

PART TWO

Temporal Parallels

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CHAPTER FIVE

First Gathering of the House of Israel

The history in the beginning of the Book of Mormon (First Nephi through Omni), holds many similarities to the first gathering of the House of Israel as well as to their later apostasy from the Lord. The story of the captive children of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their prolonged journey through the wilderness to the promised land, followed by their gradual apostasy and eventual scattering is a familiar one. The Lehites were also delivered from a wicked city, journeyed through a wilderness, and were led to a promised land. They too became stiffnecked after many years of prosperity and entered into a period of relative darkness.

Establishment of a Covenant Land and People

The similarities between the Lehites' and Israelites' deliverance and their journeys through the wilderness to a promised land are extensive. Nephi apparently not only understood these similarities but wanted us to notice them as well. In a single chapter (First Nephi 17) he lays out many common elements. Appendix B presents many of these.

The Book of Mormon history begins with the Lord commanding the prophet Lehi to "take his family and depart into the wilderness" to escape the pending destruction of Jerusalem. (1 Ne. 2:2.) When the Lord called Lehi, "there came a *pillar of fire* and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much." (1 Ne. 1:6.) Shortly after that, while pondering upon these things, he "saw *God* sitting upon his throne." (1 Ne. 1:8; Alma 36:22.) These things are reminiscent of Moses' experience with the burning bush. He too beheld the face of God, and the Lord similarly commanded him to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. (Exo. 3:2-8.)

Another likeness we find is that both the Lehites' and the Israelites' crossing a body of water marked their entrance into the wilderness. (1 Ne. 16:12; 17:8,14; compare Neh. 9:11.)²⁸ It was the river Laman in the Lehi's case and the Red Sea for the Israelites.

Once in the wilderness, the Lord provided miraculous means for both groups to survive. He fed the children of Israel with manna, and he caused water to come forth from a rock that they "might quench their thirst." (1 Ne. 17:28,29; compare Neh. 9:15.) He enabled Lehi's people to live upon raw meat,

²⁸Lehites' later crossing of the ocean also carries somewhat of a parallel to the children of Israel's crossing the Red Sea. In both cases, the Lord showed forth his miraculous power to enable his people to cross a formidable body of water.

causing it to become sweet. Therefore, they were able to "bear their journeyings without murmurings." (1 Ne. 17:3,2; compare Deut. 2:7.)

The Lord told Lehi's group, "...^a*I will...be your light* in the wilderness...; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ^b*ye shall be led towards the promised land*.... After ye have arrived in the promised land, ^c*ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God*; and that I, the Lord, did ^d*deliver you from destruction*; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem." (1 Ne. 17:13,14.) The wording in this verse is amazingly similar to what the Lord told the children of Israel. (Subscript letters signal corresponding elements.) He said, "I will take you to me for a people, and ^a*I will be to you a God*: and ^c*ye shall know that I am the Lord your God*, which ^d*bringeth you out from under the burdens* of the Egyptians. And ^b*I will bring you in unto the land*, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob...." (Exo. 6:7,8.)

Notwithstanding the many blessings God poured out, some members of both groups still chose to complain. Ironically, their cries were loudest when they were nearest their destinations. Nephi's brothers wanted to return to Jerusalem. They grumbled, "...Our women have toiled...and suffered all things..., and it would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem...." (1 Ne. 17:20; 16:36) Similarly, the children of Israel murmured, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!" (Num. 14:2.) They claimed, "the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey," and they wanted to return to Egypt. (Num. 14:3,4.)

Another likeness we notice between the two histories is that in both cases the Lord destroyed the previous inhabitants of the land to make way for the in-coming group. He swept them away because they "had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them...." (1 Ne. 17:35; Deut. 9:4; compare Omni 1:22; Jacob 5:44.)

Once in their promised lands, the experiences of the Lehites and the Israelites continued to resemble one another. For example, each basked in a period of great prosperity as the Lord poured out great blessings upon them. (1 Ne. 18:24; compare Josh. 23:14.) Each built a magnificent temple to the Lord. (2 Ne. 5:16; compare 2 Sam. 7:5.) Both nations desired to have a king, contrary to the wishes of their prophet-leader. (2 Ne. 5:18; compare 1 Sam. 10:19; 12:17.) Also, both of their kingdoms were eventually divided. In Book of Mormon history, the Nephites and the Lamanites emerged as two separate groups during this time. (2 Ne. 5:5,6.) In Biblical history, the tribes of Israel split to form the northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms. (1 Kgs. 12.)

Apostasy

In spite of the many blessings the children of Israel received, they hardened their hearts, and their prophets labored extensively to reclaim them. (2 Kgs. 17:7,8,13.) Eventually the Lord destroyed many of them and scattered the remainder. Thus they fell into a state of darkness.

Book of Mormon history reflects a similar falling away with the passing of time. Under the reign of their second king, the Nephites "began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines...." (Jacob 1:15.) Several years later, Jarom described the Nephites as having hard hearts, deaf ears, blind minds, and stiff necks. (Jarom 1:3; compare 2 Kgs. 17:14.) Because of this degeneration "the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, [had to] labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence." (Jarom 1:11; also Enos 1:22; compare 2 Kgs. 17:7,8,13.)

In spite of the many warnings and chastenings the Israelites received, they rebelled from the Lord and turned their hearts to the pagan gods of the land. (Judg. 2:12-21; 2 Kgs. 17:7-18.) This provoked the Lord to anger. Thus he scattered them "among all nations" and destroyed many of the more wicked among them. (1 Ne. 22:5; Deut. 4:25-27; Jer. 15:2.) Likewise, as the Nephites' grew more stiffnecked, they "were scattered upon much of the face of the land, and the Lamanites also." (Jarom 1:6.)²⁹ Not long after that, "the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed." (Omni 1:5,6.)

Because of the glaring iniquities of the children of Israel, the Lord said, "I will hide my face from them...." (Deut. 32:20.) This apostasy of the House of Israel essentially extended through the Dark Ages, but in these last days the Lord has promised to redeem them. The prophets have promised that following a period of "falling away" (2 Thes. 2:3) there would be a "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21).

Looking to Book of Mormon history for a parallel, we recall Moroni's statement about the church Alma established. He said it was "the first church which was established among [the Nephites] after their transgression." (3 Ne. 5:12.)³⁰ Alma's son described the time preceding the founding of the church as a period of "deep sleep." (Alma 5:7; compare Isa. 29:10.)

The portion of the Nephite record in which this slumber is most pronounced is the book of Omni where as many as 230 years are meagerly covered in a matter of only a few verses. While the writers of the Book of Mormon were generally righteous men, this is one (and apparently the only) exception. Here Omni acknowledged, "I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done." (Omni 1:2.) His successor, Chemish, only contributed a single verse to the record. (1:9.) The two-verse contribution by Abinadom following that also reflects the spiritual depravity of this era. He confessed, "...I know of *no revelation* save that which has been written, *neither prophecy*, wherefore, that which is sufficient is written. And I make an end." (Omni 1:11.) His statement mirrors Isaiah's prophecy about the general apostasy, including that of the House of Israel: "...The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the *prophets and your rulers, the seers hath He covered*." (Isa. 29:10 = 2 Ne. 27:5.)

²⁹scattering mentioned in Jarom was of the people's own accord and not imposed due to wickedness. Nonetheless, his mention of a scattering at this point in time still serves as a flag to establish a parallel between the Lehite and Israelite nations. Furthermore, even though the Nephites were actually righteous at the time they dispersed themselves (Jarom 1:5), they degenerated soon after (Omni 1:5).

³⁰transgression" (3 Ne 5:12) could refer to the transgressions of the people in the land of Limhi who had apostatized through king Noah's wicked leadership--not to the people of Nephi as a whole. However, Alma not only established the church among some of the people of Limhi in the wilderness of Mormon, but he established the church in Zarahemla--the central land of the Nephites--as well: "We were brought into this land [Zarahemla], and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also." (Alma 5:5.) The wording of Book of Mormon history suggests that there was a period of transgression during which the true church did not exist, similar to the classical Apostasy. However, this does not mean that a complete apostasy took place, for there are several indications to the contrary. For example, Kings Benjamin and Mosiah (I and II), who lived during this era, all held the priesthood of God, and the latter two were Seers. These elements were absent after the apostasy of the House of Israel and of the Gentiles.