

CHAPTER VIII

The Problem of Ether 3:15: "Never Have I Showed Myself Unto Man Whom I Have Created"

Chapter 3 of the Book of Ether records the fact that the brother of Jared, a great Jaredite prophet, carried sixteen small stones to the top of Mount Shelem to have the Lord touch them. He had melted the stones out of clear rock and had faith that if he could get the Almighty to touch them, they would provide light for the eight vessels in which his people were to journey across the sea to the promised land (Ether 3:1-5). His faith was justified, for the Lord touched each of the stones with His finger. The veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the Lord's finger (Ether 3:6). He was frightened, but still asked the Lord to show himself to him. The Lord complied with his request because of his great faith (Ether 3:7-13) and spoke to him at length. Among other things, the pre-existent Lord said these words:

And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. (Ether 3:15)

These last words provide the problem of this chapter. For do not all students of scripture know that the Lord appeared to many of his servants long before his appearance to the brother of Jared? Did he not appear to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Moses 4:14-27; cf. 5:4), to Enoch (Moses 7:4, 28-30; Gen. 5:24), to Noah (Moses 8: 27; Gen. 6:9), and again to Adam and many of his righteous posterity three years before the great patriarch's death (D. & C. 107:53-54)? What, therefore, did the Lord mean when He told the brother of Jared that He had never

showed himself unto man whom He had created? Most students will admit offhand that the difficulties presented by the Lord's words are not easy to solve.

Three answers to the problem will be presented here. The first is that which has been proposed by President Joseph Fielding Smith of the Council of the Twelve. We shall let President Smith speak for himself:

I have always considered Ether 3:15 to mean that the Savior stood before the Brother of Jared plainly, distinctly, and showed him his whole body and explained to him that he was a spirit. In his appearance to Adam and Enoch, he had not made himself manifest in such a familiar way. His appearance to earlier prophets had not been with that same fulness.

The scriptural accounts of talking face to face and of walking with God should not be interpreted in the sense that the Savior stood before those prophets and revealed his whole person. That he may have done so at later periods in the cases of Abraham and Moses is possible, but he had not done so in that fulness in the antediluvian days. For the Brother of Jared he removed the veil completely. He had never showed himself to man before in the manner and way he did to that prophet.¹

The second proposed answer has never before appeared in print. It is based on well-recognized scriptural idioms and usages. In order to explain it clearly, it will be necessary to consider carefully the Lord's words to the brother of Jared just preceding those in Ether 3:15:

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have light, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters. (Ether 3:14)

Observe that the Lord is talking about those who *be-*

lieve in him. *Believers* shall have light, eternally, and become His spiritual sons and daughters. Believers are elsewhere called "the sons of God."

And Noah and his sons hearkened unto the Lord, and gave heed, and they were called the sons of God. (Moses 8:13)

The unbelievers are known as "the sons of men."

Mine anger is kindled against the sons of men, for they will not hearken to my voice. (Moses 8:15; cf. vs. 14)

Now, having explained to the brother of Jared that believers shall become sons and daughters of God (3:14), the Lord implies in 3:15 a contrast between His course of action with the brother of Jared (a believer) and that with the "sons of men" (unbelievers). He appears in person to His servant, a believer, but never in past time has He ever done so to the unbeliever, natural man. Let us write the Lord's word with explanations in brackets to make our meaning clear.

And never have I showed myself unto man ["sons of men," unbelievers] whom I have created, for never has man [the unbeliever] believed in me as thou hast. (Ether 3:15)

This explanation would seem to fit nicely with the context in question and also with known scriptural facts and usages.

A third explanation, which we cannot recommend, has been used for many years, and we still hear it occasionally. It seems to stem from about the turn of the century, when Book of Mormon conventions were held at the old Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah. Those who use it say that our Lord appeared in vision to the brother of Jared *as He would later appear in the flesh*. In other words, Jesus appeared to the brother of Jared as He was to

appear when in mortality; this kind of vision, say the proponents of the explanation, had never been enjoyed by any other man before the days of the brother of Jared. Hence the Lord could say to him:

And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. (Ether 3:15)

As proof of the correctness of this explanation, attention is called to Ether 3:6, 8, 9, 16. Verse 16 is especially emphasized.

He saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood.

I saw the finger of the Lord, and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood.

And the Lord said unto him: Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood.

Behold, this body, which ye now behold, *is the body of my spirit*; and man have I created after the *body of my spirit*; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh. (Italics ours.)

The italicized portions of verse 16 are explained as having reference to "the mortal body which should clothe the Lord's spirit," that is to say, Jesus was showing the brother of Jared His mortal body in vision. But this explanation of the italicized portions is dead wrong, as we will show. When the prophet Joseph Smith translated "the body of

my spirit," he did so quite literally, following a well known grammatical phenomenon known in Hebrew as the "construct state." Such expressions as "plates of brass" or "the servant of the king" are illustrations of such usage. And so in verse 16 above. "The body of My spirit" simply means "My spirit body" just as "plates of brass" means "brass plates" or "the servant of the king" means "the king's servant." The true meaning of verse 16 is shown herewith:

Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is my spirit body; and man have I created after [like unto] my spirit body; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh.

Instead of helping the cause of those who advocate this third explanation, it goes directly and precisely against it. That is the reason we cannot recommend this last explanation.

¹Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, I, 37.