



FOREWORD

STARK IN ITS APPEARANCE and grand in its sweep, the Arabian desert rolls out a carpet of contrasts as far as the eye can see—mountains of sand, valleys scooped out by the wind, seasonal pools of water brought to life by brief rains, dark igneous mountains muscling above the parched soil, spindly plants extending their roots for dozens of meters in search of moisture, rocks blackened by millennia of blazing sun. All of these were the changeless, sleepless companions of Lehi, Sariah, and their little party of travelers for eight years in the wilderness. Their passing, it seems, drew only occasional attention, and the constant eye of God.¹

Against this harsh landscape, events played out that would expose the inner characters of the travelers. The documentary *Journey of Faith*, filmed on location in Arabia, as well as in Guatemala, has tried to capture the desperate conditions that attended anyone who moved through the Arabian Peninsula. One simple mistake or miscalculation would lead to serious loss or death. Such constant threats in a desert environment find voice in Lehi's dream when he speaks of "a dark



and dreary waste,” as he travels at night, and when he discovers a lifesaving tree with fruit and a precious “river of water,” which would offer nourishment to people wandering in “forbidden paths” and on “strange roads” (1 Nephi 8:7, 10, 13, 28, 32).

Why pay attention to this story? Because it became the defining experience in the lives of that first generation and in the memories of those who came after. So important was this trek that, though the numbers of the travelers were few, their story was comparable to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, also a desert saga. Grasping its significance, Nephi writes his account as a new exodus, underlining this concept even by the passages that he selects to quote from the prophet Isaiah.² In his narrative Nephi constantly draws our attention to the Israelite exodus and its place in understanding the experience of his own family. For example, when trying to encourage his brothers to persist in their efforts to obtain the brass plates, he appeals to the divine powers that Moses was allowed to wield at the Red Sea (see 1 Nephi 4:1–3). Plainly, in Nephi’s mind, Moses’s experience prefigured their own. In a second instance, when Nephi undertakes the building of his ship in response to divine instruction, he tries to dispel his brothers’ doubts by pointing to the divine guidance that Moses enjoyed when leading the Israelites from Egypt (see 1 Nephi 17:23–42). Even his language borrows language at home in the exodus story, such as the vivid verb “to murmur.”³

Later Book of Mormon authors reflected back on this journey, seeing in it the proof of the Lord’s hand in people’s lives, for reward or for punishment. For instance, King Benjamin’s charge to his son Mosiah, who would succeed him on the throne, highlighted the journey as a lesson in aspects of disobedience: “as they [the travelers] were unfaithful they did not prosper nor progress in their journey.” In fact, growing more specific, Benjamin noted that they “were driven back, and . . . were smitten with famine and sore afflictions” (Mosiah 1:17). Similarly, in Alma’s instruction to his son Helaman, he stressed that, when Lehi’s party “forgot to exercise their faith and diligence” during the journey, “they tarried in the wilderness, and did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst” (Alma 37:41–42). Even so, Alma reminded hearers on another occasion, his people were to “remember that our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God . . . [and] that they were all led by him through the wilderness” (Alma 9:9). Alma clearly implies that Lehi and his party would not have survived in the wilderness without divine aid.

The images of the Arabian desert captured in this volume and in the film *Journey of Faith* make Alma’s description all the more vivid. The film and this book seek to capture in word and image both the monumental challenges that Lehi and Sariah faced in the wilderness and the importance of this venture, which was celebrated



and remembered by their descendants for a thousand years thereafter.

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Notes

1. Attempts to suggest that Lehi and his party left a discernible footprint in Arabia as they traveled fall flat because the so-called distinctive elements turn out to be widely shared cultural traits among Semitic peoples, including Hebrews and Arabs. For a contrary view, see Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort: 1996), 77–101. Of course, members of the party interacted with others as they traveled, as illustrated in the Lord's words through Lehi wherein he warns against taking multiple wives, something that someone in the traveling party evidently was wanting to do (see Jacob 2:23–34).
2. See George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief*, ed. Neal A. Lambert (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26; Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 38–51; Noel B. Reynolds, "The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 44/2 (2005): 4–23; Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi as Moses," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 26–35; on Isaiah as an important source for the concepts of scattering and subsequent gathering, as a second exodus, see Avraham Gileadi, "Isaiah—Key to the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 199–203; Monte S. Nyman, "Isaiah: Interpretations in Modern Scripture," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 701–2; S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 10.
3. For "murmur," see 1 Nephi 2:11, 12; 3:5, 31; 4:4; 16:3, 20, 35, 36; 17:17, 22, 49; 2 Nephi 5:3; Exodus 15:24; 16:2, 7, 8, 9, 12; 17:3; Numbers 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11, 41; 17:5, 10; Deuteronomy 1:27. This dimension was pointed out by Szink in "Nephi and the Exodus," 39–41.