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Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 10—Journey to the Land of Promise

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Abstract: The objective of this lesson is the Lord aids those who keep his commandments to accomplish righteous purposes.



Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 10—Journey to the Land of Promise

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi, Chapters 16-18)

For Tuesday, November 4, 1952

Objective: The Lord aids those who keep his commandments to accomplish righteous purposes.

WITH the needed spiritual instruction, the possession of the brass plates, the membership of the colony completed, and a compass to point the way they should travel, Lehi and his group started from the valley of Lemuel into the wilderness. Dr. Hugh Nibley, in his series of articles on "Lehi in the Desert," presents logical evidence which he feels is sufficient to justify our drawing the conclusion that it was a camel caravan. The little colony took with them their tents, provisions, and seeds of every kind, and departed into the wilderness across the river Laman.

They traveled four days in nearly a south-southeast direction. They camped at a place they called Shazer. This stop was necessary, for they had need of replenishing their supplies of food. The men seem to have been experienced archers. Equipped with bows and arrows, they went into the wilderness to secure food for their families.

Having replenished their supplies, they went forth again into the wilderness. They followed the same general direction as before, following the direction indicated by the compass, which took them into the more fertile parts of the wilderness which were near the Red Sea. After traveling for many days, they felt the need of further rest and of replenishing their supplies. They halted their journey.

We might designate this place as the camp of the broken bow, for here it was that Nephi broke the steel bow he had brought with him from Jerusalem, making it extremely difficult to obtain food. The bows of the other men had become almost useless because they had lost their spring. Unable to face difficulty and disaster with courageous hearts, they were sorrowful and "did murmur" against the Lord. Nephi, however, blessed with ability to adjust himself to the situation at hand, and possessing initia-

tive and resourcefulness to a high degree, fabricated a bow and arrow from wood. With this bow and arrow, a sling, and stones, Nephi, following directions given him on the compass, climbed to the top of a mountain and killed animals in sufficient quantity to supply the colony.

It is interesting to note Nephi's account of the workings of the ball. (See 1 Nephi 16:26-30.)

Hunting with the bow and arrow and with the slingshot was the common procedure among the Arabs living near Jerusalem in 600 B.C. Nephi's description of hunting corresponds with known historical facts concerning hunting in that territory in 600 B.C.

Their next journey was to a place called Nahom, which took them many days. Here Ishmael died and was buried. His death, together with hunger, thirst, and fatigue caused the daughters of Ishmael to murmur against Lehi and Nephi and to desire that they be allowed to return to Jerusalem. They even plotted with Laban, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael to kill Lehi and Nephi. Conditions were ripe for another rebellion among a large part of the colony, but the voice of the Lord came and chastened them exceedingly, so that they repented of their sins.

All of the traveling up to now had been in a south-southeast direction, undoubtedly through the more fertile parts along the Red Sea. Their next journeying was to take them nearly east to the shores of Irreantum (many waters). They named the place Bountiful, because there was so much fruit and wild honey there.

It was a time of rejoicing for the little colony when they came to the seashore. For eight years they had suffered from lack of food, physical exhaustion, and the worry and anxiety incident to traveling through a strange wilderness. The Lord had forbidden them to make much fire, perhaps as a means of promoting safety from discovery by wandering bands of nomads who might have killed them. Resulting from this command not to make much fire, were many problems of food preparation, but the Lord said: "I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not" (1 Nephi 17:12).

Other difficulties were experienced by the women, for they gave birth to children in the wilderness. Despite these difficulties, however, the women became strong like unto the men, and learned to suffer hardships without murmuring.

The members of this little colony were now fully cognizant that if "the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them . . ." (1 Nephi 17:3). They must have rejoiced in this knowledge, and must have recognized that, through the furnace of affliction, one is refined.

When the colony "had been in the land of Bountiful for the space of many days," the Lord instructed Nephi to build a ship in which they were to sail to the land of promise. Nephi made tools from ore which he smelted from the rock, having been divinely directed to the ore. From the skins of animals, he made a bellows with which to blow the

fire, and smote two stones together to make fire.

It was amidst all kinds of adversity that Nephi built the ship. His brothers labored reluctantly, because they believed he did not have the knowledge to build a ship and did not believe that the Lord had instructed him. Like other obstructionists, they stood by the way-side and made their incisive remarks. "Our brother is a fool," they said. They expressed themselves as wishing they had remained in Jerusalem where they could have enjoyed themselves, and asserted the righteousness of the people of Jerusalem.

Nephi, in opposition to their arguments that God had not instructed him, presented a sound inductive argument in which he cited many historical examples to prove that the Lord does direct men. "He leadeth away the righteous into precious lands," he said to them, "and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes" (1 Nephi 17:38). Nephi knew that "he that is righteous is favored of God" (1 Nephi 17:35).

Many more things did Nephi tell them, calling them to repent:

And now it came to pass that when I had spoken these words they were angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea; and as they came forth to lay their hands upon me I spake unto them, saying: In the name of the Almighty God, I command you that ye touch me not, for I am filled with the power of God, even unto the consuming of my flesh; and whoso shall lay his hands upon me shall wither even as a dried reed; and he shall be as naught before the power of God, for God shall smite him (1 Nephi 17:48).

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren, inasmuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst they lay their hands upon me . . . (1 Nephi 17:52).

And the Lord told Nephi that he would shock his brethren "and this will I do, that they may know that I am the Lord their God." And the Lord shook them, even as he said. "And now, they said: We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us." And Nephi's older brothers fell down and were about to worship him, but Nephi would not allow it, telling them that the Lord their God was the one they should worship. The brothers were humbled, and they ceased to impede the work of building the ship (1 Nephi 17:52-55).

Nephi's power and reliance on God may remind us of Parley P. Pratt's description of Joseph Smith in Richmond jail, when Joseph rebuked the guards for their base conduct. "SILENCE, ye fiends of the infernal pit. In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die THIS INSTANT!"

Describing the event, Parley P. Pratt writes:

He ceased to speak. He stood erect in terrible majesty. Chained, and without a weapon; calm, unruffled and dignified as an angel, he looked upon the quailing guards, whose weapons were lowered or dropped to the ground; whose knees smote together, and who, shrinking into a corner, or crouching at his feet, begged his pardon, and remained quiet till a change of guards.

I have seen the ministers of justice, clothed in majesterial robes, and criminals arraigned before them, while life was suspended on a breath, in the Courts of England; I have witnessed a Congress in solemn session to give laws to nations . . . but dignity and majesty have I seen but once, as it stood in chains, at midnight, in a dungeon in an obscure village of Missouri (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, pp. 229-230, 1874 Edition).

After the ship was completed, the Lord instructed Lehi to take his colony into the ship. Lehi had two more sons, Jacob and Joseph, who had been born in the wilderness. They loaded the boat with fruit, meat, honey, and other provisions on which they might subsist. They also took seeds with them. They were driven forth by the winds towards the promised land.

After having been driven forth before the wind for many days, Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael and their wives began to sing and to dance, and to speak with much rudeness forgetting "by what power they had been brought hither." Fearful, because of their unbecoming conduct, Nephi reproved them. Unwilling to take criticism from Nephi, they became angry, and Laman and Lemuel bound Nephi with cords.

Immediately the compass ceased

to work, and they did not know which way to steer the ship. Soon a great and terrible tempest arose, driving them back upon the waters for the space of three days. They began to be frightened exceedingly, nevertheless they did not loose Nephi. On the fourth day they were driven back. "The tempest began to be exceeding sore," and they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea before they released Nephi, whose wrists and ankles were badly swollen. There was, however, no murmuring on the part of Nephi because of his afflictions.

When Nephi was released, he took the compass, which again worked, and they sailed again towards the land of promise. How long they were on the water we do not know, but the record states, "after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land" (1 Nephi 18:23).

Questions on the Lesson

1. What kind of hardships were suffered by this colony?
2. What is there to justify the conclusion that the Lord helped these people?
3. What characteristics of Nephi are revealed in this lesson?

* * * *

No Word

Evelyn Fjeldsted

Should I receive no word from you,
Then could the darkness be like this—
A night from some star-deep abyss
With wind that drowns
All other sounds
Wind, rising wild and free,
Surrounding me.