

DEED RESTRICTIONS AND BLESSINGS

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Yes, we have a rich heritage, but may I remind you that nations oftentimes sow the seeds of their own destruction even while enjoying unprecedented prosperity, even before reaching the zenith or the peak of their power. I think history clearly indicates that this is often the case. When it appears that all is well, oftentimes the very seeds of destruction are sown, sometimes unwittingly. Most of the great civilizations of the world have not been conquered from without until they have destroyed themselves from within by sowing these seeds.¹

—Ezra Taft Benson

Understanding that *the land* is directly connected to the prophecies and promises requires its inhabitants to be obedient to the restrictions that are intrinsic upon that land. From the prior discussion, the land will be a ‘land of freedom’ if those who inhabit this land are not only cognizant of—but obedient to—the restrictions placed on it by divine injunction. So that the reader of the Book of Mormon cannot forget or ignore these restrictions, they are found throughout its text. The many authors of this scripture, especially Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni (those who wrote and abridged the text), included these warnings and restrictions for those who would inhabit the land of promise. Mormon and Moroni wrote for an audience that was not contemporary with them, as they knew there were none left to read it. Yet they wrote by inspiration and under the direction of the Lord for a future people who would receive, read, and relate the text to themselves. The restrictions then should be taken seriously because they were included within the text for our day and time. The gospel is for the world, but the restrictions are included specifically for those who inhabit the promised land of the Book of Mormon, where the prophecies and promises specifically apply.

The Promised Land of Lehi

Because the blessings and restrictions (i.e., “promises”) are on the land rather than the people, the promises then remain connected to the land and conveyed (like a ‘title’) to those who are led there by the hand of the Lord. These limitations and blessings are the ‘deed restrictions’ connected to the Title of Liberty that the prophecies and promises outline. In the Book of Mormon these promises are made to the Jaredites and to Lehi’s descendants (including the people of Mulek) and also to the “Gentiles” who will come after the eradication of the Nephites in 420 A.D.. Most of the prophecies and promises within the Book of Mormon about the future inhabitants concentrate on the Gentiles. These Gentiles are important because it is by their hands that the record will come forth and accomplish the primary purposes of the text in distributing the gospel to the world. Therefore the Gentile narrative is significant throughout the Book of

¹ Ezra Taft Benson, *This Nation Shall Endure* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977], 179.

Mormon. Since the promises, blessings, and restrictions are connected to the land, the same prophecies and promises are in effect for these Gentiles and every people that has lived or will live upon the land (Ether 2:10–12). The words of the Lord given throughout the record provide the injunction, “*I would that ye should keep the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers*” (Mosiah 1:7). This charge applies to all nations and peoples who will reside on the land of promise and the land of liberty.

The inheritance promised to the descendants of Lehi until the coming of the Gentiles by the hand of the Lord could only be accomplished by seclusion. Many argue that when Lehi came to the western hemisphere it was so populated that their small group disappeared into the multitudes already there, physically and genetically. These presumptions are presented to convey the thought that the small drop of genetic identity, or DNA, belonging to Lehi and his family disappeared in the ocean of strangers living on the promised land before Lehi arrived.² This theory is presented for the rescue of Mesoamerica as the setting for the Book of Mormon since no genetic evidence is found (that is, mitochondrial DNA, not necessarily “Y” chromosome) implying that no ancient Israelite remnant existed in Central America.³ This notion is based on the supposition that the promised land of Lehi was in Mesoamerica and that the Yucatan Peninsula was the ‘promised land.’ If this basic or foundational setting is wrong, then all models and commentaries founded on that theory would be in question. There were, of course, people living along the west coast of the western hemisphere that are known to have come from Asia. The fact that these Asians were in mass living in Central America does not mean that Lehi landed there, nor does it mean that Guatemala was the promised land of the Book of Mormon. The argument for Central America as the land of Lehi is founded upon the so-called ‘monumental ruins;’ however, the prophecies as well as the promises connected to the land of Lehi cannot be fulfilled there, nor can the words of Joseph Smith.

The land was given to Lehi and his posterity, the same as it was given to the brother of Jared. Lehi blessed his son Joseph that the Lord will “consecrate also unto thee *this land*, which is a *most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever*; if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 3:2). And then to his son Sam, Lehi prophetically declared, “*for thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi. And thy seed shall be numbered with his seed*” (2 Nephi 4:11). Jacob, the son of Lehi, spoke specifically about the land where he was then living, as he prophesied: “Wherefore, I will consecrate *this land unto thy seed*, and them who shall be numbered among thy seed, forever, *for the land of their inheritance*; for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, above all other lands, wherefore *I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God*” (2 Nephi 10:19). In 3 Nephi, Christ emphasized this same thought but attributed this blessing of the land as an inheritance *from* the Father, stating that “*this is the land of your inheritance*; and the Father hath given it unto you” (3 Nephi 15:13). Twice more, the Savior stated, “the Father hath commanded me—that I should give unto *this people this land for their inheritance*” (3 Nephi 16:16; 20:14). Before Lehi landed in the land of promise, the brother of Jared also learned this land was for their inheritance as the Lord taught him that “the land which I shall give you for your inheritance...shall be a land choice above all other lands” (Ether 2:15). The land is promised to the seed and descendants of those who came with Lehi. It is to be a land secured for them through covenant and blessing, as a remnant of Lehi

² See *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research*, ed. Daniel C. Peterson, Michael F. Whiting, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: a Phylogenetic Perspective,” [Provo, Utah, The Neal A Maxwell Institute, 2008], 90–92. See also in same book Sorenson’s and Roper’s article entitled “Before DNA,” 42–45.

³ *Ibid.* Michael F. Whiting, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: a Phylogenetic Perspective,” 79–97.

would be spared in order to receive the gospel as delivered in the Book of Mormon by a servant of God.

A Land of Seclusion?

Part of the blessing of inheritance appears as an aspect of *geographical protection*. This segregation, or perhaps an *isolation* theme, is seen in the Book of Mormon as Lehi (who had by then arrived on the promised land) rehearsed the promises he received from the Lord about the land itself:

And behold, it is wisdom that *this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance.*

Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and *they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves.* And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and *there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance;* and they shall *dwell safely forever.* (2 Nephi 1:8–9)

Without question or conjecture, the Lord stated the land to which Lehi was led would and “should be kept *as yet* from the knowledge of other nations,” indicating that if any knew about this choice land “many nations would overrun the land.” The two words “as yet” loudly imply that when they landed, they landed in an area *without indigenous inhabitants*, or the multitudes espoused by many scholars. For this reason, the location of the land of promise *that fulfills the prophecies and promises* becomes important if we are to recognize the responsibilities placed upon those who possess the land. The Lord indicated in the reference above that the land of promise would be “*kept from the knowledge of other nations*” so the Lehites may “*possess this land unto themselves*” for their inheritance (2 Nephi 1:8). The Lord’s promise to Lehi was that Lehi and his descendants would be ‘kept from other nations and possess the land unto themselves,’ that there would be no loss of identity—physically or genetically.

This concept of a chosen piece of land for the descendants of Abraham is not new, as it is addressed over and over again throughout the Old Testament. Should the meanings of one testament be different from another when the statements, promises, and prophecies are virtually the same? The children of Israel received a specific and singular land within the lands of the Middle East and Fertile Crescent, which was not to be confused with a whole continent or hemisphere. Israel was led “by the hand of the Lord” to a chosen and promised land that had specific boundaries, contiguous to other lands without the same designations and blessings. Likewise, Moroni (quoting Ether) stated that the land given to Lehi and the Jaredites was a land for the inheritance of Joseph, a son of Israel, making a connection to ancient Israel: “*as Joseph brought his father down into the land of Egypt, even so he died there.*” Continuing, Moroni recorded “*...the Lord brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto the seed of Joseph that they should perish not. Wherefore, the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built upon this land; and it shall be a land of their inheritance...*” (Ether 13:7–8).

Many scholars stress that it was requisite that there were multitudes⁴ already on the promised land when and where Lehi landed. This assumption is made because of the known numbers of indigenous people that were living in along the western coast of the hemisphere whose cultures are dated previous to Lehi's landing in the promised land. However, this notion does not seem to be consistent with the text of the Book of Mormon itself, as quoted above. Perhaps Mesoamerica was already inhabited in 600 B.C., and perhaps Lehi landed in a more protected and isolated area of the hemisphere than traditional scholarship might want to admit or even examine.

Often, if not careful, theory becomes more important than the evidence and scripture themselves, and the interpretation of scripture is often manipulated to accommodate these theories, such as in the quote in 2 Nephi 1:8–9 above.⁵

Restrictions and Responsibilities

The two 'promised lands' of the Bible and Book of Mormon—given to Abraham and his posterity—have an irrevocable *promise* of protection and prosperity, in addition to these blessings, there are prophecies of destruction if those led there by the Lord fail to accept and remember that Jesus Christ is the God of the land (Ether 2:12). The restrictions, destructions, and resultant captivity are the same for both 'promised lands' of Israel and Joseph. The security of the land of inheritance in the Old World was founded upon the same principles as the Nephite land of promise, and through the prophecies and promises the inhabitants had been warned—such as when the children of Israel entered the land and when Lehi and his family arrived in their land. The restrictions and commandments for security in the land promised to Abraham are reviewed here. However, those that pertain to the land of Joseph to which Lehi is led are reviewed elsewhere in this book.

Moses recorded the words of the Lord about Passover and the land that the children of Israel would inhabit by warning:

And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. (Exodus 12:24–25)

The Law of Moses

Like the Book of Mormon, the restrictions in the Old Testament focus on the first of the Ten Commandments which required having “no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3), as Jesus Christ is the God of the promised lands.

Now these *are* the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do *them* in the land whither ye go to possess it:

That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43–45, 86–89. See especially Matthew Roper's article “Nephi's Neighbors,” 186–218.

⁵ *Ibid.* Matthew Roper's article, “Nephi's Neighbors,” 205–207.

Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do *it*; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 6:1–3)

Moses taught the children of Israel that the Lord would “...*enlarge thy coast*, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and *give thee all the land which he promised* to give unto thy fathers; *if thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them*, which I command thee this day, to *love the LORD thy God, and to walk ever in his ways...*” (Deuteronomy 19:8–9, see the whole chapter). Before Moses left Israel he again reminded them of the necessity of obedience in the promised land, and commanded them to set up stones as a witness to the covenant that they would obey the statutes of the Lord as they enter the promised land that “floweth with milk and honey”.

And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, *Keep all the commandments* which I command you this day.

And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over *Jordan unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaister them with plaister:

And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, *that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee.* (Deuteronomy 27:1–3)

When the children of Israel took possession of their promised land, they were instructed that the blessings of prosperity and nature upon the land would be *attached to their righteousness*, not to the unbelievers:

And that ye may *prolong your days in the land*, which the LORD swore unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land *that floweth with milk and honey*.

For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, *is* not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst *it* with thy foot, as a garden of herbs:

But *the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven:*

A land which the LORD thy God careth for: *the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.*

And it shall come to pass, *if ye shall hearken diligently* unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

That *I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.*

And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from

off the good land which the LORD giveth you. (Deuteronomy 11:9–17; see also Leviticus 26:2–20)

The implication is that “IF” the rain does not come in “due season,” and the droughts of moisture and rain fail to nourish the land, it is not because of the non-Israelite people that remain in the land, but a result of the wickedness of those who ‘profess to know the Lord’. These blessings are “irrevocably” connected to obedience and law by those who have accepted the gospel law—not those who have no law—for the rain will fall upon the righteous as well as the wicked. For example, often in the southwest when the land dries and the lakes and reservoirs are low, the local stakes and wards have a tendency to fast and pray for rain. But based on the scriptures pertaining to the Lord’s people on the “land of promise,” it is *forgiveness* that should be prayed for. The rain will come if the people are worthy for that blessing. Isaiah taught this best as he wrote about those who know and profess to know the Lord:

What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes *it brought forth wild grapes*.

And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard—I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down;

And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, and behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry. (2 Nephi 15:4–7)

The dedicatory prayer of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem stressed this same thought, as the blessings of the promised land were and are connected directly to the righteousness of Israel, i.e., those who know the Lord.

When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house:

Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and *bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers*.

When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them:

Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou *teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance*.

If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, *or* if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness *there be*;

What prayer and supplication soever be *made* by any man, *or* by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and *give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest*; (for thou, *even thou only*, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)

That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. (1 Kings 8:33–40)

This was seen at the time of Jeremiah and Lehi as they and other prophets warned about the disobedience of Jerusalem and Judah, and the resulting captivity that would follow if they remained unrepentant. Jeremiah described the religious climate that caused the Lord to send Lehi out of Jerusalem:

But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.

Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. (Jeremiah 5:23–25; see also Deuteronomy 28:15–68)

The promises connected to the land—that Joshua reminded Israel of before his death—were the consequences described when Israel came into the promised land, and covenanted to be obedient to the Lord and his statutes. Joshua reminded the children of Israel that “when ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and *ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you*” (Joshua 23:1–16).

The histories of Israel found throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 17:7–9, 26:2–3; Nehemiah 9:23–27) and the Book of Mormon stand as witnesses of the unfailing certainty of the promises and covenants the Lord made with Israel. This prophetic certainty remains even today. The command to worship the Lord in the promised land was instituted when the Lord brought a remnant of Shem from Babylon, as Abraham left Ur of Chaldees. From the blessing of Abraham, father of the faithful, the Lord said:

Arise, and take Lot with thee; for I have purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name in a strange land which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession, *when they hearken to my voice.* (Abraham 2:6)

The Latter Days

The promises of the Lord to the saints in this dispensation are the same as those given in every dispensation:

Keep all the commandments and covenants by which ye are bound; and I will cause the heavens to shake for your good, and Satan shall tremble and Zion shall rejoice upon the hills and flourish; (D&C 35:24)

The promises of God are not to be treated lightly since *all* blessings are consequences of obedience. “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which *all blessings* are predicated—And when we obtain *any blessing* from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–21).

In opposition to the blessings bestowed for obedience, there is also a loss of blessings connected to the disobedience of those who “profess” to know the Lord. “Hearken and hear, O ye my people, saith the Lord and your God, ye whom I delight to bless with the greatest of all blessings, ye that hear me; and ye that hear me not will I curse, *that have professed my name*, with the heaviest of all cursings” (D&C 41:1).

The Restoration of the gospel in this dispensation has resulted in the heavens opening again, and the Lord speaking of this promised land, and the inheritance of the righteous. In January 1831, nine months after the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Lord instructed the early members about the land of America:

And I hold forth and deign to give unto you greater riches, *even a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey*, upon which there shall be no curse when the Lord cometh;

And I will give it unto *you for the land of your inheritance, if you seek it with all your hearts*.

And this shall be my covenant with you, *ye shall have it for the land of your inheritance, and for the inheritance of your children forever*, while the earth shall stand, and ye shall possess it again in eternity, no more to pass away.

But, verily I say unto you that in time ye shall have no king nor ruler, for I will be your king and watch over you.

Wherefore, *hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people...* (D&C 38:18–22)

The phrase “if you seek it with all your hearts” (D&C 38:19) is not the quest for private property, but an eternal blessing granted by obedience to the commandments and laws of God which will activate the blessings promised. These are the blessings of inheritance, prosperity, and freedom. D&C 38:22 concluded with the injunction to “hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people.” Regardless of time, place, or nation, the notion and right of any type of personal *freedom* is permanently and directly connected to a personal responsibility. This is just as true for the Latter-day Saints in the United States today as it was in the time of the Abraham and Moses in the Bible, or the Jaredites, Lehitites, and Mulekites in the Book of Mormon. These blessings of freedom and inheritance can only be realized by obeying the same restrictions, and accomplishing the same requirements that are connected to the lands of promise found in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Moroni explained the promise given to the brother of Jared that outlines the responsibilities of those who will live on the land, as an ‘everlasting decree’ that will exist ‘henceforth and forever.’

And the Lord would not suffer that they should stop beyond the sea in the wilderness, but he would that they should come forth even unto the land of promise, which was choice above all other lands, which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people.

And he had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, *that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him*, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them. (Ether 2:7–8)

Moroni’s editorial comments follow as he discussed this same promised land to which the Jaredites were led—a land of which he is most familiar. The commentary continued:

And now, we can behold *the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off* when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

For behold, *this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off*; for it is the *everlasting decree of God*. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off.

And *this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God*—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

Behold, *this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ*, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written. (Ether 2:9–12)

This warning is included in the Book of Mormon for those who will live upon the land of promise. If this choice land cannot be determined by the overwhelming textual evidence, then this warning—and many others like it—is of no value or use. It is necessary that the reader, and in particular those living upon the “choice land,” know who they are, where they are living, and what their responsibilities are, or these prophecies have no meaning. Moroni made it clear he was writing to the future inhabitants who were “Gentiles.” It was necessary that these future Gentiles “know the decrees of God” because they would live upon “this choice land” and “be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven.” The “decrees of God” must be made known to the Gentiles because the blessings of freedom from captivity are connected to the requirement of serving and worshipping Jesus Christ.

The promised land of Israel and the land promised to the seed of Joseph have the same restrictions the same prophecies and promises to those to whom the land has been given. The responsibilities of those chosen, and those who choose, to live in these lands of promise are obedience to the commandments and the worship of the one and only true God. This prophetic requirement cannot be taken off the land as the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and then Judah have proven, both historically and scripturally. The promised land of the Book of Mormon also has similar promises of protection and prosperity for righteousness, and destruction as a result of wickedness and rejection of God, as seen with the histories of the Jaredites and the Nephites. The scriptural record of both ‘promised lands’ contain a record of a fallen people, because of their rejection of God and the ‘deed restrictions’ placed on the land prepared for them. For the promised lands to remain a land choice above all others, the requirements listed in the scriptural text must be read, understood, and adhered to with diligence.