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### The Jaredite Ocean Voyage

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*For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you. Nevertheless, I will bring you up again out of the depths of the sea; for the winds have gone forth out of my mouth, and also the rains and the floods have I sent forth. And behold, I prepare you against these things; for ye cannot cross this great deep save I prepare you against the waves of the sea, and the winds which have gone forth, and the floods which shall come. Therefore what will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea? (Ether 2:24-25)*

In Ether 2:24-25, it is evident that the Jaredite crossing of the ocean to the New World was accompanied by rains, winds, and heavy wave action. This is reiterated in Ether 6:5-8:

And it came to pass that the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind. And it came to pass that they were many times buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind. And it came to pass that when they were buried in the deep there was no water that could hurt them, their vessels being tight like unto a dish, and also they were tight like unto the ark of Noah;

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therefore when they were encompassed about by many waters they did cry unto the Lord, and he did bring them forth again upon the top of the waters. And it came to pass that the wind did never cease to blow towards the promised land while they were upon the waters; and thus they were driven forth before the wind.

The comparison with Noah's ark is significant because traditions about both stories associate the ocean voyage with mountainous waves and glowing stones to provide light within the ark.

### *A COMPARISON TO ACCOUNTS OF THE FLOOD*

Speaking of the flood of Noah's time, an Ethiopic Christian text says,

But when the windows opened wide, all stores [of water] and depths were opened, and all the stores of the winds, and the whirlwind, thick mist, gloom and darkness spread abroad. The sun and moon and stars, withheld their light. It was a day of terror, such as had never been. Then the sea all round, began to raise its waves on high like mountains; and it covered the whole face of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

While the Bible says the flood waters covered the mountains (Genesis 7:18-19), the story in this Ethiopic document makes the waves high like mountains, which closely parallels the wording in Ether 6:6.

The Jaredite account makes it clear that the high waves

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<sup>1</sup> *Conflict of Adam and Eve* III, 9:6-7, in S. C. Malan, *The Book of Adam and Eve*, also called *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1882), 155.



## A COMPARISON TO ACCOUNTS OF THE FLOOD

resulted from intense winds that came from the Lord. A number of early traditions indicate that the tower of Babel—from which the Jaredites fled (Ether 1:33)—was destroyed by strong winds sent by God.<sup>2</sup> Some texts speak of the “flood of wind” that followed the flood of water.<sup>3</sup> Hugh Nibley has suggested that this time of great wind is what produced the stormy seas crossed by the Jaredites.<sup>4</sup>

### *LIGHT FOR THE VOYAGE*

The book of Mormon describes how the brother of Jared prepared sixteen crystalline stones that the Lord touched, making them glow so that they could provide light to each of the vessels that would carry them across the ocean (Ether 2:22-3:4; 6:2-3). This story, too, is reminiscent of stories about the ark of Noah. Several early Jewish sources indicate that God told Noah to suspend precious stones or pearls inside of the ark to lighten it; in some traditions, it is a jewel-encrusted heavenly book. The gems would glow during the night and dim during the day so Noah, shut up in the ark, could tell the time of day and how many days

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the story is found in the *Chronography* of Bar Hebraeus, *Jubilees* 10:26, and in *Sibylline Oracles* 3:101-107.

<sup>3</sup> In a story paralleling Abraham 1:15-20, *Conflict of Adam and Eve* III, 24:8 tells how God sent a wind, whirlwind, and earthquake to destroy the idols at the time Nimrod attempted to slay Abraham (cf. 25:1-2). The same story is told in *Book of the Rolls* folio 120a, *Book of the Cave of Treasures* folios 23b.2-24a.1, and *Book of the Bee* 23, where the blast is termed a “wind-flood” and is compared to the flood of water sent in the days of Noah. Significantly, early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tradition attributes to Nimrod the construction of the tower of Babel.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret, 1988), 359-79; *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret, 1988), 329-34; *Since Cumorah* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret, 1988), 208-10; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret, 1989), 331-332; *The Ancient State* (Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret, 1991), 33-34; *Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 4* (Provo: FARMS, 1993), 244-245, 269.

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had passed.<sup>5</sup> This was the explanation given by the rabbis for the *śōhar* that the Lord told Noah to construct in the ark. The word is rendered “window” in the King James version of Genesis 6:16 but “light” in some other translations.<sup>6</sup>

A similar tradition is found among the Arabs, who may have borrowed it from the Jews. Al-Kisāʿī reported that when Noah made the ark, he put the name of one of the prophets (including those yet to be born) on each of the pegs, “and they shone like the stars, except for the one with the name of Muhammad, which shone as brightly as the sun and the moon together.”<sup>7</sup>

Rabbi Eliezer tells a similar story about the “great fish” that “the Lord had prepared” to swallow Jonah (Jonah 1:17). He notes that Rabbi Meir spoke of a pearl being suspended inside the fish to give light to Jonah like the noonday sun, and by which he was able to see all that was in the sea (*Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 10).

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<sup>5</sup> TB *Sanhedrin* 108b; TY *Pesahim* 1.1; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 6:16; *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 31.11; *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 23; Rashi on Genesis 6:16. For a recap of the story, see Louis Ginzberg, ed., *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1937) 1.162-163. The first person to bring the Jewish tradition to the attention of Latter-day Saints was Janne M. Sjodahl, in his *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City, 1927), 248. The tradition was discussed at length by Hugh Nibley, “There Were Jaredites: The Shining Stones,” *Improvement Era* 59 (September 1956):630-32, 672-75; *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1988), 366-379; *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1988), 337-358; *Since Cumorah* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1988), 209-10; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1989), 243-4, 329. For a study of this and other glowing stones stories, see John A. Tvedtnes, “Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2, Fall 1997.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of a “window” came from the Latin Vulgate translation and is also found in the Greek translation by Aquila. The Aramaic *Targum Onkelos* renders it “light.”

<sup>7</sup> W. M. Thackston, Jr., transl., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisāʿī* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 2:98.



## POSSIBLE ROUTES

### *POSSIBLE ROUTES*

According to Ether 2:25, the Jaredite barges were driven by the wind. Some critics have noted that strong winds would have enabled them to sail to the New World in less than the 344 days indicated for the voyage in Ether 6:11. But the Jaredite vessels were not sailing vessels and hence would have depended on ocean currents to cross the ocean, most likely the North Pacific.

In 1964 two prominent non-Mormon scholars, Clifford Evans and Betty J. Meggers noted that a boat caught off the coast of Japan would be carried by the North Pacific reaching land in about 11 months (330 days), which corresponds closely with the timeframe given in the book of Ether. They wrote:

If a boatload of Early Middle Jomon fishermen left the sheltering bays of Kyushu and went out into the sea off the southeastern coast in October or November, they would have entered a zone with some of the strongest currents in the Northern Pacific, running northeastward at 24-43 miles per day. Records for the 40-year period between 1901-1940 tabulate 802 typhoons, of which 130 were in October and 67 in November. A canoe caught too far from shore by one of these storms might easily be swept by the combined northeasterly pressure of wind and current far out to sea before control was regained. Even if the occupants retained possession of their paddles, they might have been unable to turn back. During the month of November, westerly and northerly winds predominate in the northern hemisphere, and are steadiest and of greatest force between about the 40th and 55th parallels. In addition, the percentage of gales increases during November in high latitudes, occurring at an average frequency of one every 8-10 days over the

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greater part of the northern Pacific except near coasts. A combination of these forces would have borne a canoe eastward along the great circle route, which on a flattened map curves far north of Hawaii. Records during the past century demonstrate the feasibility of such a drift vessel reaching land with living passengers after a voyage of 11 months.<sup>8</sup>

Another study produced the same year suggests that this current would bring a vessel to land somewhere off the coast of northern or central Mexico, depending on the time of year.<sup>9</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Several aspects of the story of the Jaredite voyage across the ocean to the New World can be confirmed by ancient traditions that were generally unknown in Joseph Smith's day and by modern research. This information lends authenticity and credibility to the story told in the Book of Ether.

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<sup>8</sup> Clifford Evans and Betty J. Meggers, "Transpacific origin of Valdivia Pottery on Coastal Ecuador," *XXXVI Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Espana, 1964* (Sevilla, 1966), 66. The presentation was based on the discovery of Jomon period Japanese pottery in Ecuador, suggesting that the Japanese had, in fact, crossed the Pacific to South America in the late third millennium B.C. The author thanks Matthew Roper for bringing this study to his attention.

<sup>9</sup> Carl L. Hubbs and Gunnar I. Roden, "Oceanography and Marine Life along the Pacific Coast of Middle America," in Robert Wauchope, gen. ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas, 1964-1976), 1:148, 154-55, 160. Again, thanks for this information are due to Matthew Roper.