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## Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible

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# **Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible**

Bruce J. Boehm

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Several months ago I authored a paper dealing with the pattern of exodus in the Book of Mormon. In this paper I compared several of the major exoduses in the Book of Mormon and found that each of them followed a six-step pattern. However, what caught my interest in researching and writing the paper was how the Nephites saw themselves as a result of this recurring exodus. I was only able to comment briefly on how the continuing exodus influenced the Nephite self-concept, yet the interest in this subject remained with me. I was particularly perplexed and unsettled by

Jacob's, Alma's, and Ammon's comments on the Nephites being "wanderers in a strange land" (Alma 13:23).

My original intent was to expand this previous paper into a comprehensive study comparing some of the major exoduses in the Book of Mormon and examining the extent to which these exoduses followed or deviated from a similar pattern. I had then planned to comment on how continuing interest in the exodus influenced Nephite self-concept. However, I was so intrigued by the latter subject that I began my research probing this curious phrase—"wanderers in a strange land." This led to a whirlwind of research in primary texts within the scriptures themselves and in secondary sources dealing with exodus and particularly the wandering motif.

### **Parallels Between the Nephite and Israelite Exodus**

George S. Tate, Terrence Szink, and S. Kent Brown have each compared the pattern of exodus in the Book of Mormon to the Israelite exodus from Egypt. In his essay, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," George S. Tate provides a thorough table of similarities between the Israelite exodus and the exodus in the Book of Mormon. Tate points out that a host of elements in the book of Exodus, such as a flight into the wilderness, divine guidance in the wilderness, crossing water, the destruction of the enemies, and manna have parallels in the Nephites' journey to the promised land. For example, just as the Israelites flee Egypt into the wilderness, so the Nephites depart from Jerusalem into the wilderness. And, as the Israelites are led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, so too is the Lord a "light" (1 Nephi 17:3) to the Nephites, leading them by means of the divinely crafted Liahona. Tate's list includes some thirteen parallels between the Israelite exodus and the Nephites' journey to the promised land.<sup>1</sup>

Professor S. Kent Brown, in his "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," also notes several similarities between Lehi's

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<sup>1</sup> George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1981), 258.

exodus and the Israelite exodus. His list includes such similarities as the complaints of the children of Israel and the complaints of Laman and Lemuel, the years of wandering in the wilderness, and the arrival in a promised land.<sup>2</sup> Brown's list, although not an attempt at a comprehensive comparison, is enough to show clearly that a number of similarities exist between the Nephite and Israelite exoduses.

Like Brown and Tate, Szink, in his "To the Promised Land," also offers an insightful comparison of the two exoduses.<sup>3</sup> However, Szink's comparison focuses on the linguistic similarities between the Nephites' journey to the promised land and the ancient Israelite exodus. Specifically, Szink examines the use of the word "murmur" in both accounts and concludes that Nephi's word selection is strongly influenced by the exodus account in the Bible. Szink also points out other similarities between the two exoduses, such as Nephi's parallels between his rebellious brothers and the children of Israel and Nephi's comparison between himself and Moses.

### **Nephite Exodus: A Conscious Reenactment**

Although other similarities could be pointed out from the work of these same scholars, it is evident that there is a striking number of similarities between exodus in the Book of Mormon and exodus in the Old Testament. In fact, the similarities are so prevalent, Tate argues, that, "Nephi senses that he and his family are reenacting a sacred and symbolic pattern that looks back to Israel and forward to Christ—the pattern of Exodus."<sup>4</sup>

Brown comes less rapidly to this conclusion. According to Brown it is not Nephi and his family who make the connection explicitly, but rather later prophets. However, Brown does not rule out the case for conscious reenactment. He implies that although

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<sup>2</sup> S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30 (Summer 1990): 112.

<sup>3</sup> Terrence L. Szink, "To a Land of Promise (1 Nephi 16–18)," in *Studies in Scripture: Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 60–72.

<sup>4</sup> Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," 249.

Nephi to some extent may have been conscious of reenacting the exodus pattern, that consciousness grew as he was able, thirty years later, to look at the entire exodus experience as recorded in the larger plates. Brown suggests that perhaps Nephi became more aware, in retrospect, of the similarities between his own exodus and the Israelite exodus.<sup>5</sup> Thus the smaller plates, the account we have, reflect Nephi's growing consciousness on this matter.

Like Brown, Szink argues that Nephi's account in 1 Nephi is influenced by the fact that he wrote it some thirty years after its occurrence. Nephi was able to sort through the material in the large plates and select those things which would "persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham" (1 Nephi 6:3-4). Szink implies that the Book of Mormon might reflect Nephi's hindsight in recognizing the significant number of similarities between the Nephite and Israelite exodus.<sup>6</sup>

### Recurring Exodus

More importantly, Tate and Brown also note that the exodus, a departure from one land to another in search of a new inheritance, continues even after the Nephites reach the promised land. Tate points out that after this initial exodus the pattern recurs both for the Nephite people as a whole and in the personal conversions of the Nephites. He notes that exodus recurs for the Nephite people as a whole in the accounts of Alma<sub>1</sub> and his followers, the people of Limhi, and the Jaredites, and that "each individual conversion reenacts the exodus."<sup>7</sup> As evidence that individual conversion reenacts the exodus, Tate refers to Alma<sub>2</sub>'s description of his conversion experience in terms of exodus.<sup>8</sup>

Like Tate, Brown also notes how the exodus pattern continues throughout the Book of Mormon. Brown discusses the exoduses of both the people of Limhi and Alma<sub>1</sub>, pointing out that in both cases it is the Lord who delivers the people from bondage. Brown notes such similarities between these later Nephite exoduses and

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<sup>5</sup> Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," 112.

<sup>6</sup> Szink, "To a Land of Promise (1 Nephi 16-18)," 60.

<sup>7</sup> Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," 253.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

the Israelite exodus as the fact that both the Israelites and the Nephites take their flocks and herds with them, and that the Lord eventually softens the hearts of the Egyptians, as he would later soften the hearts of the Lamanite overseers.

### Interpreting the Significance of Exodus

Scholars have likewise considered at length the continuation of exodus throughout Nephite history. Tate suggests that the exodus pattern in the Book of Mormon acts as a type which “unifies the work structurally and thematically.”<sup>9</sup> Professor Bruce W. Jorgensen also examined the Book of Mormon typologically, but focused on Lehi’s dream rather than the exodus pattern as the key to understanding the Book of Mormon’s typological unity.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, a host of scholars have addressed exodus typology in the Bible. However, Tate’s piece is significant because it is the first to examine how exodus works as a type in the Book of Mormon.

Tate argues that recurring exodus in the Book of Mormon not only looks back to the Israelite exodus, but forward to Christ. As Tate concludes, each exodus is “pointing back to the original Exodus and adumbrating the fulfillment of each type in Christ.”<sup>11</sup> Tate points out that just as the Old Testament exodus typology is fulfilled in the New Testament, so Book of Mormon exodus typology prior to 3 Nephi is fulfilled in Christ’s appearance to the Nephites.

Unlike Tate’s, Brown’s approach to exodus is not directly typological. Brown insists that the Nephites see the exodus experience as a proof of God’s power. Thus, Nephi, Helaman’s son, refers to the exodus in his sermon atop the garden tower as a proof that God has the ability to fulfill all His words.<sup>12</sup> However, Brown also recognizes that the exodus acts as a type for deliverance from sin through the atonement, and refers to Alma’s personal conversion story in which Alma describes his repentance in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce W. Jorgensen, “The Dark Way to the Tree of Life: Typological Unity in the Book of Mormon,” *Encyclicalia* 54/2 (1977): 16–24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” 116.

terms of Israel's deliverance from Egypt to illustrate that the exodus is a type for the effects of the atonement.

### **A Summary of the Research**

I have focused on the work of Tate, Brown, and Szink because their essays delve into the significance of exodus in the Book of Mormon, and, cumulatively, their work clearly establishes the many parallels between the Nephite journey to the promised land and the Israelite exodus. Further, these scholars establish that the exodus pattern, collectively (as a people) and individually, was a conscious reenactment by the Nephites. With the exception of Szink, their essays also note that the exodus pattern recurs throughout the Book of Mormon. Yet despite this solid foundation of research, perhaps not enough has been said about one of the most intriguing elements of their discussion—why the exodus pattern continues even after the Nephites reach the promised land.

### **Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible**

At first glance the continuing pattern of exodus in the Book of Mormon strikes the reader as somewhat unsettling. However, as with many other elements in the Book of Mormon, these occasional wanderings take on a wealth of spiritual meaning. For the Nephites, these exoduses are not merely historical events. The Nephites come to see the exodus experience, so prevalent in their history, as a type for their spiritual condition. To the Nephites, exodus becomes a metaphor for their journey through mortality toward eternal life. Indeed, recurring exodus leaves an indelible impression upon the Nephite self-concept, impressing upon the minds and hearts of the Nephites that they are spiritual wanderers and strangers on the earth and that their true inheritance lies beyond even the "promised land." This study will focus on the spiritual significance of the Nephites being "wanderers in a strange land" (Alma 13:23).

## Continuing Exoduses in the Book of Mormon

Early in 1 Nephi, the Lord promises Nephi that he “shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you” (1 Nephi 2:20). Because of this and other divine promises, it might strike the reader as somewhat odd that shortly after the Nephites reach the promised land, it again becomes necessary for them to flee into the wilderness. This second exodus is even more disturbing, considering that it was largely due to Nephi’s faith and courage that Lehi’s party reached the land of their “first inheritance.” The scant year or so that the Nephites are allowed to remain in the land of their first inheritance hardly seems ample reward for eight years of toiling in the Arabian desert. Even the Nephites’ consolation that the Lord “leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes” (1 Nephi 17:38) hardly seems adequate to quell the disappointment the Nephites must have felt at having to begin a new exodus so shortly after reaching the promised land. It is hardly surprising that only those “who believed in the warnings and revelations of God” followed Nephi into the wilderness.<sup>13</sup>

However, this people’s exodus to a second inheritance is just the beginning of a series of exoduses the Nephite people were required to undertake after reaching the promised land.<sup>14</sup> Two

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<sup>13</sup> Many of the exoduses in the Book of Mormon tend to follow a basic pattern with the Lord initially warning a righteous leader to depart from the land. We see the Lord also warning Mosiah and Alma<sub>1</sub> to flee with their followers into the wilderness. In fact, the first verse of many of the exodus narratives begins with the Lord warning his servant: the Lord “did warn” Nephi to depart from his brethren (2 Nephi 5:5); King Mosiah, “being warned of the Lord” (Omni 1:12); “Alma, having been warned of the Lord” (Mosiah 23:1). After this initial warning, the basic pattern of exodus continues: the more righteous portion of the people flee into the wilderness to a promised land, those who remain suffer physical or spiritual destruction, the Lord’s people wander in the wilderness for some time before reaching the promised land, they prosper, and the pattern begins anew.

<sup>14</sup> Along with George S. Tate and S. Kent Brown, Richard Bushman notes that the pattern of exodus continues in the Book of Mormon. In his “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” *BYU Studies* 17 (Autumn 1976): 9, Bushman argues that “Book of Mormon prophets saw the major events of their



centuries later, King Mosiah fled the land of Nephi, seeking yet another inheritance in the promised land. And during an interim of relative stability, the search for a new inheritance continued, as Alma, Limhi, and the Anti-Nephi-Lehites were likewise required to flee their homelands and find new inheritances elsewhere in the promised land. The Book of Mormon itself ends with an exodus, as Moroni, a lone Nephite, makes one final departure into the wilderness. He laments, "And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life" (Moroni 1:3); yet his wandering, his exodus, is forlorn and fruitless, as he has "not friends nor wither to go" (Mormon 8:5).

The Nephites understand the spiritual meaning inherent in their elusive searches for an inheritance. Even five hundred years after their fathers had reached the promised land, Alma and Ammon suggest the spiritual lessons learned when they refer to themselves and the Nephite people as "wanderers in a strange land." To the Nephites, these exoduses are not merely historical events; they take on larger spiritual significance.<sup>15</sup>

### **Strangers, Sojourners, and Wanderers: The Holy Bible**

The scriptures make frequent reference to the Lord's servants and people as strangers, sojourners, or wanderers. Even more striking is the fact that these references continue after the Lord's people have reached the promised land or the land of their promised inheritance. Moses, while dwelling in the land of Midian with Jethro, suggests the metaphor by referring to himself as "a stranger in a strange land" (Exodus 2:22). Here the word *stranger* is a translation of the Hebrew word *gēr*. The word *gēr* comes from the Hebrew root GWR which means "to sojourn." The *Gesenius*

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own past as comprising a series of deliverances beginning with the archetypal flight of the Israelites from Egypt"; see also 7–10, 17.

<sup>15</sup> For an intriguing discussion of another group who fled Jerusalem around the time of Lehi and who also considered themselves sojourners, see Hugh Nibley's discussion of the Rechabites in *The World of the Prophets*, vol. 3 in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 232, and throughout the *Collected Works*.

*Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* defines *gēr* as “a sojourner,” “a temporary dweller,” or a “new-comer.” Thus, by referring to himself as a “stranger” or *gēr*, Moses, an Egyptian native, is essentially saying that he is a sojourner or temporary dweller in Midian.

Interestingly, Abraham uses this same term to describe himself. When Sarah dies, Abraham tells the sons of Heth, “I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight” (Genesis 23:4). Once again the word “stranger” is an English translation of the Hebrew *gēr*. Not only do the scriptures refer to Abraham as a “stranger” while in Canaan, but they apply the same description to Isaac and Jacob: “And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers” (Exodus 6:4). Here the patriarchs are referred to as *gērîm*, the plural of *gēr*. “Strangers” in this passage means “sojourners.” Further, in this scripture it is not just Abraham describing himself as a *gēr*, but the Lord himself referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as such. In a literal sense we may accurately refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as *gērîm* because they are only temporary dwellers in the promised land, and as newcomers from another country they have no inherited rights in Canaan.

However, this passage clearly suggests that their being referred to as *gērîm* has spiritual significance as well. The word *pilgrimage* in the Bible is associated with a religious journey and suggests that Canaan was the land of the patriarchs’ spiritual as well as temporal journeying. Indeed, Exodus 6:4 suggests that the patriarchs were metaphorical sojourners, temporary dwellers on the earth, temporary dwellers even in Canaan, for their eternal abode is in God’s kingdom.

Nowhere in the scriptures is the spiritual significance of this journeying toward and dwelling in the land of Canaan more clearly expressed than in Abraham’s own account of his exodus to Canaan: “Therefore, eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation, as we journeyed from Haran by the way of Jershon, to come to the land of Canaan” (Abraham 2:16). With one eye directed heavenward and the other focused on the physical realities of their pilgrimage, these patriarchs made their way simultaneously to Canaan and an eternal land of promise. Paul

supports this interpretation in his letter to the Hebrews, where he writes that these saints “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13), seeking for a “better country” than Canaan, “that is, an heavenly” (Hebrews 11:16).

Even hundreds of years after the Israelites have conquered the land of Canaan, King David says, “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding” (1 Chronicles 29:15). Again, the English translation of *gērîm* is “strangers.” Clearly, however, the Israelites are no longer sojourners and newcomers in the sense that the patriarchs were; by this point the Israelites have established their rule for some time. Thus, David seems to be joining Abraham in confessing that he and his people are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

It seems somewhat ironic that both the Lord and his servants would refer to God’s people as *gērîm* or “sojourners” even after they have reached the land that God has prepared for them. However, these references to the Israelites as *gērîm* in the land of Canaan forcefully remind us that even in the promised land the Lord’s people will not feel entirely at home, for they will understand that their inheritance lies beyond and surpasses any earthly blessing, including their geographical “promised land.”

### **Strangers, Sojourners, and Wanderers: The Book of Mormon**

As in ancient Israel, Nephite prophets use similar terms to describe themselves, even after reaching the promised land. In his final commentary, Jacob concludes, “the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers” (Jacob 7:26).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The term “wanderers” is an uncommon word in the Old Testament (occurring only twice—Jeremiah 48:21; Hosea 9:17). However, the Hebrew term equivalent to “wanderers” (as Jacob uses it), *nāḏāḏ*, is more common. Both Hosea and Jeremiah use the term. Hosea lived within a hundred years of Lehi and had a strong influence on Lehi’s contemporary Jeremiah. The book of Hosea and many of Jeremiah’s words would have been available to Lehi and his descendants through the brass plates and could have influenced Jacob’s description.

Of course, Jacob himself is well acquainted with a nomadic lifestyle. Lehi's "firstborn in the wilderness," Jacob spent the first years of his life wandering in the Arabian desert (2 Nephi 2:2). Shortly after his arrival in the promised land, Jacob again followed Nephi into the wilderness. However, this designation as "wanderers" seems to apply to more than just the Nephites' physical experience. Jacob makes this statement some seventy-five years after their second exodus, and long after the Nephites have settled in the land of Nephi. The language Jacob uses also seems to suggest that his comment is more than a literal description of the Nephite experience. His comparison of life to a dream is similar to David's simile of life and shadows (1 Chronicles 15:29); both passages suggest that this transitory life is a type for eternal spiritual realities. Jacob seems to be reflecting on past years of wandering and likening this to the Nephite spiritual condition—wandering, in the sense that the Nephites are "pilgrims and strangers," not quite at home in this mortal existence, even in their promised land.

Later on in the Book of Mormon, both Alma and Ammon invoke this same description. In the same passage that Alma refers to the promised land as a "strange land," he refers to the Nephites as "wanderers" in that land. Likewise Ammon refers to the Nephites as "wanderers in a strange land." The word-for-word repetition of this phrase within a few chapters is striking, especially when we consider how the Book of Mormon was compiled. Mormon had access to hundreds of years of detailed records and at times would abridge two or three hundred years of records in a few verses. Thus, for Mormon to include this phrase suggests that it was a significant concept to Mormon and was strongly impressed into the Nephite consciousness.

Like David, these two great Nephite prophets seem to be looking back across centuries of Nephite history and depicting the Nephite experience as one of journeying in a foreign country. However, as with the Israelites at the time of David, the Nephites at this time have enjoyed relative stability in the land of Zarahemla for nearly two hundred years. The Nephite reference to "wandering," just as the Israelite "sojourning," has religious connotations. Although admittedly "wandering" and "sojourn-

ing” have different meanings, both the Israelites and Nephites use these terms metaphorically to describe their spiritual condition.

Looking back on Nephite history, Alma and Ammon see the recurring pattern of leaving a homeland in search of a new inheritance as more than merely historical events; rather, they emblemize the wandering and speak of the Nephites as spiritual “wanderers” in the metaphorical sense—as wanderers or journeyers through mortality en route back home to their God. The Nephites see themselves as wanderers because, despite what new earthly inheritance they seek, an everlasting inheritance is their real goal and this goal lies beyond this earthlife. Until they reach this eternal kingdom, they remain wanderers, even in the promised land.

The final chapter in the Book of Mormon emphasizes this poignantly. At the conclusion of his farewell address, Moroni writes, “and now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite” (Moroni 10:34). Moroni realizes that there is no new mortal inheritance left to seek; the only inheritance remaining for him lies beyond this world, “in the paradise of God.”

### **“A Strange Land”: Types and Shadows in the Holy Bible**

Because the Lord’s people see themselves as wanderers and strangers on the earth, the promised land is sometimes referred to in scripture as a “strange land.” After appearing to Abram and changing his name to Abraham, the Lord promised Abraham that he would be the “father of many nations,” and that his seed would receive “all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8). This land, which God granted to Abraham, was later referred to as the “land which he [God] promised,” or the promised land (Deuteronomy 6:3; 9:23; 19:18). The phrase “a strange land” appears only three times in the Old Testament. In Exodus 2:22 and 18:3, Moses refers to the land of Midian as “a strange land.” And in Psalms 137:4, the phrase “a strange land” refers to Babylon. In the two Exodus references, the word “strange” is the English translation of the Hebrew *nôkrî*, meaning

“foreign.” The Hebrew word, *nēkār* in Psalms 137 means “foreign” but also implies a “heathen” land.

Not until the New Testament is Canaan, the promised land, referred to as a “strange land.” The author of the Hebrews recounts that “by faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country” (Hebrews 11:9). “Strange” in this passage is a translation of the Greek *allōtrios*, which means “foreign.” Paul says therewith that Abraham’s sojourning in Canaan was like sojourning in a foreign country (clearly by using the word “as,” Paul is making some kind of comparison). Paul implies that Abraham recognized the land of Canaan, although a promised earthly inheritance, was not his true inheritance. Abraham had to sojourn “in faith” even in the land of Canaan because “he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). This “city” refers, of course, to the kingdom of God.

Interestingly, the only other references to the land of Canaan as a “strange land” occur in Latter-day Saint scripture. In Abraham 1:16 the Lord tells Abraham: “my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy father’s house, and from all thy kinsfolk, into a strange land which thou knowest not of” (see Abraham 2:6).

Of course the promised land is literally a “strange land” to Abraham because, as discussed earlier, Abraham is literally a foreigner. However, the promised land is a “strange land” in another sense as well: referring to Abraham and other faithful saints, Paul says, “they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:16). Thus the land of promise is a foreign land in a spiritual sense, because the saints claim heaven itself as a homeland.

Although the Lord refers to the promised land as a “strange land,” he also uses it in the Old Testament as a type for exaltation. Abraham’s experience with the land of Canaan illustrates this point. Abraham never does possess the land during his mortal life. Stephen makes this clear in the book of Acts: “And he [God] gave him [Abraham] none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on” (Acts 7:5); Abraham must look forward in faith to the day when his seed will inherit the land. In a similar manner

Abraham must look forward to a "better country," God's kingdom. The future promise of an inheritance in the land of Canaan seems to symbolize and point Abraham to an everlasting inheritance in the eternities.

Indeed, the Lord often refers to the land of Canaan as an "everlasting possession." This could simply mean that it is a possession from the Lord in the same way that "everlasting punishment" is the punishment God administers (D&C 19:11-12). "Everlasting possession" may also mean that the Israelites will possess the land forever, as they hearken to the Lord. However, it seems more likely that the Lord is again establishing the symbolic connection between Canaan and eternal life. The Lord says that possession of the land is contingent upon the Israelites' "hearken[ing] to my voice" (Abraham 2:6). Thus, the Israelites are entitled to the land only when they are obedient to the Lord. In the same way, eternal life is also contingent upon obedience. The Lord is saying, then, that when the Israelites believe in him, they will not only inherit the land of Canaan, but the kingdom of God as well. Inheritance in the land of Canaan points the Israelites' eyes forward to an even greater inheritance, the "greatest of all the gifts of God," the gift of salvation and "eternal life" (D&C 6:13).

### **"A Strange Land": Types and Shadows in the Book of Mormon**

Reference to the promised land as a "strange land" likewise occurs twice in the Book of Mormon. The two references fall within thirteen chapters and just a few years of each other. Alma<sup>2</sup>, addressing the Ammonihahites, says the Nephites are blessed because of their "being wanderers in a strange land" (Alma 13:23). Some four or five years later, Ammon, while addressing his fellow missionaries after a successful fourteen-year mission, refers to the Nephites as "a branch of the tree of Israel, [that] has been lost from its body in a strange land" (Alma 26:36).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Alma and Ammon seem to use the phrase "in a strange land" in the same way it is used in the Old Testament, meaning in a "foreign" land. Thus this phrase may have been influenced by their knowledge of the brass plates, since

Unless they are spiritually intended, these are comments we might expect from such literal pilgrims as Lehi or Nephi, but certainly not from prophets some five hundred years after the Nephites have been established in the promised land. Of course, to Alma, the land of Zarahemla might be somewhat “foreign.” Although it is difficult to date Alma’s birth exactly, he was most likely born in either the land of Mormon or Helam and grew up in the land of Helam. He probably was with his father, Alma<sub>1</sub>, when he escaped with his people from the land of Helam. However, Alma makes this comment some forty years after arriving in the land of Zarahemla. Furthermore, he seems to be referring to the entire promised land rather than just Zarahemla. Ammon’s comment seems even less likely to refer to Zarahemla, where Ammon’s ancestors, who date back to King Mosiah, have lived for some two hundred years. Both comments then seem to be referring to the entire promised land, rather than just the land of Zarahemla, as a “foreign” land.

In one sense the entire promised land is a foreign land to the Nephites. As Israelites, the land of Canaan was also the land of their inheritance. This is what Ammon seems to mean when he says that they are separated from the rest of the house of Israel in a land foreign to the other Israelites (see Alma 26:13). Yet Lehi tells his sons that “the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever” (2 Nephi 1:5). Further, throughout the Book of Mormon, Nephite prophets recognize that the Lord has given them the Americas as the land of their inheritance (see 2 Nephi 10:19).

Both of these references to the promised land as a foreign land seem unusual unless we see the land of promise in terms of its spiritual significance. The Nephites, as the ancient Israelites, recognize that (in the spiritual sense) they are in a foreign land. Even the promised land is not the true inheritance of the Nephites. The promised land, as in the Old Testament, acts as a type or shadow pointing toward eternal life. Nephi makes it clear that “all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the

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they would have had access to the book of Exodus and at least some of the Psalms (perhaps 137).



world, unto man, are the typifying of him [Christ]" (2 Nephi 11:4). The promised land is no exception; "given of God," it typifies Christ through pointing the Nephites' eyes toward the salvation and exaltation which come through Christ.<sup>18</sup> Thus, recurring exodus to a new inheritance points readers forward to eternal life and reminds them that we must seek for an everlasting inheritance beyond this telestial world.

Not only can we infer that the promised land is a type for exaltation, but we are told explicitly in the Book of Mormon that such is the case. Alma<sub>2</sub> makes the connection, comparing the word of Christ to the Liahona, or director:

And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. (Alma 37:44–45)

Not only is the Liahona a type for the word of Christ, but the promised land itself becomes a type for exaltation. Just as the Liahona guided Lehi's party to the promised land, so the words of Christ guide us to eternal life. Alma links the "promised land" to an eternal land of promise.

Even before Alma makes the explicit connection, there are parallels between the land of promise and eternal life. As early as 1 Nephi 2:20, the Lord promises Nephi, "And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands." Likewise, Nephi testifies to his brothers, "wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day" (1 Nephi 22:31). The attainment of both the

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<sup>18</sup> The entire exodus pattern itself can be viewed typologically. The deliverance from an oppressed condition typifies the deliverance from sin. Wandering in the wilderness corresponds to the trials of enduring to the end. Finally, entrance into a promised land typifies exaltation. For more in-depth typological approaches to the Book of Mormon refer to Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," 245–62, and Jorgensen, "The Dark Way to the Tree of Life," 16–24.

promised land and eternal life is always provisional upon obedience to the Lord's commandments.

### **Conclusion**

Continuing exodus is not only a historical fact in the Book of Mormon, but it becomes a metaphor which teaches important doctrines as well. Understanding the biblical exodus as a type and shadow, the Nephites attached spiritual significance to their wanderings, recognizing that their history of exodus typifies their spiritual condition as wanderers seeking for an everlasting inheritance in an eternal land of promise. Like Abraham, the Nephites journeyed toward their new inheritances with one eye fastened on the temporal demands of their trek and the other eye fixed upward, looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).