

## 15. Defining the Exodus as a Rebirth (Exodus 14–17)

Israel's exodus out of Egypt led by Moses was a turning point in the history of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The descent phase of humiliation and suffering they experienced at the hands of the Egyptians led directly to their ascent phase of being transformed into a people of God. They acquired a new identity—a nation called Israel—with whom God established a covenant relationship as he had done with their ancestors. God's aim was to do for the people of Israel collectively what he had done for their ancestors individually.

It was in the Sinai wilderness that God would officially make Israel a nation. The purpose of the Sinai Covenant that followed the exodus out of Egypt was to lift Israel from a lower to a higher spiritual and physical plane—to the same exalted status as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through Moses, Israel's deliverer, God brought a people out of another people accompanied by signs and wonders. In a sense, Egypt gave birth to Israel, the exodus through the Red Sea being the birth canal. God created the special circumstances of Israel's exodus out of bondage in order to ennoble and elevate his people. In the Sinai wilderness, Israel became God's covenant people and he became their God.

“Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?” (Deuteronomy 4:32–34).

Before their exodus out of Egypt, the Israelites were not officially a people of God. They were simply the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, much as many people in the world are today. God did not deliver them out of Egypt because of any rights or privileges of their own. They could claim no blessings from God for themselves because at that point they had made no covenant with him. God delivered Israel out of bondage for their ancestors' sake, not their own. When the people of Israel were imperiled in Egypt, God “remembered” his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and brought their descendants out.

Even though God had promised Israel's ancestors a land of inheritance as an unconditional blessing, their descendants couldn't just go and possess it. If they did, they would be like any other aggressive nation and would subject themselves to grave danger. Rather, Israel had to obtain the land for itself as a covenant blessing. The Sinai Covenant—the covenant God made with Israel *as a nation*—provided the means by which Israel could obtain the Promised Land.

You may wonder why such unusual things happened to the Israelites as they came out of Egypt and why those events are so much detailed in the scriptural account. In fact, Israel's exodus out of Egypt established a precedent—a type and shadow—of what God would do in the end-time. Even so, everything that happened or would happen between God and Israel was determined by covenant relationships as all would occur within one covenant framework or another.

A number of exoduses in the Book of Mormon help establish a scriptural exodus pattern. In his description of Lehi's exodus out of Jerusalem, for example, Nephi maintains many connections and parallels with Israel's exodus out of Egypt. Subsequent Book of Mormon exoduses, such as Nephi's from the land of first inheritance to the land of Nephi, King Mosiah's exodus from the land of Nephi to Zarahemla, Alma's exodus from the land of Helam to Zarahemla, the Jaredites exodus from the Tower of Babel to the Americas, and so forth, accord with this same exodus pattern. That pattern consists of (1) an oppressive situation that becomes intolerable, whether of wickedness, bondage, or persecution; (2) the Lord's commanding a prophet to lead his people from their established location into the wilderness; (3) those who believe in the revelations of the Lord abandoning former residences and being led through the wilderness; and (4) their inheriting a new promised land and starting a new life.

The exodus pattern all these scriptures establish is itself prophetic of an end-time exodus out of Babylon, or the world at large, on the eve of a worldwide destruction. Just as the Lord intervened in his people's affairs when he raised up Moses and empowered him to deliver the people of Israel out of bondage, so he intervenes again when he empowers his end-time servant—his mighty *arm*—to deliver his elect at the end of the world. This time, however, it appears that the Lord's servant, whom Isaiah identifies as “the angel of his presence” (Isaiah 63:9), was directly involved even in delivering Israel in Moses' day:

“Awake, arise; clothe yourself with power, O *arm* of Jehovah! Bestir yourself, as in ancient times, as in generations of old. Was it not you who carved up Rahab, you who slew the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the Sea, the waters of the mighty deep, and made of ocean depths a way by which the redeemed might pass? Let the ransomed of Jehovah return! Let them come singing to Zion, their heads crowned with everlasting joy; let them obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing flee away” (Isaiah 51:9–11).

Just as the angel of the Lord accompanied Israel's ancient exodus, so, in the end-time exodus, the Lord himself accompanies them. Having ascended to a higher spiritual level than the Israelites under Moses, God's elect now merit the presence of God himself being with them: “Turn away, depart; touch nothing defiled as you leave there. Come out of her and be pure, you who bear Jehovah's vessels. But you shall not leave in haste or go in flight: Jehovah will go before you, the God of Israel behind you” (Isaiah 52:11–12); “Go forth out of Babylon, flee from Chaldea! Make this announcement with resounding voice; broadcast it to the end of the earth. Say, ‘Jehovah has redeemed his servant Jacob.’” (Isaiah 48:20).

Exiting end-time Babylon, God's people arrive from the four corners of the earth: “Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bring your offspring from the east and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give up!’ to the south, ‘Withhold not!’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth” (Isaiah 43:5–6). As before, no armies or elements are able to stand in their way: “Thus says Jehovah—who provides a way in the Sea, a path through the mighty waters, who dispatches chariots and horses, armies of men in full strength; they lie down as one, to rise no more, they flicker and die, snuffed out like a wick” (Isaiah 43:16–17); “When you cross the waters, I will be with you; [when you traverse] the rivers, you shall not be

overwhelmed. Though you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; its flame shall not consume you” (Isaiah 43:2).

So great an event is the end-time exodus of God’s people that only the new, not the old, will be celebrated in the millennial age: “‘The days come,’ says Jehovah, ‘that it will no more be said, ‘Jehovah lives, who brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘Jehovah lives, who brought the people of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where he had driven them.’ For I will bring them again into the land I gave their fathers’” (Jeremiah 16:14–15).