

Exodus of Lehi Revisited

“Do ye suppose that they would have been led out of bondage, if the Lord had not commanded Moses that he should lead them out of bondage? . . . Wherefore, the Lord commanded my father that he should depart into the wilderness.” (1 Nephi 17:24, 44)

In the past decade, there have been many reports on what has been called the “Exodus Pattern” in the Book of Mormon.¹ Although these reports have been fairly comprehensive, I feel a few points have been missed. To the numerous comparisons that have been made between the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt and the exodus made by the Lehites from Jerusalem, such as the divine call of the leader accompanied by fire, the deliverance of the people on the other side of a water barrier, the extended wandering, and the complaints and rebellion, I would like to add two additional parallels. The first deals with death in the desert and the second with transfiguration.

The Burial of Ishmael

In 1952, Hugh Nibley first pointed out the significance of the name *Nahom* in relationship to the death of Ishmael.² He also mentioned the importance of Ishmael’s daughters mourning his loss. What also becomes apparent is that, by the way Ishmael is buried in the desert, they (the Lehites) are following in the footsteps of their fathers (the children of Israel under Moses). Let us examine, side by side, two accounts of death and burial in the desert:

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| And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom. (1 Nephi 16:34) | And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought. (Joshua 24:32) |
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I feel that it is most likely that Ishmael died well before (possibly weeks or even months) the Lehites arrived at Nahom. Dr. Nibley points out it is not uncommon for desert people to carry their dead many miles to locate the proper place of burial.³ Just as Joseph was buried in a special parcel of land, it seems only natural that the Lehites would wait until they found a proper place to bury Ishmael.

In their report to FARMS, Warren and Michaela Aston show that the place of Nahom is a few miles off the main trail that the Lehites took.⁴ It is unlikely that they would go out of their way unless it was rather important. Surely, one thing that would make them go out of their way would be the death of a loved one. It is important to note, as do the Astons, that Nahom already existed and was already a place of burial.⁵ The chances seem slim that Ishmael would die as the party arrived at Nahom. The logical conclusion is that Ishmael died along the way and was carried to Nahom.

We cannot conclude whether the Lehites were aware of the parallels to the Exodus as they were reenacting them, although it appears that Nephi did at least thirty years later.⁶ We can be sure that, like the children of Israel, they honored their patriarchs and also were following ancient ritual in burying their dead.

The Transfiguration of Nephi

Bruce R. McConkie defines transfiguration as “a special change in appearance and nature which is wrought upon a person . . . by the power of God.”⁷ Let us examine two accounts of transfiguration in the desert.

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said many things unto *my brethren*, insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst *they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers*, even for the space of many days. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me, *so powerful was the Spirit of God*; and thus it had wrought upon them. (1 Nephi 17:52)

And when *Aaron* and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the *skin of his face shone*; and *they were afraid to come nigh him*. (Exodus 34:30)

It is interesting to note that in both instances the literal brothers of Moses and Nephi witnessed the transfiguration. Both sets of brethren weren't quite sure what to make out of the situation. Aaron was afraid to go to Moses while Nephi's brothers were shocked by the power of the Lord which was in him (see 1 Nephi 17:54).

In both accounts, the effect of the power of God upon mortal flesh is detailed. Moses's skin shone while Nephi mentions that he was "filled with the power of God, even to the consuming of my flesh" (1 Nephi 17:48). Nephi was indeed transfigured by the Lord and therefore was able to better understand Moses's situation. In fact, Nephi gives a powerful sermon on the symbolism of the exodus of the children of Israel just prior to his state of transfiguration.

We find that the parallels between the exodus of Israel from Egypt and the departure of Lehi from Jerusalem are numerous. Through these parallels we are able to understand the mentality of the Lehites as they emulated the children of Israel. We also can better recognize the hand of the Lord in guiding his covenant people.

Research by Mark J. Johnson, originally published in the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 3/2 (1994): 123–26. For a chart comparing the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt with the exodus of Lehi, see John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), chart 91.

Notes

1. The exodus from Egypt is a "type" of God's deliverance. The comparison between Lehi's deliverance from the Babylonian captivity and the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt is specifically mentioned in 1 Nephi 17:23–43 and Alma 36:28–29. On the exodus motif in the Book of Mormon generally, see George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo: Religious Studies Center Monograph Series, 1978); 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; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus: Seeing It as a Test, a Testimony, and a Type," *Ensign* (February 1990): 54–57; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26; and "Nephi and the Exodus," *Ensign* (April 1987): 64–65.

2. See Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 79.

3. See *Ibid.*

4. See Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, "The Place Which Was Called Nahom: The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia" (FARMS, 1991); see Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); and Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Arabian Journey Updated," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 379–89.

5. See *Ibid.*, 10.

6. For further discussion, see Bruce J. Boehm, "Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 189–90.

7. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 803.