

The Exodus Repeated

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This large congregation at the Marriott Center at Brigham Young University is but a fraction of the total audience assembled in centers throughout the world tonight. I wish that I could greet each one of you, and I am very sorry that is not possible. I am also thankful that Sister Nelson and several members of our family can be here. Their steadfast support means much to me.

I bring love and greetings from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We appreciate the great faith and devotion of the young adults of the Church. We hope that you students will enjoy your studies and excel in your chosen fields wherever you live. We hope that you who are single may meet and marry someone who can help you achieve your full potential. And for you who are already married, we hope that you will continually cherish your precious partner. Each person in this vast congregation may be privileged to bear great responsibilities in the Church in the exciting years ahead. We commend you, we thank you, and we pray for you.

The title for my message tonight is “The Exodus Repeated.” I have chosen this topic because of the many instructive parallels that exist between the exodus from Egypt of the Israelites under Moses and the exodus from the

United States of the Latter-day Saint pioneers under Brigham Young. In this year of celebration honoring those early converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we sense our deep debt of gratitude to them. But I also chose this topic because we can learn much from these stalwarts of ancient and modern Israel.

Generally, the sesquicentennial sketches and pageants have portrayed well *what* the pioneers did. But only a few writers have delved deeply enough to explain *why*. Even fewer have reported the similarities between the pioneer trek and the exodus from Egypt. That exodus was a type, and shadow, for the exodus of the pioneers.

An obvious likeness is that both groups had their inland sea of salt water and a Jordan River. But there were many other very significant similarities. Ancient Israel and modern Israel are linked arm in arm.

Russell M. Nelson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 7 September 1997.

The Josephs

Ancient Israel had leaders before Moses, and modern Israel had a prophet-president before Brigham Young. The predecessors for each group also bore a resemblance to each other. A name common to both was Joseph—Joseph who was sold into Egypt and the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Few men in the Old Testament are of greater importance to Latter-day Saints than is Joseph of Egypt. Many of us claim lineage from Joseph through his sons Ephraim or Manasseh. The Book of Mormon reveals:

A part of the remnant of the coat of Joseph was preserved and had not decayed. . . . Even as this remnant of garment . . . hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed . . . be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself. [Alma 46:24]

The pioneers were remnants of that precious seed. They knew that Joseph Smith had been chosen by the Lord to take up the labors of the tribe of Joseph, son of Jacob. Centuries earlier, Joseph had prophesied of Joseph Smith and had described their kinship:

Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers.

And I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him. And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work. [2 Nephi 3:7–8]

The name of *Joseph* applied not only to Joseph Smith, Jr., but to his father as well. Again I quote from Joseph, who was sold into Egypt:

Behold, that seer [Joseph Smith] will the Lord bless; . . . for this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. . . .

And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation. [2 Nephi 3:14–15; see also JST, Genesis 50:26–38]

Jacob's son Joseph and Joseph Smith had even more in common. At age 17, Joseph was informed of his great destiny (see Genesis 37:2–11). At the same age Joseph Smith was informed of his destiny regarding the Book of Mormon. At age 17 he was first visited by the angel Moroni, who informed the boy prophet that "God had a work for [him] to do." He was to translate a book written upon golden plates containing the fullness of the everlasting gospel. His "name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues" (Joseph Smith—History 1:33; see also vv. 34–41).

Both Josephs endured persecution. Joseph of old was falsely accused of a crime he did not commit and was put into prison (see Genesis 39:11–20). Joseph Smith suffered incarceration on trumped-up charges and false accusations.

Joseph's coat of many colors was taken from him by his brothers in a cruel attempt to convince their father that Joseph had been killed (see Genesis 37:2–33). Joseph Smith's life was cruelly taken from him, largely because of betrayals by false brethren.

Anciently, when "all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do" (Genesis 41:55). In the latter days, people starving for nourishment that only the gospel can provide are again to be fed—by Joseph. The Lord declared that "this generation shall have

my word through [Joseph Smith]" (D&C 5:10). Today we may "feast upon the words of Christ" (2 Nephi 32:3) because of Joseph Smith.

Moses and Brigham Young

Moses and Brigham Young had much in common. They were astute followers before they became great leaders. Moses had been prepared in the courts of Egypt and had gained much experience in military and other responsibilities (see Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2:10; see also Acts 7:22, Hebrews 11:24–27). Brigham Young was likewise prepared for his leadership role. In the march of Zion's Camp, he had observed the leadership of the Prophet Joseph Smith under difficult conditions (see *HC* 2:61–134, 183–85). Brigham Young aided in the removal of the Prophet Joseph from Kirtland (see *HC* 3:1–2; see also *Manuscript History of Brigham Young: 1801–1844*, ed. Elden J. Watson (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), pp. 23–24). He also directed the move of the persecuted Saints from Missouri to Nauvoo (see *HC* 3:250–52, 261; see also John K. Carmack, "Missouri Era: Residue of Wisdom," *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History, Missouri*, eds. Arnold K. Garr and Clark V. Johnson [Provo: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1994], pp. 2–3).

For both the Israelites and the Saints, civil and ecclesiastical law were unified under one head. Moses bore that responsibility for his people (see *Teachings*, p. 252). Brigham Young—the modern Moses (see D&C 103:16)¹—led the Latter-day Saints' movement west, with the Lord's blessing (see D&C 136). Moses and Brigham Young followed parallel patterns of governance (see Exodus 18:17–21, D&C 136:1–3). Brigham Young organized the large group of men, women, and children for an orderly migration to the west.

We lament that leaders of both groups had to endure dissension from their close associates. On occasion Moses encountered opposi-

tion from his beloved Aaron and Miriam (see Numbers 12:1–11). Latter-day leaders also suffered contention among their trusted associates (see *HC* 1:104–5, 226). Nevertheless, the same unified pattern of government will come again when the Lord shall be "King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2; see also Zechariah 14:9) and govern from Zion and Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2:1–4).

The journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai took about three months (see Exodus 19:1). The journey from Winter Quarters to the valley of the Great Salt Lake also took about three months (111 days).

The destination for each group was described by the Lord as a land flowing with milk and honey.² The pioneers turned their wilderness into a fruitful field and made the desert blossom as a rose—precisely as prophesied by Isaiah centuries before (see Isaiah 32:15–16, 35:1).

Miracles Shared

Both groups shared many miracles that are memorialized annually. The celebration of Passover relates to the travels of the ancient Israelites. And each July we repeat legendary stories of our pioneers. Both groups traversed deserts, mountains, and valleys of untamed wilderness. Ancient Israelites left Egypt via the parted waters of the Red Sea "as by dry land" (Hebrews 11:29). The pioneers left the United States crossing the wide waters of the Mississippi river—frozen to become a highway of ice (see Orson Pratt, *JD* 21:275–77).

The book of Exodus reports that quail were miraculously provided to feed the hungry people of ancient Israel (see Exodus 16:13, Numbers 11:32, Psalm 105:40). The pioneers had an equivalent experience. After the last of them had been driven out of Nauvoo, many were sick and some had died. Their provisions were meager. On the riverbank above Montrose, Iowa, 9 October 1846, many quail miraculously flew into camp. The quail were

cooked and fed to some 640 destitute people (see Stanley B. Kimball, “Nauvoo West: The Mormons of the Iowa Shore,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 18, no. 2 [winter 1978:142]).³ It was also miraculous that a permanent settlement survived in the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Seagulls that saved the crops were part of that miracle.

God preserved ancient Israel from plagues sent upon Egypt (see Exodus 15:26). Similarly, God preserved the Saints from the plague of the United States Civil War, which caused more American deaths due to war than any other war.

Spiritual Strengths Shared

For both the Israelites and the Saints, their travail forged great spiritual strength. They both endured trials of their faith, during which the weak were winnowed away and the strong were empowered to endure to the end (see Ether 12:6; D&C 101:4–5, 105:19). They had to leave their homes and earthly possessions and learn to rely wholly upon God. Protection was provided for ancient Israel by the Lord, who “went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire” (Exodus 13:21; see also v. 22, Numbers 14:14, Deuteronomy 1:33, Nehemiah 9:19). The same has been said of divine watchcare afforded to the pioneers (see *HC* 3:xxxiv; also Thomas S. Monson, *CR*, April 1967, p. 56).

Scriptures given to both societies speak of the strength of the Lord’s hand in their deliverance. To those of ancient Israel, Moses said, “Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place” (Exodus 13:3).

To the Latter-day Saints, a comparable scripture was revealed: “For I, the Lord, have put forth my hand to exert the powers of heaven; ye cannot see it now, yet a little while and ye shall see it, and know that I am” (D&C 84:119).

The children of Israel had a portable tabernacle wherein covenants were made and ordinances were performed to strengthen them on their journey.⁴ Many Latter-day Saints were endowed in the Nauvoo Temple before their arduous trek westward.

Gratefully, the Israelites celebrated their exodus from Egypt. The Latter-day Saints commemorated their exodus with the establishment of the world headquarters of the restored Church in the tops of the mountains. All celebrants acclaimed their deliverance by God (see Jeremiah 23:7–8).

Timeless Gospel Principles

Scriptures available to ancient and modern Israel include timeless principles of the gospel. You are familiar with the prophecy of Isaiah:

Thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust. [Isaiah 29:4]

Could any words have been more descriptive of the Book of Mormon, coming as it did “out of the ground” to “whisper out of the dust” to people of our day?

Other Old Testament passages foretold the Book of Mormon. One such came to mind last January when I attended a prayer breakfast at the White House, in Washington, D.C., hosted by President Bill Clinton. During an informal reception that preceded the breakfast, I was chatting with a distinguished and scholarly Jewish rabbi from New York. Our conversation was interrupted by another rabbi, who asked his colleague from New York if he could recall the scriptural reference to the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph that would come together one day. My friend paused for a moment, stroked his chin pensively, and then replied, “I think you will find that in the book of Ezekiel.”

With that, I could not restrain myself. “You might look in chapter 37 of Ezekiel,” I interjected. “There you will find the scriptures that you seek.”

My rabbi friend expressed surprise: “How did *you* know that?”

“This doctrine,” I concluded, “is very important in our theology.”

Indeed it is. You know it, and I know it. I would like to read it:

Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions:

And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. [Ezekiel 37:16–17]

Saints of modern Israel in 160 nations across the world are blessed to hold the Bible and the Book of Mormon as one in their hands. The worth of this privilege must never be underestimated.

Isaiah described the spirit of the Book of Mormon as “familiar.” It resonates with people who know the Old Testament, especially those who are conversant with its Hebrew language. The Book of Mormon is rich with Hebraisms—traditions, symbolisms, idioms, and literary forms. It is familiar because more than 80 percent of its pages came from Old Testament times.

Timeless truths and principles of the gospel were and are important to people of ancient and modern Israel. The Sabbath day, for example, was honored for different reasons through the generations. From the time of Adam to Moses, the Sabbath was observed as a day of rest from the labor of creation (see Exodus 20:8–11, 31:16–17). From the time of Moses to the Resurrection of the Lord, the Sabbath also commemorated the liberation of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt (see Deuteronomy

5:12–15; Isaiah 58:13; Ezekiel 20:20, 44:24; Mosiah 13:19). In latter days, Saints keep the Sabbath day holy in memory of the Atonement of Jesus Christ (see Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Revelation 1:10, D&C 59:9–19).

The restoration of the priesthood rejuvenated the principle of tithing, linking to the Old Testament teachings of Genesis and Malachi (see Genesis 14:20, Malachi 3:8–12). Saints of modern Israel know how to calculate their own tithing from this simple instruction: “Those who have thus been tithed shall pay one-tenth of all their interest annually; and this shall be a standing law unto them forever, for my holy priesthood, saith the Lord” (D&C 119:4).

In contrast, have you ever amused yourself with the thought, on or about April 15 each year, that the filing of income tax returns is a bit more complicated? I’ll confess that I have.

Turning our attention again to the timeless truths of the gospel, none are more vital than those associated with temple worship. They are another connection between ancient and modern Israel.

Whenever the Lord has had a people on the earth who will obey his word, they have been commanded to build temples in which the ordinances of the gospel and other spiritual manifestations that pertain to exaltation and eternal life may be administered. [Bible Dictionary, s.v. “temple”]

The best-known temple of ancient Israel was Solomon’s temple. Its baptismal font and dedicatory prayer provided patterns that are employed for temples today (see 2 Chronicles 4:15, 6:12–42; D&C 109). Old Testament scriptures refer to special clothing (see Exodus 28:4, 29:5; Leviticus 8:7; 1 Samuel 18:4) and ordinances (see Exodus 19:10, 14; 2 Samuel 12:20; Ezekiel 16:9) associated with temples (see D&C 124:37–40). How thankful we are that the Lord chose to restore the highest blessings of the priesthood to his faithful sons and daughters.

He said: “For I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 124:41).

Revealed truth that we know as the Word of Wisdom came to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1833. Every Latter-day Saint is familiar with it as one of the enduring hallmarks of our faith. The final verse of that revelation forges another link back to ancient Israel: “And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them” (D&C 89:21).

This reference to the Passover shows that the Lord wanted obedient Saints of modern Israel to receive physical and spiritual protection just as he had provided for his faithful followers centuries before.

The Covenant, the Scattering, and the Gathering

Other divine teachings revered by both societies include doctrines of the Abrahamic covenant and of the scattering and gathering of Israel. About four thousand years ago, Abraham received a promise from the Lord that blessings would be offered to all of his mortal posterity (see D&C 132:29–50, Abraham 2:6–11). Included were promises that the Son of God would come through Abraham’s lineage, that certain lands would be inherited by his posterity, that nations and kindreds of the earth would be blessed through his seed, and more. Affirmation and reaffirmations of this covenant are evident in many scriptures of the Old Testament (see Genesis 26:1–4, 24, 28; 35:9–13; 48:3–4).

Although certain aspects of that covenant have already been fulfilled, many have not. The Book of Mormon teaches that we of modern Israel are among the covenant people of the Lord (see 1 Nephi 14:14, 15:14; 2 Nephi 30:2; Mosiah 24:13; 3 Nephi 29:3; Mormon 8:15). And, most remarkably, it teaches that the

Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled only in the latter days! (See 1 Nephi 15:12–18.) The Lord once again bestowed the Abrahamic covenant, this time upon the Prophet Joseph Smith, to be a blessing upon him and posterity after him (see D&C 124:56–59).

Did you know that Abraham is mentioned in more verses of modern revelation than in all verses of the Old Testament?⁵ Abraham—this great patriarch of the Old Testament—is inextricably linked to all who join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁶

Doctrines relating to the scattering and gathering of the house of Israel were also among the earliest lessons taught in the Book of Mormon. I quote from 1 Nephi:

After the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; . . . the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer. [1 Nephi 10:14]

Saints of modern Israel know that Peter, James, and John were sent by the Lord with “the keys of [his] kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times,” in which he would “gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (D&C 27:13; cf. Ephesians 1:10).

The travels and travails of our pioneers were of eternal consequence. Their mission was not limited to an international immigration or a transcontinental migration with wagons and handcars. They were to lay the foundation of an endless work that would “fill the world” (Joseph Smith, quoted in *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, sel. G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946], p. 39). They were essential to Jeremiah’s prophecy: “Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him,

and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jeremiah 31:10).⁷

They got the message. Missionaries were sent very early to “the isles afar off” to commence the work of the Lord. As a result, the Church was established in the British Isles and in the islands of French Polynesia years before the pioneers entered the valley of the Great Salt Lake. It has been my privilege to participate in sesquicentennial celebrations in the British Isles in 1987 and in French Polynesia in 1994. Now we celebrate this one in 1997.

The lineage of Joseph—through Ephraim and Manasseh—is the seed appointed to lead in the gathering of Israel (see Erastus Snow, *JD* 23:183–84). The pioneers knew—through their patriarchal blessings and from the Old Testament, amplified by scriptures and revelations of the Restoration—that the long-awaited gathering of Israel was to commence with them. This “ball” was in their court!

Summary

Early converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were pioneers of modern Israel. Regardless of the time or place in which Saints may live, all faithful members of the Church will receive their just reward. “All things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (D&C 76:59).

Ancient and modern Israel subscribe to an ageless message of the Old Testament: “Know therefore that the Lord thy God . . . keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deuteronomy 7:9).⁸

Upon our shoulders lies the responsibility to keep the faith through our own generation. This “ball” is in our court! We of modern Israel are destined to be “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). We know that we are children of the covenant (see Acts 3:25, 3 Nephi 20:25–26). We are remnants of the seed

now to be gathered and gleaned into God’s eternal garner (see Alma 26:5).

You young adults are literally the hope of modern Israel. You are part of Zion’s army. You are children of the promised day. I am grateful to be associated with you in the work of the Lord.

As Saints of modern Israel, we speak with one voice. We love our Heavenly Father. We love the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. We are his people. We have taken his holy name upon us. We know the Book of Mormon to be the word of God and hold it as one with the Holy Bible. We proclaim Joseph Smith as the great prophet of the Restoration. And we sustain President Gordon B. Hinckley as God’s gifted prophet of today.

I leave with each of you my testimony, my love, and my blessing, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Notes

1. Concerning Brigham Young’s role in that exodus, President Spencer W. Kimball wrote:

*Since Adam there have been many exoduses and promised lands: Abraham, Jared, Moses, Lehi, and others led groups. How easy it is to accept those distant in time as directed by the Lord, yet the ones near at hand as human calculations and decisions. Let us consider for a moment the great trek of the Mormon refugees from Illinois to Salt Lake Valley. Few, if any, great movements equal it. We frequently hear that Brigham Young led the people to make new tracks in a desert and to climb over mountains seldom scaled and to ford and wade unbridged rivers and to traverse a hostile Indian country; and while Brigham Young was the instrument of the Lord, it was not he but the Lord of heaven who led modern Israel across the plains to their promised land. [Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1972), p. 28]*

2. For the ancient Israelites, see Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 13:27, 14:8, 16:13–14; Deuteronomy 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; Joshua 5:6; Jeremiah 11:5, 32:22; Ezekiel 20:6, 15; JST, Exodus 33:1. For the pioneers, see Doctrine and Covenants 38:18–19.

3. *Catching Quails*, an oil painting on canvas by C. C. A. Christensen, is in the Museum of Art at Brigham Young University.

4. Ordinances and covenants of ancient Israel are cited in 1 Corinthians 10:1–3; for those of modern Israel, see Doctrine and Covenants 84:26–27. The tabernacle of ancient Israel had been intended to be a movable temple before the people lost the higher law (see D&C 84:25, 124:38).

5. Abraham is mentioned in 506 verses of scripture, 289 of which are in modern revelation.

6. The covenant may also be received by adoption (see Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; Galatians 3:27–29, 4:5–7).

7. The word *gather* comes from the Hebrew verb *qabats*, which means “to gather, assemble.”

8. See also Deuteronomy 11:1, 27; 19:9; 30:16; Joshua 22:5; 1 John 5:2–3; Mosiah 2:4. Other Old Testament scriptures refer to rewards for those obedient to God’s commandments through a “thousand generations” (see 1 Chronicles 16:15; Psalm 105:8).