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Robert T. Barrett, *Moses Parting the Red Sea*

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Jeremiah and the New Paradigm of the Gathering

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Cecil B. DeMille's epic film *The Ten Commandments* was a smashing success due in part to the leading actors. Certainly, Charlton Heston's portrayal of Moses was unforgettable. And who can forget Yul Brenner's swagger as the egotistical Ramses II? The real ingredient to the film's popularity, however, was not the charismatic Heston or Brenner but rather the sensational storyline itself, taken primarily from the book of Exodus. One would be hard-pressed to find a scriptural narrative more exciting, dramatic, or—shall we say—made for Hollywood.

The Exodus story is a scriptwriter's dream: a one-time national-hero-turned-fugitive is called by God to return to his homeland and demand the release of masses of people held in bondage. Add to that a ruling despot who refuses to grant the slaves their freedom and is humbled (together with his people) by numerous plagues sent from God. Rivers and standing pools of water turn to blood, frogs infest the land, dust miraculously changes to lice, flies swarm, cattle die, men and beasts suffer from boils, hail and fire rain from heaven, locusts devour vegetation, and after three days of thick darkness all Egyptian firstborn men and beasts are slain. Add to that list the miraculous parting of the Red Sea to provide safe passage for the newly released captives and ultimate deliverance from the despot's pursuing army. Certainly, this dramatization of God's miraculous power and awesome might leaves few readers wondering if anything is too hard for the Lord.

The story is high adventure. More important, it is a true narrative. We need look no further than the Book of Mormon for corroborating evidence as to its factuality (see 1 Nephi 17). The ancients used the events of the Exodus, together with the miracles that occurred during the forty years of wilderness wanderings and the conquest of Canaan, to instill in their people a sense of trust and confidence in God's invincible power. For example, when Nephi began to build a ship in the land Bountiful, he countered Laman and Lemuel's jeering skepticism with a brief but pointed history lesson—but not just any history lesson. Nephi's powerful tutorial was the account of the Exodus and the Israelite conquest of the land of Canaan (see 1 Nephi 17). His intent? To teach his wayward brothers. He asked that if God had "wrought so many miracles among the children of men [during the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan], how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?" (1 Nephi 17:51). Nephi's historical vignette confounded his brothers as well it should have. The Exodus storyline provides convincing evidence of God's omniscience, which is beyond the scope of human comprehension.

Besides Nephi's account of the Exodus, the Psalmist and Habakkuk also pay homage to the Exodus motif, the idea that God will lead His people from bondage into a promised land. Much of Psalm 105 and all of Psalm 106 praise God for His miracles and demonstrations of His power during the Israelite's exodus from Egypt, their forty-year wilderness wanderings, and the conquest of Canaan. Consider: "He [God] sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. They showed his signs among them, and wonders in the land. . . . He sent darkness. . . . He turned their waters into blood. . . . Their land brought forth frogs. . . . He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies. . . . He smote also all the firstborn. . . . He spread a cloud for a covering. . . . He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out. . . . And he brought forth his people with joy" (Psalm 105:26–43).

Habakkuk praised God's majesty through allusions to the miracles found in the Exodus and conquest narratives. He declared, "The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high" (Habakkuk 3:10). This poetic imagery likely refers to the parting of the Red Sea (see Exodus 14). Habakkuk's statement "the sun and moon stood still in their habitation" (Habakkuk 3:11) certainly refers to the miracle during Joshua's battle against the five Canaanite kings (see Joshua 10:8–14). Lastly, Habakkuk's words "Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in

anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people” recalls the Lord’s power over the Canaanites as he led Joshua and the Israelites in the conquest of the promised land (Habakkuk 2:12–13).

Nephi, the Psalmist, and Habakkuk all attributed the Exodus miracles not to Moses or Joshua but to God. They emphasized God’s central role in these monumental events with the intent to strengthen faith in God’s ability to act in the affairs of mankind and, more important, God’s power in their own affairs.

The Paradigm Shift

The use of the Exodus motif served as an impressive and profound way to illustrate God’s power throughout Old Testament times. But according to Jeremiah, that motif would eventually be replaced by another paradigm. Note Jeremiah’s words: “Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers” (Jeremiah 16:14–15).

According to Jeremiah, the day will come when the Exodus story will be eclipsed by another event, or series of events: the latter-day gathering of Israel. Stories from the modern gathering will replace the Exodus story as the benchmark demonstration of God’s power and His control over the destiny of nations and individuals. Modern apostles and prophets will rehearse stories in general conference regarding their own missionary experiences, the experiences of other missionaries and converts, and the dedication of distant foreign lands for the preaching of the gospel.

Some may wonder how the modern gathering of Israel could replace the Exodus story as the optimum example of God’s majestic power. Certainly, the latter-day gathering will include miracles as in ancient times. And it will transcend the Exodus story in other ways—extremely important ways.

The New Paradigm

The latter-day gathering will surpass the events of the Exodus in terms of its sheer magnitude, the outpouring of spiritual and temporal blessings, and the use of the Book of Mormon as the instrument of gathering.

A worldwide gathering. Moses gathered ancient Israel from a relatively small geographical area. In contrast, Old Testament prophecies regarding the latter days speak of a worldwide gathering—a gathering that reaches the uttermost parts of the earth. Jeremiah referred to this when he said the Lord would send fishers and hunters to search for modern Israel from every mountain, hill, and hole of the rocks (see Jeremiah 16:16).

Other Old Testament prophets echoed similar thoughts. Isaiah declared, “And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:12). Here, the four quarters is a Hebrew literary device meant to symbolize north, east, west, and south, or, in other words, universality.

Ezekiel echoed a similar thought when he announced, “I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered. . . . I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side” (Ezekiel 11:17; 37:21). Lastly, Micah wrote, “I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will gather the remnant of Israel; . . . they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men” (Micah 2:12).

Moses gathered ancient Israel from the land of Egypt—not an easy task, to say the least. The modern-day gathering of Israel, however, will reach far beyond the confines of a single country to include all nations of the earth, from major cities to tiny villages so small and remote they cannot be found on a map. The enormity of this work will require miracle after miracle, which may never be reported or talked about except in the journal pages of faithful missionaries and converts across the world.

An outpouring of spiritual and temporal blessings. No doubt about it, Moses understood his people. Unfortunately, most of what he understood was their propensity for negative, narcissistic, and self-destructive behaviors. He understood their spiritual waffling, their propensity to adopt worldly behavior, and their unwillingness to remain firm and steadfast in God’s love. He also knew their spiritual shortsightedness and disobedience would ultimately lead to their forced expulsion from the promised land and their scattering among the nations of the world.

Unlike the impermanence of the ancient gathering of Israel to the promised land, the latter-day gathering will be characterized by greater stability, faith, and commitment to God’s work. Certainly, this modern gathering to the Church will not be without its challenges, but the

Lord has made clear this gathering will endure. Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream is evidence of that. In that dream, the king saw a great image made from gold, silver, brass, iron, and clay. The image was free-standing and firmly in place until a stone, miraculously fashioned without human hands, smashed the image into pieces. Ultimately, the stone became a "great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35). By way of interpretation, Daniel proclaimed, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44).

The kingdom, of course, is God's kingdom. Better stated, it is the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is a kingdom to which seekers of truth will gather and unite in fellowship through gospel ordinances such as baptism. It is a stable and enduring kingdom, not short-lived as it was in Old Testament times. No wonder Jeremiah was in awe of this modern-day gathering.

Amos referred to the permanence and success of the latter-day gathering in this way:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall not more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God. (Amos 9:13–15)

Ancient Israel inhabited the promised land, planted gardens and vineyards, and, in time, provoked God's judgments through their disobedience. Israel lost the protective blessings of God and was ravaged by predator nations, such as Assyria and Babylon. In stark contrast, God has promised those who faithfully gather to the Church in the last days that they will not "be pulled up out of their land" (Amos 9:15).

Other Old Testament prophets made similar prophecies, such as Obadiah, who wrote of a latter-day Jacob who would "possess their possessions" (Obadiah 1:17), and Ezekiel, who proclaimed: "And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: and I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring

fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates and will do better unto you than at your beginnings; and ye shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 36:10–11).

God’s blessings will flow freely to gathered Israel, blessings to surpass those that ancient Israel received. This is another reason for Jeremiah to applaud the latter-day gathering in contrast to the gathering in Moses’s day.

There is another key difference: building faith among latter-day Israel will not depend upon constant visual signs as it did in ancient times. God consistently reminded Moses’s people of His divine presence and redeeming love through miracles and visual signs. The cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night are evidence of this (see Exodus 13). Manna, the rock at Horeb, the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and the brass serpent (to mention only a few) further show a people in need of visual objects to bolster their faith. In contrast, Jeremiah made clear that in the last days “they shall say no more, the ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more” (Jeremiah 3:16). The ark of the covenant was a representation of God’s presence and power. Modern Israel, however, will not need the physical presence of the ark to remind them of God. Instead, faithful latter-day Israelites will find evidence for God written upon their hearts (see Ezekiel 11:19). God will also be to them as a “little sanctuary in the countries where they [Israel] should come” (Ezekiel 11:16). In other words, modern Israel will remember God through their ordinances, their covenants, and the voice of God’s Spirit.

The instrument of the gathering: the Book of Mormon. What does whistling have to do with the modern gathering of Israel? Quite a bit, actually. At least, Isaiah thought so. He foresaw the time when the Lord would “hiss,” or whistle, as a device to gather Israel to the Church (see Isaiah 5:26b). More specifically, the Lord proclaimed it would be the writings of the Nephites, the Book of Mormon, that would do the whistling: “And also, that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed; and that the words of your seed should proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed; and my words shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard [ensign] unto my people, which are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:2).

Isaiah called the Book of Mormon part of the “marvellous work” that would surround the Restoration of the gospel and latter-day missionary work (see Isaiah 29:11–14). Ezekiel also saw the Book

of Mormon as the instrument of the modern gathering of Israel. He declared that when the record of Joseph or Ephraim (the Book of Mormon) would finally be joined with the record of Judah (the Bible), the gathering process would begin: “I will take the stick of Joseph . . . and . . . the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side . . . and I will make them one nation in the land . . . and one king shall be king to them all . . . and [I] will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 37:19–23).

In short, the Bible is not the instrument to gather modern Israel. That daunting task is left to the words of those who slumber: the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson stated: “Now, what is the instrument that God has designed for this gathering? It is the same instrument that is designed to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith is His prophet, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. It is that scripture which is the keystone of our religion. . . . It is the Book of Mormon.”¹

The Book of Mormon is one of the great miracles of this dispensation—and of all time, for that matter. Not only is it the keystone of our religion, but it is the tool used by countless missionaries throughout this dispensation to gather modern Israel to the Church. The power of the book is enduring. Its messages are indelibly burned into the souls of those who faithfully read and pray about its contents. And, unlike the ancient Israelites, who murmured against Moses within days of witnessing the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, modern Israel has the Book of Mormon to continually foster testimony and faith. Jeremiah was surely aware of that when he made his statements contrasting the ancient and modern gatherings of Israel.

Conclusion

The Exodus narrative served a useful purpose for Old Testament writers. They reveled in the stories and praised God for His miracles. But, as Jeremiah pointed out, a new event and a new set of miracles would overshadow the Exodus story: the modern gathering of Israel. This new storyline is deserving of the praise Jeremiah lavished upon it. It is also worthy of our attention and our praise, for in it we see God’s hand working among the inhabitants of the earth as majestically as He ever did among the Israelites in Moses’s and Joshua’s day. Indeed,

according to Joseph Smith, “[The] subject of the gathering . . . is a principle I esteem to be of the greatest importance to those who are looking for salvation in this generation, or in these, that may be called, ‘the latter times.’ All that the prophets that have written, from the days of righteous Abel, down to the last man that has left any testimony on record for our consideration, in speaking of the salvation of Israel in the last days, goes directly to show that it consists in the work of the gathering.”² RE

Notes

1. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning: A Modern-day Prophet Testifies of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 35–36.
2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 2:260.