

# MIGRATIONS TO THE PROMISED LAND

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*He [the Lord] watched over them [the Pilgrims] and safeguarded their descendants and those who followed them to America, and in due time, there came an opportunity to establish liberty such as humankind had not known before. The Lord raised up Washington, and with him that body of men who fought valiantly to establish for us in this land a government for which surely we are all grateful... The Lord has watched over his land... he led the Pilgrims here; he established the Constitution of the United States, and through the Prophet Joseph Smith restored the everlasting gospel to bless the children of men. If they will accept it and obey it, it will result in the salvation of the human family.<sup>1</sup>*

—George Albert Smith

**T**he first chronological mention of a “land of promise” is found in the Pearl of Great Price, as the text explains that Enos, the grandson of Adam, came out from an area called “Shulon, and dwelt in a *land of promise*” called Cainan (Moses 6:17). This land of Cainan was the home of Enoch, a homeland which he declared was the “land of my fathers, a land of righteousness” (Moses 6:41). The land would have been somewhere near the place of Adam-ondi-Ahman, where Adam, the father of all, gathered his righteous posterity (including Enoch) three years before his death (D&C 107:53). It is near Adam-ondi-Ahman that the New Jerusalem will be built in the Last Days, and the place where the city of Enoch will return. And perhaps to the same place, the land of righteous from which it ‘fled’ millennia before (see Moses 7:62–64).

Hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, who have assembled yourselves together, according to my commandments, *in this land, which is the land of Missouri*, which is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints.

Wherefore, *this is the land of promise*, and the *place for the city of Zion*.

And thus saith the Lord your God, if you will receive wisdom here is wisdom. Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse. (D&C 57:1–3)

The land where Adam and his righteous posterity lived was the first “promised land” mentioned in scripture. Lehi and his family were led by the hand of the Lord to the same promised land where the Savior explained that the New Jerusalem is to be built in the latter-days (3 Nephi 20:21; 21:22–25; Ether 13:2–4, 8–10).

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Q. Cannon, ed., *Latter-day Prophets and the United States Constitution* [Provo:BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991], 115.

## A Promised Land

In the Bible the phrase “land of promise” refers to the land to which Abraham was led, which ultimately became an inheritance for him and his posterity:

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

By faith he sojourned in the *land of promise*, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. (Hebrews 11:8–9)

The same land ‘promised’ to Abraham is the land to which the children of Israel were led by Moses after they left the worldly environs of Egypt.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, *and* go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swore unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it: (Exodus 33:1; see also Exodus 6:8 and Deuteronomy 19:8)

Moses was commanded “that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in *the land of promise*,” (D&C 124:38) when the children of Israel took possession of “the chosen land.” In the Joseph Smith Translation, Isaiah declared that in the last days the House of Jacob “*shall return to their land of promise*” which land is called the “Land of the Lord” (JST Isaiah 14:2). The “House of Jacob” would include the promised land of Israel and also the land of Joseph to which Lehi was led (Ether 13:4–8). The land promised to Abraham, or the land of Jerusalem in the Bible, is a land of promise and a land of inheritance for the children of Jacob or Israel; just the same as that ‘choice and promised land’ of the Book of Mormon is reserved as the land of Joseph.

The Book of Mormon also speaks extensively about a land of promise described often as the “land of their inheritance” or a “choice land above all other lands” and a “promised land” to the Jaredites and to Lehi and his family. The Book of Mormon also states that this same land given to Lehi and his descendants will become a “land of promise” and a “land of inheritance” for the Gentiles who will be led there by the hand of the Lord (1 Nephi 13:15; Mosiah 12:8; 3 Nephi 16:8, 21:4; Mormon 5:19). The Nephites are taught by Christ that this same promised land will be the land of the New Jerusalem (3 Nephi 21:33). In the Bible and the Book of Mormon, the House of Israel and the descendants of Joseph (who was sold into Egypt), are led by the hand of the Lord and directed by prophets of God to a ‘promised land’—a land prepared for them and given to them for an inheritance. Moroni spoke of the same promise of inheritance to the descendants of Joseph as he is translating and abridging the Jaredite record (Ether 13:2–8, 10–11). Like Moroni, Christ also spoke of this inheritance, to those people at the land Bountiful who are “*a remnant of the house of Joseph. And behold, this is the land of your inheritance; and the Father hath given it unto you*” (3 Nephi 15:12–13).

Not only is this land chosen as a land of inheritance for Lehi’s posterity, but also the Gentiles (who may also be of Joseph) receive an inheritance with the Lamanites who remain. As the Savior taught during His ministry among the Nephites, He spoke about the last days and the Gentiles upon the promised land, explaining that “my people who are *a remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles*, yea, in the midst of them...” (3 Nephi 21:12). He continued by stressing that if the Gentiles will not ‘harden their hearts’ that “I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be *numbered among this the remnant of Jacob*,

*unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance*” (3 Nephi 21:22) and be “numbered among my people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:6).

## Two Promised Lands

The phrases “land of promise” and “promised land” (as found in the scriptures) are selective and restrictive in definition. There are only two lands of promise mentioned in scripture, and both have these limiting interpretations. One is the land of the prophets and patriarchs of the Bible, the land the Savior walked and ministered during His mortal life and ministered to after His resurrection. The other “land of promise” is in the “choice land” where Lehi and his family were led, the land where the resurrected Lord ministered and taught the inhabitants, as he did in Palestine. Below is a list of the events that have, or will, take place in each ‘promised land’ found in the scriptures:

- Two promised lands that the seed of Abraham have been promised and led to for an inheritance.
- Two promised lands whose capitals are Jerusalem and New Jerusalem.
- Two promised lands from which scripture originates: *One*, the “stick of Judah” and *Two*, the “stick of Joseph” testifying of the resurrection and Atonement of Jesus Christ in the meridian of time, and the establishment of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Two promised lands in which the gospel was taught personally by the Savior and recorded as scripture.
- Two promised lands in which the priesthood organization is restored with a council or quorum of 12 apostles.
- Two promised lands in which the Church of Jesus Christ is established to spread throughout the world.
- Two promised lands from which one will go “forth the Law” and from the other will come the “word of the Lord.”
- Two promised lands in which the Savior will appear at the beginning of the Millennium.
- Two promised lands that are established for the gathering of Israel.
- Two promised lands that have restrictions of obedience for the safety and freedoms of the inhabitants.

From one land of promise, Lehi and his family who are descendants of Joseph through Manasseh, are led away and preserved from destruction and a physical captivity by Babylon. They are led to the other “promised land” which had been preserved for their religious freedom and their inheritance, yet they were eventually destroyed by a spiritual Babylon. To this same promised land comes the descendants of Joseph through Ephraim who are identified by Joseph Smith as the “Gentiles” (D&C 109:60) who come out of captivity from a spiritual Babylon for religious freedom. The freedom of the promised land is guaranteed only if those who inhabit the land do not succumb to the influences of Babylon and embrace the philosophies of the anti-Christ by rejecting the “God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12).

The phrase the “land of promise” or the “promised land” evokes a number of questions about the idiom that should be considered and addressed. These phrases “land of promise” and “promised land” in the Book of Mormon are the same land, and mean the same place in reference to the

land where Lehi was led as well as the Jaredites centuries before. Some have tried to conclude that these two phrases have different meanings because the prophecies and promises in the Book of Mormon about the chosen land do not fit with a personal theory or agenda. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the Book of Mormon will verify they are indeed the same (just a few of these references include 1 Nephi 13:12, 14, 30; 1 Nephi 18:22–25; Alma 37:44–45; Ether 2:7–9; Ether 6:5, 8, 12, 16, etc.).

This land in scripture is a land of promise because it is conveyed to a particular group of people, with promises given to both the land and those who live upon it. These prophecies and promises are of primary significance because of their frequent mention. This important implication of prophecy and that of promise can—and does—lie in the past, present, and the future, and is connected to the very foundation of the origin of the United States, the Constitution, and the freedoms all should cherish.

The righteous are always the ones who leave or are led away by God while the wicked are those who usually remain.

For behold, the Lord God has led away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure. And now behold, the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also. (2 Nephi 10:22)

This is true throughout scripture and Church history. Enoch and his city are described as having “fled” (Moses 7:69) the wicked world while Noah prepares to sail upon the waters with only his family of eight, saving only the righteous (Moses 8:26–30). The Jaredites are led away at the time of Babel. Abraham found it needful to find another place of residence (Abraham 1:1) in order to be protected in his priesthood and religion. Moses and the children of Israel left Egypt and traveled into the wilderness to worship the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and offer sacrifice (Exodus 3:18).

Two families living at the same time as Jeremiah are led away from Jerusalem because of the destruction that was to come upon Judah. These two families were the Rechabites (Jeremiah 35) and the Lehaites (1 Nephi 2:2). Again, the righteous were led away to protect themselves, their families, and their religion. Nephi is warned by the Lord to take those who were righteous and flee into the wilderness from Laman and Lemuel, also for their protection, their families, and their religion (2 Nephi 2:5–6). This motif is often seen in the history and prophecy recorded in the Book of Mormon (see Jacob 3:4).

The Puritans who left Europe were led to the ‘New World’ and came out of a captivity of persecution and incarceration for religious expression, landing in a new land that allowed them freedom and the right to worship and interpret scriptures according to their own wills. In this dispensation, the pattern still continued as Joseph Smith and later Brigham Young moved the saints westward under the direction of the Lord for their protection and their right to worship. This is the common motif for those who are directed by divine sanction in seeking a purity of worship and religious freedom under the hand of God.

The Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and explains how that gospel would be connected to the promised land that had been set apart for the descendants of Joseph, the patriarch to the children of Israel. It also reveals the history of the people who inhabit that choice land and includes important warnings for those who would find an inheritance there in the future.

## Jaredites

The first and oldest of the groups to begin their expedition to the promised land of the Book of Mormon, after the time of Noah, were the Jaredites. Leaving Mesopotamia at the time of the tower of Babel, the Jaredites were led by the Lord on their journey to the land of promise. The Lord, speaking to the brother of Jared while en route, stated: “And these are my thoughts upon the land which I shall give you for your inheritance; for *it shall be a land choice above all other lands*” (Ether 2:15). The prophet Ether taught that the land to which the Jaredites were led was connected to Noah, as Moroni recorded that Ether “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*” (Ether 13:2). After the flood of Noah and before there were nations or people living there, it was “a chosen land of the Lord.”

After traveling in a northward direction, the Lord comforted the brother of Jared by stating that, “I will go before thee into a land,” explaining that the land that they were to inherit “*is choice above all the lands of the earth*” (Ether 1:42). In the wilderness for years and on the edge of the known world, “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*” (Ether 2:7). Having built barges that were watertight, the Jaredites boarded their vessels and were driven by the great winds “*towards the promised land*” (Ether 6:8). After being upon the waters for nearly a year:

...they did *land upon the shore of the promised land*. And when they had set their feet upon the shores *of the promised land* they bowed themselves down upon the face of the land, and did humble themselves before the Lord, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them.

And it came to pass that they went forth upon the face of the land, and began to till the earth. (Ether 6:12–13)

Moroni, while abridging the Jaredite record, explained that the land to which they were led was “*a land which is choice above all other lands*” (Ether 2:10). In other words, it was not just a fertile place to live, but a chosen land that was endowed by “the decrees of God concerning this land, *that it is a land of promise*” (Ether 2:9). “*And thus the Lord did pour out his blessings upon this land, which was choice above all other lands*” (Ether 9:20).

The brother of Jared and those who were with him knew and understood that the land to which they traveled was watched over by the Lord, and was a land that was choice unto God above all others. This was a land that was not only promised to them, but one that held particular promises and blessings for those who would inhabit it. It was a land that was sacred to the Lord, one consecrated and set apart specifically to be a blessing for the righteous.

## Lehites

The promised land motif taught to the Jaredites was also confirmed to the next group of pilgrims described in the Book of Mormon. About six hundred years before Christ, the prophet Lehi, while preaching in Jerusalem, was warned that he should take his family and leave the land of Judea. Lehi declared to his family that “*I have obtained a land of promise*” (1 Nephi 5:5). Nephi, the son of Lehi, is told by the Lord that because of his obedience that he also “...*shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands*” (1 Nephi 2:20). The Lord instructed Lehi that another family should be brought out of Jerusalem “that his sons should take daughters to wife, that they might raise up

seed unto the Lord *in the land of promise*” (1 Nephi 7:1). The Lord explained that the blessings of the promised land would extend to Nephi’s posterity with the same restriction of obedience: “*Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise*” (1 Nephi 4:14).

Lehi taught that he and his family being led to the land of promise was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the scattering of the house of Israel, as “...*he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth*” (1 Nephi 10:13). As the children of Israel were led by the Lord from Egypt, so also the Lord became the guide, directing Lehi and his group to the promised land.

And I will also be your *light in the wilderness*; and *I will prepare the way before you*, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments *ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led*.

Yea, and the Lord said also that: After ye have arrived *in the promised land*, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem. (1 Nephi 17:13–14)

Arriving in a place that Lehi called Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:5), Nephi was commanded to construct a ship under the direction and inspiration of the Lord (1 Nephi 17:7–18). Like the Jaredites before, the Lehites loaded their ship with “provisions and things” and “put forth into the sea and were driven forth before the wind *towards the promised land*” (1 Nephi 18:8). After the difficulties of weather and rebellion upon the water, Nephi stated, “...I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again *towards the promised land*. And it came to pass that 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 18:22–23). Now physically on the land of promise, Nephi described the land as a choice land of bounty and blessing:

And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that *they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance*.

And it came to pass that *we did find upon the land of promise*, as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there *were beasts in the forests of every kind*, both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals, which were for the use of men. And we did find all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper. (1 Nephi 18:24–25)

Lehi, concerned for the spiritual welfare of his posterity, “spake unto them *concerning the land of promise, which they had obtained*—how merciful the Lord had been in warning us that we should flee out of the land of Jerusalem” (2 Nephi 1:3). Reminding them of the recent past, Lehi taught his family about the mercies of the Lord in their physical salvation, something perhaps only those who are spiritually in tune might view as a blessing.

But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, *we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted*

*this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.* (2 Nephi 1:5)

The verse above is crucial to understanding where the promised land might be located, and to which land the Gentiles would later be led. The Lord declared to Lehi that the land of promise is a land for those who “*should be led out of other countries*” by Him. Which land was dedicated to Lehi’s “*children forever*” and should be the “*land for the inheritance*” of his seed. The Lord stressed this thought later as Lehi blessed his son Joseph with a concerted restriction: “...the Lord 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). Jacob, the brother of Nephi, taught his ‘brethren’ of the promises of the Lord upon those who were to live upon this land as he reiterated the teachings of his brother and father, and reminded his brethren that “...*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*,” and then the restriction; “*wherefore I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God*” (2 Nephi 10:19). Jacob reminded them of a number of significant concepts connected with the land of promise in 2 Nephi 10:19, and each concept is repeated throughout the Book of Mormon:

- It is and will be; a “*consecrated*” land to their seed and others.
- There will eventually be others who will be “*numbered*” among their posterity.
- It will be a land of “*inheritance*” for the posterity of Lehi and others.
- That the land is “*a choice land...unto God above all other lands*.”
- That all that “*dwell thereon that they shall worship*” God.

The text of the Book of Mormon places prominence upon the promised land to which the Jaredites and Lehi with his posterity are led. It is a covenanted and “*consecrated land*.” This land of promise is a land that is “*choice*,” not just to those who have possessed it in the past, or will in the future dwell there, but “*unto*” God—“*above all other lands*.” Because it is “*choice*” unto God, He has placed restrictions, limitations, and boundaries upon the land that cannot be ignored without reaping curses, calamities, and consequences by the inhabitants, as the history of the Jaredites and Nephites have proven.

To remind the readers again: the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also a record about the promised land and most of the prophecies and promises in the Book of Mormon are associated with this land. Finally, it is a record of a “*fallen people*,” a history of those inhabitants who did not take seriously the spiritual and temporal restrictions placed upon the land, and the blessings of the gospel that they had received.

### **A Consecrated and Holy Land**

The Book of Mormon teaches that the land of promise is not limited only to the three historical groups discussed within the text, but also to others, as the Lord “*hath covenanted this land*” unto Lehi’s seed “*and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord*” (2 Nephi 1:5). Lehi also prophesied “*according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord*. Wherefore, *this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring...*” (2 Nephi 1:6–7). Whom shall he bring? The brother of Jared is taught that the land was chosen and set apart for those who

“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*” (Ether 2:7). This land of promise is called by the Lord a “holy land” and the blessing and restriction is again emphasized by the prophet Enos as he hears the voice of the Lord saying, “I have given unto them *this land, and it is a holy land*; and I curse it not *save it be for the cause of iniquity*” (Enos 1:10). Lehi, speaking to Zoram, stated that this promised land is a land “*the Lord hath consecrated for the security*” of those who keep the commandments (2 Nephi 1:32), “and nothing, *save it shall be iniquity* among them, shall harm or disturb their posterity *upon the face of this land forever*” (2 Nephi 1:31). One word used by the Lord in reference to this favored land is “consecrated,” which means “to make holy” as the Lord affirms in Enos 1:10.

The land of the Book of Mormon is a “holy land” that is “preserved for a righteous people” who will be led out of “other countries by the hand of the Lord” and “consecrated” to “whom he [the Lord] shall bring.” These clear and concise phrases are coupled to the “land” that is “choice” unto God. It is a land chosen for the righteous believers and those whom He will lead there. It is a land set apart for the work of God, a land chosen by God—separated, consecrated, and protected by God—and inhabited by divine authorization. One primary group brought to the land by the hand of the Lord is the “Gentiles,” who are discussed from beginning to end within the text. This is a definite and specific fourth group in the plates of Nephi who are brought to the same holy land as the Jaredites, Lehites, and Mulekites.

### **The Promise of the Promised Land**

Because the land to which Lehi is led is “holy” and “consecrated unto God,” there are boundaries set that cannot be crossed and blessings connected to obedience to His commands and limitations. For the Lord has taught that “when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21). These limitations and restrictions placed by God on the land of promise are as easily seen in the Book of Mormon as are the blessings. The restrictions and blessings are not specific for a particular people or a particular time in history, but are *connected to the land itself* and, therefore, to all who might dwell there. That being the case, these restrictions and blessings present a number of quandaries to the student of the Book of Mormon. First, where the location of that “chosen and promised land” is, upon which these restrictions and blessings are associated? Second, who are the people today responsible and attached to those commands and limitations? And third, what is the spiritual state of those in the “promised land” as compared to the scriptural history of those who inhabited the same land in the past?

The impetus and major reason for the Book of Mormon is that it contains the gospel of Christ that ‘Jew and Gentile’ might be convinced that Jesus is the Christ. However, the second theme centers around the prophecies and promises *of the land*; and the responsibility of those who dwell on it. In the past, an intellectual emphasis has been put on a location with monumental ruins as the determination for the setting of the Book of Mormon rather than on the actual words of the text. When those words—those promises and prophecies that are connected to the land—are allowed to speak for themselves, the distinctive and descriptive characteristics of the promised land become visible, and it then becomes an uncomplicated task to establish the identity of this chosen land.

The gospel contained within the Book of Mormon is for the world and is meant to “go forth unto every kindred, tongue, and people” (1 Nephi 5:18). However, the promised and prophetic content about Lehi’s land of promise is directly connected to the land and people who inhabit it, and are specific about the land to which Lehi was led. The characters and attitudes of individuals, and the



collective wickedness and righteousness of those who know and knew the gospel, is the same in every age, and is found among all who have received the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wherever the land is that Lehi landed and lived, and that the Jaredites inhabited, is the same land with the promises attached to it. Both cultures lived in the same land that was chosen by God to be “choice above all other” lands. The record proves by the spiritual and scriptural history it was the same land with the same restrictions and blessings that are promised and prophesied in the Book of Mormon. To take the Book of Mormon most seriously, the land chosen that is set apart for the fulfillment of the prophecies and promises, restrictions and blessings should be sought after and found to fully comprehend the responsibilities resting upon those living in that land. If that chosen land cannot be identified, then major prophetic messages of the Book of Mormon will go unheeded with prophesied disastrous consequences.