



Type: Magazine Article

---

## The World of the Jaredites, Part III

Author(s): Hugh Nibley

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 54, No. 11 (November 1951), pp. 786–787,  
833–835

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

---

  

---

# The WORLD

## Of The JAREDITES

PART III

By Hugh Nibley, Ph. D.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HISTORY AND RELIGION, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

### A NOTE ON THE WEATHER

Dear F.

IT is gratifying to know that you have at last read the Book of Ether and found that it is not, in spite of its name, "chloroform in print." The thing to which you are now objecting, "the extravagant and overdone account of how they crossed the ocean," is the very thing to which my last letter was leading. We ended, you will recall, with the observation that it must have been something terrific that drove the Jaredites out of the land. What was it?

The *burans* of Central Asia are terrible at all times. Ancient and modern travelers tell almost unbelievable but uniform tales of those appalling winds which almost daily shift vast masses of sand, dust, and even gravel from one part of the continent to another.<sup>43\*</sup> The great loess deposits on the eastern and western fringes of the vast area bear witness to even more dreadful dust storms that accompanied the drying up of the land after the glacial epoch. But it is when the world's weather gets out of hand, as it has a number of times in the course of history, that the blowing sands of Asia bring mighty empires to ruin, bury great cities almost overnight, and scatter the tribes in all directions to overrun and submerge the more favored civilizations of the east and west. The weather of Asia is the great central driving-mechanism of world history. It is only of recent years that men have begun to correlate the great migrations of history, with their attendant wars and revolutions, with those major weather crises such as the great wind and drought of 2300-2200 B.C. and the

world floods of 1300 B.C. which we now know to have taken place in the course of recorded history.<sup>44</sup> So hypnotized have students of society become by the ease and directness with which an evolutionary rule-of-thumb may be applied to all the contingencies of life, that the raging of the elements and the crash of empires go unheeded in their graphs and handbooks. With examples gross as earth before them, they still disdain to recognize anything as cheaply sensational as plagues and earthquakes, nor will they acknowledge the frightening speed with which the scenes of world history are shifted.

Sir Aurel Stein in his book *Lou-Lan* has described the deserted houses and streets of that city standing exactly as they did fourteen centuries ago, when their inhabitants were driven forth by drought so sudden and severe that neither the wood of the fruit trees nor the most delicate fabrics have rotted since then. The mighty city of Etsina was just as suddenly deserted six hundred years ago, and not found until 1908: "all natural life died. The trees of the forest threw themselves to the ground (referring, of course, to the terrible winds) . . . and storms arose which soon buried the country in sand." To this day the trees remain undecayed, "like sun-dried mummies, dead, naked and gray. . . . Over a vast area, once shady forest, they lay in thousands. . . . We passed other ruins of deserted strongholds, and with strange sensations dug up objects that no human being had touched for more than six hundred years. . . ."<sup>45</sup> The same traveler who reports these things was to witness the recurrence of this familiar Asiatic tragedy with his own eyes:

Once we came upon an abandoned Sart village, where newly thrown-up dams and uncompleted excavations bore witness to the departed population's desperate struggle to retain the vanishing water. . . . But a day had come when there was no more water to be had. The animals stood by the watering places and sought in vain for moisture, the women wept in the houses, and the men gathered in the mosque to pray to Allah for the miracle which alone could save their many homes. (Cf. Ether 1:38). But no miracle happened; the village got no water, and in the last extremity of famine the people had thrown their most indispensable possessions onto the remaining horses and donkeys and hastily left their homes and the lands of their fathers to follow their *aksakal* (n. village elder, cf. the Brother of Jared) out into the parched country around on a desperate search for water.<sup>46</sup>

The fate of the unhappy wanderers is thus described: "Later on we sometimes met with small parties of these former agricultural villagers, who now drifted about out on the steppes as unhappy nomads. The fugitives had been obliged to divide into small groups, since no one water-hole could accommodate them all. . . ."<sup>47</sup>

Is not this the story of the dispersion in miniature? You know the story of how the ancestors of the Etruscans were driven out of Asia Minor by drought and moved to the west, hunting for a promised land. It is not merely water these people were looking for, but a better land, above all, a better grazing land. In the epic of the Beni Hilal we are shown how one of the greatest of Arab tribes was driven from their homes by seven years of hot winds, and how they sought a promised land, first in Central Asia and then in Morocco. It was when the rest of the world was smitten with famine that Egypt became the refuge of the patriarchs, for "there was corn in Egypt." As you know, there are two classic points or centers of radiation from which all the great migrations of antiquity

\*Numbers refer to bibliography at end of article.

took their beginning—the heart of Asia and (to a far lesser degree) the Arabian desert. Is it not remarkable that the migrations of the Book of Mormon take their departure from these same two centers?

You must get over the idea that history moves at a slow, even, majestic pace. It does not. The sudden calamity that overtook an Asian village in 1927 has struck repeatedly in the past, dispersing the inhabitants of mighty capitals to become wanderers on the earth, "and when the storm laid itself to rest, the flying sands solidified again and the terrified nomads found the whole face of nature changed into new shapes."<sup>48</sup> And of all the many cities and empires dispersed by a sudden puff of burning air, Babel, the city of the tower, has left behind the richest deposit of legend and tradition.

Eusebius in his *Chronicon*, which has proved one of the most reliable

sources of early oriental history, cites the Sibyll to the effect that "when all men were of one tongue, some of them built a high tower so as to mount up to heaven, but God destroyed the tower by mighty winds."<sup>49</sup> Two centuries earlier Theophilus of Antioch gave a fuller version of the story, quoting the Sibyll in verse: "After the cataclysm cities and kings had a new beginning, in this manner. The first city of all was Babylon . . . and one by the name of Nimrod became its king. . . . Since at that time men tended to become scattered, they took counsel of themselves and not of the Lord, to build a city and a tower the top of which would reach to heaven, so that their own name might be glorified. . . . Thus speaks the Sibyll: But when the threats of the great God were fulfilled of which he had warned mortal men at the time, they built a tower in the Assyrian land. They all once spoke the same language and

wanted to mount up to the starry heavens. But forthwith the Immortal One laid great stress upon the blasts, so that the wind overthrew the mighty tower, and drove mortals to strive with one another. And when the tower had fallen, the languages of men were divided up into many dialects, so that the earth became filled with different kingdoms of men."<sup>50</sup> The Book of Jubilees (second century B.C.) tells how "the Lord sent a mighty wind against the tower and overthrew it upon the earth, and behold it was between Asshur and Babylon in the land of Sinar, and they called its name "Overthrow."<sup>51</sup> The zealous and learned Persian antiquary, Tha'labi (d. 1030 A.D.), records the report that the people were scattered from the tower by an awful drought, accompanied by winds of such velocity as actually to blow down the tower.<sup>52</sup> "Forty years after the tower was finished,"

(Continued on page 833)

An artist's conception of the building of the vessels by Jared and his people.

—Painting by Goff Dowding



We're gathering up to Zion  
To learn her pleasant ways,  
And mid the mountains hide us  
Though all the world may gaze.

God and his prophets aid us,  
We know the sacred fire;  
Ne'er yet has it betrayed us,  
And still it will inspire.  
While Babylon groans in frenzy  
Because her end is nigh.  
The saints lift up their voices  
And wake Hosannah high.

And when we reach the mountains,  
May we in peace abide,  
Accept in trust each trial,  
Or wait the turning tide;  
Sustain each regulation  
The priesthood may bestow,  
This is the one salvation  
That Israel's tribes shall know!

CHORUS

Gathering home by thousands,  
By rail from forge and farm;  
O'er ocean's wave in a rolling ship.

William arrived home in November but his health did not improve, and less than two months later, January 5, 1877, he passed from this life.

On January 7, William's casket was carried from his residence to the meetinghouse by members of the high council. The Nephi brass band, of which he had been a member, played the funeral march. While his remains were being lowered into the grave, his choir sang several of his favorite hymns. Thus a man who loved music passed away; but many of his songs, together with his love of music, still remain with his family.

The World of the Jaredites

(Continued from page 787)

says Bar Hebraeus, who collected a vast amount of lore in central Asia in the thirteenth century, "God sent a wind, and the Tower was overturned and Nemrodh died in it."<sup>23</sup> The picture of violent atmospheric disturbances accompanied by social upheavals, the scattering of tribes, and the changing of languages cannot but go back to some real experience; not only is it the sort of thing one would expect, but it is also definitely known to have happened time and time again — there is no reason for doubting that a great city called Babel once long ago suffered the same fate as

(Continued on following page)

GET UTOCO WINTERIZING SERVICE  
NOW IS THE TIME



That special winterizing attention your car needs to protect it from cold weather can't be done too early — but a few hours delay may be too late!

Important Protection

Drive in today and have us:

- ✓ Drain and clean the radiator and supply anti-freeze.
- ✓ Drain the crankcase, flush it, and refill with motor oil in the proper winter grade.
- ✓ Lubricate your car thoroughly.
- ✓ Replace worn tires with new Atlas "Gripsafe" Tires to provide you maximum safety for driving on slippery highways.
- ✓ Check your battery — to be sure it can stand the added strain of cold weather driving.
- ✓ Inspect the fan belt and replace if necessary.
- ✓ Check the hose connections and replace if necessary.

Personalized Service

When you have your car winterized by your Utocho dealer, you get not only top products but the personalized attention of conscientious, experienced men. "Service is fine, at the Utocho sign!"



42nd Year of Progress

**LET'S GO—WITH UTOCO** **UTOCO**  
UTAH OIL REFINING CO.

IN USE for SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS

Aids in treatment of Canker, simple sore throat and other minor mouth and throat irritations.

HALL'S REMEDY

Salt Lake City, Utah

Read and Keep  
The Improvement Era



Given Free of Cost To You—30 day supply of Vitamins and Minerals for sending us only two easy - to - get orders from friends and relatives at price everybody can afford. SCIENTIFICALLY BALANCED FOOD SUPPLEMENT compounded and guaranteed by oldest and largest manufacturer of vitamins in U.S. Earn extra cash in spare time. Send postcard today for free details.

NOYES DISTRIBUTING COMPANY, DIV. O  
302 1/2 W. Central Ave. Albuquerque, New Mexico

ACCORDIONS

FAMOUS ITALIAN MAKES  
Available to Bible Students, Christian Workers and Missionaries at

SPECIAL DISCOUNTS  
Write Today for FREE Literature  
CHICAGO ACCORDION CENTER, Inc.  
Dept. 15, 754 N. Damen Ave., Chicago 22, Ill.

## THE WORLD OF THE JAREDITES

(Concluded from preceding page)  
the people of 'Ad and Thamud, of Lou Lan, Etsingol or the Nasamonians.<sup>54</sup>

But what of the Book of Mormon? In striking contrast to the story of Lehi, where the only terrors met on the journey by land and sea were the normal and familiar ones, including a typhoon, we have in the history of the Jaredite migration a very freakish state of things. The Lord commanded Nephi to build "a ship"—an ordinary

ship, which his brothers felt sure he would never be able to finish. Yet the ship was finished, and the family set sail. There is no mention of the Lord's giving any specifications for the building of this ship, indeed, as Nephi describes it, he was left largely on his own as a test of his faith, and his brethren apparently had no scornful comments to make on the type of ship he was building. From which we conclude that it was, as it is repeatedly called, simply "a ship."

Now, Lehi's people had to cross at least twice and probably three or four times as much water as the Jaredites, and an ordinary ship sufficed for their purpose. But Jared's ships were altogether unusual vessels. The Lord gave the builder special instructions for every detail. They had to be submersible and yet ride very lightly on the surface of the waves. "They were small and they were light upon the water," yet built to stand terrific pressure: "exceedingly tight," "tight like unto a dish," with special sealed vent holes that could not be opened when the water pressure on the outside was greater than the air pressure within. The Lord explained why it would be necessary to build such peculiar vessels: because he was about to loose winds of incredible violence that would make the crossing a frightful ordeal at best: any windows, he warns, will be dashed to pieces; fire will be out of the question; "ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you . . . 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 II:23-25.) This was no normal crossing and no brief passing storm: "the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters . . . they were *many times* buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the *wind*." (VI:5f.) It is perfectly clear from our account that the party was to spend a good deal of time below the surface of the sea! Of course such phenomenal and continual winds cannot have been a mere local disturbance, and we may confidently assume that the Book of Ether is reporting the same super-winds that are said to have accompanied and possibly caused the destruction of the tower.

In so many words, the Book of Ether tells us that at the time of the dispersion the world was swept

there's room to  
add a  
room  
in your home!

Enjoy it now by  
using our  
Time Payment Plan

TRI-STATE  
Time Payment  
PLAN  
LUMBER REPAIR • REMODEL

**Where?** Somewhere in your house there's room for better living. By moving a wall, re-arranging a closet or entrance . . . perhaps in the attic or the basement . . . you can have space for a study, den, recreation room or bedroom. It's worth a try, why not do some planning now?

**What to do?** Call on us for ideas on what to do and how to do it. Plans, ideas on materials, suggestions on design and decorating, help in selecting competent workmen or hints on how to do the work yourself. . . . We're all ready with a complete ONE-STOP building service.

36 Months to Pay — Only 10% Down  
Use Tri-State's Time Payment Plan

**TRI-STATE**  
L U M B E R C O .

by winds of colossal violence. There are three main sources for checking on this: (1) the old traditions of the tower, (2) actual historical records of other places that have suffered the same fate as Babel, thereby showing that the fate of Babel was a possible, nay a typical one, and (3) the studies of the paleoclimatologists, showing that sudden world droughts accompanied by very high winds have taken place within historic times. I suppose that one would only have to find the next major catastrophe before 2300 B. C. in order to date the Tower of Babel with some accuracy. Meantime, I must insist again, we are concerned only with the sort of thing that happened. Not only does the Bible not mention the winds, but the Book of Mormon itself does so casually, albeit very specifically, by way of explaining something else. This very casualness is a strong argument for the authenticity of the record.

As we said at the beginning, the Book of Ether leads one into the strangest regions. Now we shall demonstrate the surprising fact that even at its oddest, our story never loses touch with historical reality. That is going to take a good deal of time and paper, so let this suffice for the present and expect more.

(To be continued)

#### Bibliography

<sup>40</sup>John de Pian de Carpini opens his account of his travels in Central Asia in the 13th century with a description of these winds, M. Komroff (Ed.) *Contemporaries of Marco Polo* (N.Y.: Liveright, 1927), p. 4. Such modern explorers as G. N. Roerich, *Trails to Inmost Asia* (Yale University, 1931), refer to them repeatedly, e.g. p. 49: "We were approaching the great desert basin of inner Asia, and each breath of wind brought dust from its vast sandy expanse." Pp. 110, 193-5, 210, 404, etc.

<sup>41</sup>Good general treatments of the major weather changes in ancient history may be found in C. E. P. Brooks, *Climate Through the Ages* (London, 1926).

A. R. Burn, *Minoans, Philistines, and Greeks* (N. Y., Knopf, 1930.)

Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods* (London, Murray, 1928).

Ed Eyre, *European Civilization*, I, 94f, 103; J. B. S. Haldane, "A Biologist Looks at England," *Harpers* 175 (Aug. 1937) pp. 284, 286.

V. G. Childe, *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (N.Y.: 1934), Ch. ii.

<sup>42</sup>Henning Haslund, *Men and Gods in Mongolia* (N.Y.: Dutton, 1935), p. 108, 106-110.

<sup>43</sup>*Idem*, pp. 176-8.

<sup>44</sup>*Id.*, p. 177.

<sup>45</sup>*Id.*, p. 106.

<sup>46</sup>Eusebius, *Chronicon* I, iv, in *Patrol. Graec.* XIX, 116.

<sup>47</sup>In *Patrol. Graec.* VI, 1101; virtually the same text in the *Sibyll* (ed. R. H. Charles) III, 98. The idea that the tower was built expressly to unify the human race which was tending to become dispersed is found in *Sibyll* V, 423: "touching the very clouds and seen of all, so that all the faithful and all the righteous may see the glory of the invisible God." Of this idea Kraeling says *Jnl. Bibl. Lit.* 66, 282f, "Here is indeed a primitive, yet profound philosophy concerning the nature of the Oriental city." Whether Babel was a tower or a city (Kraeling, *op. cit.* pp. 280-2) is a mere quibble, since the two normally go together. In spite of everything, God cursed the project because it was undertaken by men on their own without consulting him: "Woe to thee, Babylon, golden-throned and golden-sandaled, thou who for many a year wast queen, sole sovereign of the world, of

old so great and cosmopolitan. . . ." (*Sibyll* V, 434f.)

<sup>48</sup>Book of Jubilees, X, 25f (R. H. Charles).

<sup>49</sup>Tha'labi, *Qissas al-Anbiya*, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup>Bar Hebraeus, *Chron.* (Budge) I, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup>For 'Ad and Thamud, R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge, 1930), Ch. i; Herodotus II, 32, tells how the wicked and presumptuous Nasa-monians were forced to leave their land by drought, only to be buried in the sands by terrible winds that overtook them on their wanderings. The suddenness of the fall of world-ruling Babylon made an ineradicable impression on the minds of men, who have applied the name of that city as a "code-word" to every doomed world-metropolis since then, e.g. Rome, Alexandria; B. Meissner, *Babyl. und Assyr.* I, 385-6.



## THE OFFICIAL L. D. S. MISSIONARY BIBLE

*is now available in four new durable and attractive bindings designed to withstand continuous use in all climatic conditions*

AN ESSENTIAL FOR MISSIONARIES, TEACHERS, STUDENTS, CHURCHWORKERS

The King James Version bound with the Church's official Ready References and the useful and authoritative Cambridge Concordance and Dictionary to the Bible. A section of ruled paper for notemaking is included.

Set in bold, clear, self-pronounced type, with center column references

**13 "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.**

13 ch. 1. 8.  
\* ver. 7.  
\* 2 Tim. 4. 8.  
\* Mt. 24. 17.

- MB1 Durable simulated leather, overlapping covers, fabric lined, red under gold edges. \$7.50
- MB2 The finest Persian Morocco leather, straight edges, fabric lined, red under gold edges. Indexed \$12.00
- MB3 The finest Persian Morocco leather, overlapping cover, fabric lined, red under gold edges (as illustrated). \$11.00 Indexed \$12.00
- MB4 The finest Persian Morocco leather, overlapping covers, genuine leather lining, red under gold edges. \$13.00

From our dealers everywhere

### THE DESERET BOOK COMPANY

44 East South Temple Street, Salt Lake City 10, Utah