? A *Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* mentions that God consigned both races of Seth and Cain to death with the exception of a descendant from the pious Jared. I believe that the author is referring to Noah in that quote.



Battle between Balarama and Jarasandha. Illustration from a Bhagavata Purana series. (wikipedia)

*“The earth was corrupt before God and filled with violence; which denotes that from the period when the race of Seth, became apostates, civil wars were added to the crimes already practiced by the race of Cain. So that the earth was not only corrupt, but filled with war, and violence: insomuch that **an all-merciful God cosigned both races to death, by a deluge which inundated the whole world, with the exception of a descendant from the pious Jared.**” vol.2 page 317*

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*“And in the second year the word of the Lord came to Ether, that he should go and prophesy unto Coriantumr that, if he would repent, and all his household, the Lord would give unto him his kingdom and spare the people— **Otherwise they should be destroyed, and all his household save it were himself.** And he should only live to see the fulfilling of the prophecies which had*

*been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance; and Coriantumr should receive a burial by them; **and every soul should be destroyed save it were Coriantumr.***”  
Ether 13: 20-21

*“Wherefore, he did pursue them, and on the morrow he did overtake them; and they fought again with the sword. And it came to pass that when they had all fallen by the sword, save it were Coriantumr and Shiz, behold Shiz had fainted with the loss of blood.”* Ether 15:29

#### IV. TOWER OF BABEL

- A. The tower of Babel is mentioned in the first chapter of the *Book of Ether*. It is also mentioned several times throughout *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus*. The first quote I am sharing with you I find interesting because it mentions a titanian war, which might be an inspirational source for the whole Coriantumr and Shiz giant battle that annihilates almost everyone.

*“That they “treat of the **confusion of speech, and demolition of the tower of Babel, and of the Titanian war, which ensued.**””*  
vol.2 page 318

*“They stopt at a plain in the land of Shinar, and disregarding the orders which they had received to separate, they determined to **build a city and a tower**, which employed them for twenty four years; when they left off building the city, all the workmen being necessary for the completion of the tower. By this time, the population being greatly increased, they set about enlarging the city. For on that work they were employed, when they were **scattered from thence, over the face of the earth.**”* vol. 1 page 380

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*“Which 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 in his wrath that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth; and **according to the word of the Lord the people were scattered.**”* Ether 1:33

## V. "ETHER"

- A. The word "Ether" is mentioned a few times in *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus*. I particularly like this sentence because it mentions Jupiter- a topic of interest to Joseph Smith.

*"And we learn from Cornulus that the old European heathens considered Jupiter, not as the son of Saturn, but of **Ether**, or pure Spirit" vol.2 page 398*

## VI. RECORDS

- A. The *Book of Mormon* is filled with references to records, and *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus* mentions them too.

*"But the three great Vedas and two Sasters are the only **sacred books**, supposed to have been written in the old world: and these have evidently been organized since the flood. Sir William Jones carries them back so far as the year B.C. 1580." vol.1 pages 276-277*

## VII. TENDER MERCIES

- A. Those who are immersed in Mormonism and it's sometimes peculiar verbiage have probably heard the phrase "tender mercies" a million times. In Ether 6:12, tender mercies praying and tears of joy are shed because of the Lord's tender mercies after their voyage to the promised land. While Alexander Hamilton's book doesn't mention the word "tender", it does mention mercies and prayers that were given after Noah's journey on the ark.

*"The first action recorded of this patriarch after the deluge, is raising an altar to the Lord, and **pouring out prayers and thanksgivings for the mercies** that had been shewn him, and his family." vol. 2 pages 39-40*

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*“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.” Ether 6:12*

## VIII. VISITATION OF GOD

- A. We can even see references to seeing God in *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus*. There is even mention of a veil before knowing the whole deity (like the veil before Jared saw the whole body of God) and a person wanting a visitation.

*“Unveil, O thou that givest sustenance to the world, that face of the true Sun, which is **now hidden by a veil of golden light; so that we may see the truth, and know our whole Deity.**”* vol. 2 page 84

*“A **voice from Heaven** said, Name the boon which thou wantest. The pious Amara, astonished and doubtful of the truth, replied, **First grant me a visitation.**”* vol. 2 pages 72-73

*“He [God] is, therefore, by sime, adored as transcendently present in elementary fire; by others, as Menu, Lord of Creatures; by some, as more distinctly present in Indra, **Regent of the clouds and the atmosphere**; by others, as pure air; and by some, as the most high eternal Spirit.”* vol.1 page ix

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*“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.**”* Ether 2:14

*“... And 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. And he answered: Nay; Lord, **show thyself unto me.**”* Ether 3: 6, 10

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For me I can't deny the parallels between *A Key to the Chronology of Hindus* and *The Book of Mormon*. I hope that this paper provided you with some additional theories as to what may have inspired the story of the Jaredites. My intention in writing this is not to dissuade or persuade anyone in their beliefs but to look at potential sources behind stories.

## Appendix

**Other Interesting Notes/ Comparisons with A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus and the Book of Mormon**

The cashmirians have a tradition that they are descended from Jews (vol. 1 page 247)

Mentions King Midas and that whatever he touched turned to gold (vol.1 pages 236-237)

World increased progressively in wickedness

When they speak of Jared, they mention that he is one that there is the least known about and that he participated in lots of wars with idolaters (vol.2 page 140)

Straight path (vol 2 page 101)

Recovering sacred books lost during the deluge, and that the loss of these sacred books ultimately led to their destruction (vol. 2 page 31-32)

Lots of talk about war

Mentions Brahmans are baptized in their eight year

Speaks of infant baptism vol. 2 pg 79-80

Lots of talk about kings

Book written in letters or epistles

Three Vedas/ three nephites? (vol. 2 page 101)

Language different from anything used before

Trembling earth and sun and moon darkened (vol 2. Page 105, Helaman)

Importance of oaths and penalties if broken (vol. 2 page 117, 179, 312)

This just sounds Joseph Smithish- "'Chryser exercised himself in words, in charms and in divinations.' Ravan had recourse to magic in all his contests with Rama" vol. 1 page 202

Slew someone to recover/obtain sacred books/plates

Noah taking records in the ark, Chaldeans profess that they were buried during the flood. Vol. 1 page 52
Both talk about money/weight systems
Lots of talk about jupiter, astronomy, and numbers which were of interest to Joseph Smith
Talks about giants and titans/ Jaredites being large people
Mentions apostasy
Phrase "both in heaven and earth" vol. 1 page 7
Similar names Osiris/ Orihah
Both mention abominations and faith (vol.1 page xiv, xv)

A few of the Book of Ether parallels to Ugaritic flood/Noah's Ark story as found in Hugh Nibley's book An Approach to the Book of Mormon
special instructions were given to make both the vessels and the ark
both have doors that need to be shut
the ark and the vessels have air holes (windows)

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