

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be looking at the journeys of the people of God.

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It is often referenced concerning the 40 years that the Israelites spent "wandering" in the wilderness before they were able to enter and ultimately occupy the land of Canaan, which is now known as the land of Israel. This was a major movement of people to be sure, but it is only one of the several examples in scripture where the people were commanded to go from one place to another as a group and not individually (more on that later).

I say "commanded" instead of "running around willy-nilly until they found a place to call home," or even "captured and taken hostage to a foreign land," because there are certainly examples of those as well. No, I'm referring to a commandment from the Lord to do something purposeful and with premeditated intent.

The two immediate examples that come to mind are the Jaredite and Nephite journeys recorded in the Book of Mormon.

The Jaredites of course were a people who lived in the nation-state that was building the great tower, found in Genesis 11. The biblical account records only just a few things before moving on to other items of interest.

Genesis 11

1 And the whole earth was of the same language and of the same speech. And it came to pass that many journeyed from the east; and as they journeyed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and dwelt there in the plain of Shinar.

2 And they said one to another, Come, go to; let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and they had slime for mortar.

3 And they said, Come, go to; let us build us a city and a tower whose top will be high, nigh unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

4 And the Lord came down, beholding the city and the tower which the children of men were building;

5 And the Lord said, Behold, the people are the same, and they all have the same language; and this tower they begin to build; and now, nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined, except I, the Lord, confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So I, the Lord, will scatter them abroad from thence, upon all the face of the land and unto every quarter of the earth.

6 And they were confounded and left off to build the city; and they hearkened not unto the Lord; therefore, is the name of it called Babel because the Lord was displeased with their works and did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face thereof.

The Book of Mormon picks up the account beginning in verse 5. Clearly the Lord was not pleased with what the people of that town were doing. There are, as I see it, two main reasons why the Lord was not happy about their activities.

1. The objective they had for building this tower was to make a name for themselves and to challenge, perhaps and if possible, the occupancy of the heavens by reaching up to the heavens in a more "direct" method - building a tower to climb up to heaven.
2. The people building the tower were also doing so to keep everyone close together, rather than spread out upon the earth.

The first of these seems woefully misbegotten from the beginning. Perhaps they thought they could reach Enoch's city - which had before been taken from the earth to go into heaven? They surely had a knowledge of those events because Noah and his sons could have shared that information with their descendents.

Granted, that may **not** have been their intent, but if it had it represented a serious misunderstanding of what it took for Enoch and his city to be translated and taken up into heaven.

Let's remember that the Great Flood involving the Ark, lots of animals, and eight people, was only a couple hundred years in their past. Noah's sons were probably still alive at this time, perhaps even Noah himself (he was 600 years old at the time of the flood and lived an additional 300 years after the flood). This was not "ancient history" to them - it was very much part of their recorded history. Enoch's city was taken up into heaven less than a thousand years earlier.

By comparison, our nation, the USA, is only 248 years old. That might seem like a lot of years, but the people at the time of the great tower were living to be sometimes well over 200 years old. For example, Noah lived to be 950 years old (350 years of which were after the flood), and Shem lived for 502 years after the flood. Shem was 98 years old at the time of the flood, living to a total of 600 years of age. ***The history of the flood at the time of the great tower was in the living memory of the people.***

Genesis 11:7 And these were the generations of Shem. And Shem, being a hundred years old, begat Arphaxad two years after the flood; and Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

Whether they sought Enoch's city using means they shouldn't have or not, it did displease the Lord enough that he made a major change in them. He changed their language and essentially forced them to spread out upon the earth.

Where we pick up the history is with two brothers, Jared and his brother. After repenting of their folly, they asked the Lord not to confound their language and the Lord listened.

Their journey began this way:

Ether 1

12 And it came to pass that Jared spake again unto his brother, saying, Go and inquire of the Lord whether he will drive us out of the land; and if he will drive us out of the land, cry unto him whither we shall go;

13 **And who knoweth but the Lord will carry us forth into a land which is choice above all the earth.**

14 **And if it so be, let us be faithful unto the Lord, that we may receive it for our inheritance.**

15 And it came to pass that the Brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord according to that which had been spoken by the mouth of Jared.

16 And it came to pass that the Lord did hear the Brother of Jared, and had compassion upon him, and said unto him, Go to and gather together thy flocks, both male and female of every kind; and also of the seed of the earth of every kind; and thy family, and also Jared, thy brother, and his family, and also thy friends and their families, and the friends of Jared and their families.

17 **And when thou hast done this, thou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward.**

18 **And there will I meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the land of the earth.**

19 And there will I bless thee and thy seed and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation.

20 And there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed upon all the face of the earth.

They then, of course, collected the necessary materials and did as instructed. But it seems interesting to me that the first thought - after asking the same mercy upon their families and friends - is to be directed to a land they could receive for their inheritance. Why would Jared ask this question of his brother? Surely this was not a spur-of-the-moment request. He would have known this would be a major task.

Let's review for a moment. They were in Babel for a reason. They didn't start their lives in Babel, but they arrived there after journeying from the east. That is to say, they were traveling **west** from their point of origin when they planted their roots in the land of Shinar.

Genesis 11

1 And the whole earth was of the same language and of the same speech. And it came to pass that **many journeyed from the east**; and as they journeyed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and dwelt there in the plain of Shinar.

At this time the land was still fresh and renewed from the floodwaters of the Great Flood, so it was not the desert that we know about today. It was a fruitful land. Or in other words, they were smart enough not to stop in a barren landscape consisting of sand and desert when Nimrod founded Babel. In fact, it seems that Nimrod had built up quite a reputation for himself, being called the "Mighty Hunter," and claiming large areas for himself.

Genesis 10

5 And Cush begat **Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter in the land. Wherefore, it is said, Even as Nimrod, the mighty hunter in the land.**
6 **And he began a kingdom, and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel**, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh **in the land of Shinar.**

Nimrod founded a kingdom that included no fewer than 4 major cities. Does that have anything to do with the narrative about the Jaredites? I think it actually does.

If Nimrod were indeed their king, the people of Babel were indeed subjects of the king, and the directive to build the tower may well have been orders given by Nimrod himself. Since most kings do not take lightly to having their orders disobeyed by their subjects, the next step may very well have been to send in an army to enforce his orders. Jared would very well have understood this, hence the inquiry to find a way to escape from this destruction.

Their actions in moving northward as a collection of forty two or more individuals or families would essentially be seen as a subversive movement, and sending the armies of Nimrod after them would be the next logical step for a king bent on making a name for himself. A "mighty hunter" who is a king has a reputation to protect.

When we think about these kinds of journeys, we need to understand that their motivations may very well be more complicated than what we glean at first glance.

After meeting with the Lord in the northern valley they then traveled in the wilderness in an unspecified direction and for an unspecified amount of time. Sadly we are not privy to anything more detailed at this time, but it seems reasonable that they traveled east for several - or many - years. During this time they had to set up camp for lengths of time because it refers to building barges to cross various waterways - probably not rivers, more likely lakes or inland seas as these would be large enough to merit spending the time to build such barges to carry absolutely everyone and everything they had.

During this whole time the Lord led them in a cloud.

Ether 1

27 And it came to pass that **the Lord did go before them, and did talk with them as he stood in a cloud**, and gave directions whither they should travel.

Doesn't that sound vaguely familiar? This was a journey of years, during which time the Brother of Jared spoke and the mountain Zerin moved out of their way. In the days of Moses the Red Sea was parted. Mountains and waters can not stand in the way of the people when the Lord is leading.

One difference that we find between the Jaredite journey and that of the Israelites is the manna. There is no indication that the Jaredites had manna provided to them while they traveled. However, they were traveling through a different land, and they may have stopped long enough in places to grow crops; or, just perhaps, there was enough food along the way to feed the people. Another difference is that this is not 600,000 men plus women and children. This was somewhere along the lines of maybe a few hundred people. Their needs were not nearly as great as a multitude of millions of people.

Regardless of how they got their food they did not seem to suffer much for want of it. If they did it is certainly not recorded.

The second of the Book of Mormon accounts is that of Lehi and his family, led primarily by Nephi for the most part. Their journey from Jerusalem to the New World (western hemisphere) is quite a bit more detailed, but still leaves a lot to the imagination.

But we find a similar reason for their departure: a need to escape certain destruction.

1 Nephi 1

23 But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

24 For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done;

25 And because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, **behold, they seek to take away thy life.**

26 **And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.**

27 And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord; wherefore, he did as the Lord commanded him.

28 And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness.

In this case they left with what we might today call "the shirt on their backs." Just enough provisions to survive the trip, which included tents, camels and the like. They were not farmers, nor were they likely to be skilled in hunting, but they left with only such things that were necessary to get away to safety.

This was, again, a relatively small group of people. After collecting the Brass Plates and the family of Ishmael, they made their journey along the boundaries of the Red Sea, being directed by the Lord. Instead of having the Lord stand in a cloud, they were provided with the Liahona.

This curious device (no pun intended) was left at the tent door of Lehi and it served as both a compass and a sort of instant messaging device, as instructions were sometimes found to be printed on it from time to time.

1 Nephi 5

11 And it came to pass that, as my father arose in the morning and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment, he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass.

12 **And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness.**

13 And it came to pass that we did gather together whatsoever things we should carry into the wilderness and all the remainder of our provisions which the Lord had given unto us;

...

32 **And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him, Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written!**

33 **And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren, and the sons of Ishmael, and our wives.**

34 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith, and diligence, and heed which we did give unto them.

35 **And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it.**

36 And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things.

This is one of the most unique things found in all of scripture. This is variously referred to in the Book of Mormon as the Liahona, a compass, a ball, and even a director. Suffice it to say that this was not something they made themselves, but something the Lord provided.

We really know very little about it, but it became an artifact that was kept by the prophets among the Nephites down through their history, even referred to as late in Nephite history as king Benjamin, and later by Alma, Jr., which was somewhere in the neighborhood of between 450 and 550 years later

Mosiah 1

22 And it came to pass that after King Benjamin had made an end of these sayings to his son, that he gave him charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom.

23 And moreover, he also gave him charge concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi,

24 And also the sword of Laban, and the ball, or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord, that thereby they might be led, everyone according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him.

25 Therefore, as they were unfaithful, they did not prosper nor progress in their journey, but were driven back and incurred the displeasure of God upon them;

Alma 17

71 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball or director; or our fathers called it liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it.

72 And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship.

73 And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness; and it did work for them according to their faith in God;

74 Therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore, they had this miracle and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God day by day;

75 Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means, it did show unto them marvelous works.

76 They were slothful and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence; and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey;

77 Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst because of their transgressions.

78 And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal), they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

79 For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

80 And now, I say, Is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.

It may be that some would dispute the existence of such a thing, seeing nothing else like it in particular throughout the rest of the scriptures. Is that really so?

- The son of Nebuchadnezzar saw **a disembodied hand writing on a wall**, and no one really disputes that.

- **The Lord wrote with his finger on tablets of stone** - essentially etching upon them the commandments by the work of just his finger. No one really disputes that.

- Moses saw the Lord in **a burning bush that was not consumed**. No debates on this either.

- **Aaron's rod budded and grew almonds.** Not many trees have branches that will grow fruit/nuts once they have been disconnected from the tree for years after being formed into a staff by a carpenter.
- **A rod was turned into a serpent that ate other serpents.** Who can debate that?
- The **Israelites were fed for 40 years by manna that seemed to just appear on the ground six days a week.** Really, that is a lot of food.
- Moses **struck a rock and water good enough for millions of people and their herds of animals came forth.** That is a lot of water, and it happened more than once.
- Abraham and Sarah **had a child when she was beyond child-bearing years.**
- John was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth when **she was beyond child-bearing years.**
- **Jesus was born to a virgin.**
- The prophets sometimes **received messages from the Lord through the Urim** (1 Samuel 28:6 And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, **nor by Urim**, nor by prophets. -- this seems to be the exception in Saul's case because he had been disobedient, otherwise, dreams, Urim, and prophets were all methods of God communicating with his people.)

After all of these miraculous things, is a brass ball with directors and words written on it so impossible?

Genesis 18:13 And the angel of the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? **Is anything too hard for the Lord?**

The point of the Lehi and his family traveling such a great distance was to be given a place to inherit - a land of promise. It was a way to escape destruction.

In each of these instances we see that their journeys were undertaken because the Lord wanted to preserve his people. It should not be surprising then that we read from Ether's prophecy that there is a larger reason for this:

Ether 6

2 For behold, they rejected all the words of Ether; for he truly told them of all things from the beginning of man; and that after the waters had receded from off the face of this land, it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord;

3 Wherefore, the Lord would have that all men should serve him, who dwell upon the face thereof; and that it was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord.

He then proceeds to record the events surrounding a New Jerusalem that should be built up on this land, but that would hardly be possible without a people to do so. The Jaredites had an opportunity, but failed. The Nephites had an opportunity, but they also failed. The promise extended to the inhabitants of this land is that if they are faithful, they will succeed, but if they are not faithful, they will lose that opportunity just as those that failed before.

The journeys of the people of God are always towards the place of a better hope.

And that brings us to the individuals that I promised to discuss earlier (remember way back at the top?).

The Lord works with individuals as well as with groups. Lehi and his family were just a few people. The Jaredites were just a few. We can find countless other individuals whom God has directed, not least of which is Abram:

Genesis 12

1 Now the Lord had said unto Abram, **Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house unto a land that I will show thee;**

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse thee; and in thee shall the families of the earth be blessed.

But there are many others also:

Hebrews 11:7 By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, **prepared an ark to the saving of his house;** by the which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Mosiah 1

19 Behold, I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla;

20 For behold, he, **being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi--and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him into the wilderness--**

21 And it came to pass that he did according as the Lord had commanded him.

22 And they departed out of the land into the wilderness, as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord; and they were led by many preachings and prophesyings.

23 And they were admonished continually by the word of God; and **they were led by the power of his arm through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla.**

Mosiah 11:1 Now Alma, **having been warned of the Lord** that the armies of King Noah would come upon them, and had made it known to his people, therefore, they gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain, **and departed into the wilderness** before the armies of King Noah.

We could go on to show how the wise men were warned by the Lord not to go back to Herod, and how Joseph was warned to go into Egypt, and their subsequent return to

Nazareth, and of many others. These were journeys for the preservation of the people of God. It may not always be an easy course to follow, but the promise is worth it.

The important thing to remember in all of these examples is that it was the Lord who gave them the instruction to move.

When the Lord commands you to do something, do it. ***Make sure you know it is the Lord's commandment.***

There is a difference between asking the Lord and pestering the Lord. That is not to say that we should not ask the Lord for important wisdom or important guidance, but sometimes when we persist in asking for something, ***the Lord will indeed provide it, but it is not according to his desire for us.*** Think on this for a minute:

1 Samuel 8

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,

5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; **now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.**

6 **But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us.** And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.

7 **And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.**

8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

9 **Now, therefore, hearken unto their voice; howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.**

10 And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king.

This example shows us that sometimes when we persist in asking for something from the Lord he will give it, but it is not for our good. The people suffered for hundreds of years because of it.

If there is a real point to this entire exposition, it is to take the journey that the Lord wants you to take, but not to do it half-heartedly or out of spite. The Lord's will for us is to accomplish good, but it is up to us to do that good which he wants to accomplish.

We see the examples of the people who were faithful and we can see the benefits of what they had to endure - sometimes it is hard, sometimes the Lord just works out the details for us, and sometimes we fall backward. The Lord has a journey for each of us, not just one of travels through the world from one place to another, but the journey of life itself.

At the risk of being cliché the road of life that we travel on is one of many levels but with an ultimate promise. Spiritually and physically we start somewhere and go somewhere. There are some who say the destination is not the point, but no one takes a journey in the expectation that there is no destination at all. There is no cheating on this path - you cannot skip the important steps.

Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years, but it started by him pausing for a moment to look at a burning bush. The Jaredites started their journey by just asking to keep their language intact. Lehi, Abraham, Enoch, and others all began their journeys because they had been prepared to receive instruction from the Lord, regardless of what that commandment might be. They started in faith, endured in faith, and arrived in faith in their respective promised lands. They all had their sights set on something better.

Hebrews 11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.

If we truly believe in modern-day revelation, then we must accept that the scriptures are still being written, and that they include us. We are part of that same heritage, and it shall be so until the end. The Lord will lead us even as he did for those who came before -- if we are not of little faith.

Luke 18:8 I tell you that he will come; and when he does come, he will avenge his saints speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?