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"He Shall Prepare a Way"

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Source: *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*

Published: Salt Lake City; Cornerstone Publishing, 1999 (1st Edition)

Page(s): 104–109

Chapter 12

“HE SHALL PREPARE A WAY”

I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Nephi 3:7)

In 1 Nephi 3:7, Nephi expressed his unqualified trust in the Lord to help his servants accomplish his will. The Lord instructed Nephi’s father, Lehi, to send his sons back to Jerusalem to procure the brass plates from Laban. It was not an easy task, but Nephi had faith that the Lord would prepare the way for them. He recorded, “When my father heard these words he was exceedingly glad, for he knew that I had been blessed of the Lord” (1 Nephi 3:8).

Lehi’s sons were unsuccessful in their first attempt to obtain the plates. When Laman, Nephi’s brother, was driven from Laban’s house, the young men began contemplating a return trip to their father’s camp in the wilderness (1 Nephi 3:11-14). But Nephi persuaded them to continue with their mission:

I said unto them that: As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us. Wherefore, let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord. (1 Nephi 3:15-16)

These words reflect those he uttered in the presence of his father before leaving for Jerusalem. Nephi proposed to his brothers that they should go to their father’s house to gather up their wealth to purchase the plates from Laban. This would prove that they were not the thieves he accused them of being (1 Nephi 3:13).

OBTAINING THE PLATES

Ironically, this gesture resulted in Laban's theft of Lehi's possessions and the sons were again driven away and hid out in a cave. Laman and Lemuel were angry at Nephi and Sam and beat them until an angel stopped them (1 Nephi 3:16-27).

OBTAINING THE PLATES

When the angel departed, Nephi reiterated his belief that the Lord would help them get the plates from Laban. "Let us go up again unto Jerusalem," he said, "and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands" (1 Nephi 4:1). As proof of his words, he reminded his brothers that the Lord had saved the Israelites from the Egyptians by parting the Red Sea for them (1 Nephi 4:2-3).

The brothers returned to Jerusalem and Nephi crept inside the city wall by night. He noted, "And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do" (1 Nephi 4:6). Having demonstrated his faith in the Lord by his works, Nephi now received divine guidance. He found Laban drunken and unconscious on the ground and was constrained by the Spirit to slay him (1 Nephi 4:5-18). Dressing in Laban's clothing, he was then able to procure the plates and return to his brethren outside the city (1 Nephi 4:19-14).

When the brothers returned to their father's tent in the wilderness, their mother Sariah declared,

Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. (1 Nephi 5:8)

Sariah had learned the lesson that Nephi already knew—the Lord does not give commandments his children cannot obey.

A WAY IS PREPARED IN THE WILDERNESS

Nephi had another opportunity to demonstrate his faith in the Lord after he and his brothers had made a second trip to Jerusalem to bring Ishmael's family into the wilderness with them (1 Nephi 7:2-5). One night, the Lord commanded Lehi that the group should leave their camp and move on. In order that Lehi might accomplish this, the Lord provided him a ball or director (called the Liahona in Alma 37:38), which Lehi discovered outside his tent the following morning (1 Nephi 16:9-10). This device, working according to the group's faith, showed the direction they should travel and gave additional instructions as necessary.

When Nephi broke his steel bow, the family despaired of having sufficient food to eat (1 Nephi 16:18). Not only did Laman, Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael complain in their usual fashion, but, Nephi added, “my father began to murmur against the Lord his God” (1 Nephi 16:20). Nephi's reaction was quite different. Believing that God would not have sent them into the wilderness without making provision for their survival, he chastised the others (1 Nephi 16:22). As before, he demonstrated his faith by works, manufacturing a bow and arrow and preparing a sling and stones. He then asked his father where he should go to obtain food (1 Nephi 16:23). Ashamed, the other members of the family humbled themselves, and Lehi enquired of the Lord by means of the Liahona. Nephi followed the divine instructions and returned to camp with food (1 Nephi 16:24-32). He explained,

And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that 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; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness. (1 Nephi 17:3)

BUILDING A SHIP

When the group arrived at the sea, the Lord commanded Nephi to build a ship. Nephi had no skills in shipbuilding, but he did not hesitate to obey the Lord's instructions. He had faith that the Lord would provide the means to accomplish his commandments. Nephi asked only that the Lord show him where to find ore with which to make tools. Again he demonstrated his faith by works, constructing a bellows to begin making the tools. He explained, "Wherefore, I, Nephi, did strive to keep the commandments of the Lord, and I did exhort my brethren to faithfulness and diligence. And it came to pass that I did make tools of the ore which I did molten out of the rock" (1 Nephi 17:15-16).

Making tools was one thing,¹ but Nephi's brothers mocked his plans to construct a ship (1 Nephi 17:17-22). In reply, he again used the example of the deliverance of Egypt under Moses at the Red Sea and other miracles in the wilderness (1 Nephi 17:23-32). He also reminded his brethren that the last time he had told them this they had been chastised by an angel for their disobedience (1 Nephi 17:45). He added,

If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done. And now, if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship? (1 Nephi 17:50-51)²

¹ Nephi may have been a smith by profession. See Chapter 10, "Was Lehi a Caravaneer?" in this volume.

² Compare the stories of Enoch (Moses 6:34; 7:13-14) and Nephi the son of Helaman (Helaman 10:5-10; 11:4-6), who were told to call upon the powers of nature to affect the earth.

“HE SHALL PREPARE A WAY”

GOD PREPARES A WAY FOR OTHERS

There is no indication in the scriptures that Noah, described as “a just man and perfect in his generations,” hesitated to construct the ark when the Lord commanded him. There have been a few prophets who hesitated because they lacked faith in their own abilities, but the Lord was able to overcome their objections.³ Jonah didn’t want to preach to the people of Nineveh, so he tried to run away from his prophetic responsibilities. In the end, the Ninevites repented as the Lord expected.

The sons of Mosiah were in a situation like that of Jonah. They proposed a mission to convert the Lamanites, noted for their hatred and harsh treatment of Nephites (Alma 17:14; 26:9). Their father, perhaps with some anxiety, asked the Lord’s counsel and was assured that the Lord would be with and protect his sons (Mosiah 28:1-8).⁴ Demonstrating their faith by their deeds, they managed to convert many thousands of Lamanites to the Nephite religion (Alma 26:4, 13, 22).⁵

Alma the younger faced a similar situation when he went to teach the people in the city of Ammonihah. Driven from the city, he decided to go to the town of Aaron. But the Lord sent an angel to stop him and instruct him to return to Ammonihah. Meanwhile, the angel prepared the way for him by telling one of the city’s inhabitants, a man named Amulek, to expect a prophet of God as a visitor (Alma 8:13-22; 10:7-10).

³ Note, for example, the stories of Enoch (Moses 6:31-34), Moses (Exodus 3:11-15; 4:1-16), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6-9).

⁴ Mosiah’s grandfather, for whom he was named, had demonstrated such faith that, when the Lord told him to leave the city of Nephi, he gathered together the faithful and departed into the wilderness (Omni 1:12-14).

⁵ For a discussion of the mission of the sons of Mosiah, see John A. Tvedtnes, “The Sons of Mosiah: Emissaries of Peace,” in Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (eds.), *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret & FARMS, 1990).

THE WAY IS PREPARED AGAIN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Two nearly identical incidents have occurred in the Middle East. In each, the Lord prepared both the missionary and the individual he would convert by revealing his will to both. One is recorded in Acts 10. A Roman army officer named Cornelius, living at Caesarea, was told by an angel that he should seek knowledge from Simon Peter. While Cornelius' servants made their way to the port city of Joppa, where Peter was staying, the apostle experienced a unique dream in which he learned that he could now take the gospel to non-Jews. After seeing the Holy Ghost fall on Cornelius and his family, he baptized them. They were the first non-Jewish members of Christ's church in the meridian of time.

A similar event happened nearly two millennia later. In 1886, Jacob Spori, a missionary for the LDS Church in the Middle East, on board a ship bound for the Palestinian port-city of Haifa, had a dream in which he learned that he should walk down a certain street. In his dream, he saw a blacksmith with a short coal-black beard, whom he was told would be prepared to receive the message of the restored gospel. Spori reported that, while walking down the street in Haifi (during his first visit to that city), he was met by the blacksmith, Georg Johann Grau. Grau came running out to see him and informed him that he had seen Spori in a dream and had been told that the stranger would have a divine message for him. On August 29, 1886, Georg and Magdalena Grau were the first persons baptized by priesthood authority in modern times in the land of Jesus, only a few miles from Caesarea, where Peter had baptized Cornelius and his family.

CONCLUSION

The message of Nephi remains as valid today as it was nearly 2,600 years ago. When the Lord commands us to do anything, he prepares the way for us to accomplish his will.