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TYPES AND SHADOWS OF  
DELIVERANCE IN  
THE BOOK OF MORMON

*M. Catherine Thomas*

Grasping the Lord's outstretched hand requires reaching into the unknown for the unseen. The Lord provided the Book of Mormon to assist the humble seeker to bridge that gap. In the Book of Mormon the Lord often identifies His empowering grace with the words *deliver* or *deliverance*. The Book of Mormon also frequently deals with types of deliverance; that is, with examples or instances of deliverance. This sacred scripture presents a series of dilemmas, which are types of the troubles that men and women face in all dispensations: being lost, hungry, enslaved, in danger, or possessed by such painful emotions as anger, guilt, depression, and fear.

Deliverance from such trouble is a major theme of the Book of Mormon. A computer count shows that the words derived from *deliver* occur more than two hundred times in the 531 pages of the Book of Mormon, signifying the importance of the principle.<sup>1</sup> Thus we repeatedly learn that God will provide some deliverance from trouble if we will but turn to Him. The Book of Mormon speaks to all ages, and its principles apply to people everywhere. No one can ever have a dilemma that the Lord cannot turn into some form of deliverance. The purpose

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of this essay is not only to heighten our sensitivity to deliverance in the Book of Mormon and thereby increase our faith in the accessibility of Christ's help but also to point out the principles by which deliverance is obtained.

All Book of Mormon accounts of deliverance ultimately point the reader's mind to the greatest deliverance of all, the redemption of mankind from physical and spiritual death by the Lord Jesus Christ. The object of all the deliverances is to bring that which is miserable, scattered, alienated, and spiritually dead back into living oneness with Christ: deliverance is a function of the power of at-one-ment in Jesus Christ. Jacob explained:

"And because of the way of *deliverance* of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall *deliver* up its dead;

" . . . Which spiritual death is hell.

" . . . O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he *delivereth* his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment" (2 Nephi 9:11–12, 19; all italics here and hereafter are the author's emphasis).

## DELIVERANCE AS A THEME OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

We find the theme of deliverance in the first chapter of the Book of Mormon: "Behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of *deliverance*" (1 Nephi 1:20).

Clearly *deliverance* is a key word as Nephi, under the Lord's inspiration, set it up as an important theme of the entire Book of Mormon. Following are some random samples of the use of *deliverance* in the Book of Mormon: Nephi explained to his fearful brothers, "The Lord is able to *deliver* us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 4:3); Alma rebuked the unbelief of the people of Ammonihah: "Have ye forgotten so soon how many times he *delivered*



our fathers out of the hands of their enemies, and preserved them from being destroyed, even by the hands of their own brethren?” (Alma 9:10); and Alma also taught his son Helaman, “I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could *deliver* them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did *deliver* them in their afflictions” (Alma 36:2).

Helaman wrote of his experiences with his two thousand stripling warriors: “We did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and *deliver* us out of the hands of our enemies. . . . Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would *deliver* us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our *deliverance* in him” (Alma 58:10–11).

A systematic survey of the fifteen books of the Book of Mormon suggests how well the idea of deliverance is spread through its pages. Such a wide distribution demonstrates that Nephi, Jacob, and Mormon used *deliverance* as one of the organizing principles of the Book of Mormon.

*First Nephi.* “And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were *delivered* by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:19).

*Second Nephi.* “O house of Israel, is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem, or have I no power to *deliver*?” (2 Nephi 7:2).

*Jacob.* The prophet Jacob teaches the concept of deliverance but does not use the word in his own book; however, the word does appear in 2 Nephi 6:17 (“For the Mighty God shall *deliver* his covenant people”) and 2 Nephi 9:10–13, both of which are Jacob’s writings.

*Enos and Jarom.* Neither Enos’s twenty-seven verses nor Jarom’s fifteen verses include this sense of the word *deliver*. Nevertheless, Enos 1:15 conveys the concept of deliverance: “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it.”

*Omni.* “Wherefore, the Lord did visit them in great judgment;

nevertheless, he did spare the righteous that they should not perish, but did *deliver* them out of the hands of their enemies” (Omni 1:7).

*Words of Mormon.* The eighteen verses of the Words of Mormon teach the concept but do not use the word *deliver* in our sense.

*Mosiah.* “Put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, [and] if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, *deliver* you out of bondage” (Mosiah 7:33).

*Alma.* “God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would *deliver* them; and this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it” (Alma 48:16).

*Helaman.* “O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has *delivered* you?” (Helaman 7:20).

*Third Nephi.* “As the Lord liveth, except ye repent of all your iniquities, and cry unto the Lord, ye will in nowise be *delivered* out of the hands of those Gadianton robbers” (3 Nephi 3:15).

*Fourth Nephi.* The forty-nine verses of 4 Nephi do not use the term *deliverance*.

*Mormon.* The Lord said, “And thrice have I *delivered* them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins” (Mormon 3:13).

*Ether.* The book of Ether expresses the concept of deliverance: “Therefore when they were encompassed about by many waters they did cry unto the Lord, and he did bring them forth again upon the top of the waters” (Ether 6:7), but does not use the term *deliverance*.

*Moroni.* Moroni does not use *deliverance* in our sense.

In all, we find that eight of the fifteen books employ the word *deliverance* in the sense of divine power working for mortals. The shorter books are generally the ones that lack it. Most of the longer books possess many instances of the use of *deliverance*.

## GROUP DELIVERANCE

The Book of Mormon provides many examples and types of deliverance that range from saving an entire nation, as in the often-evoked story of the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt,<sup>2</sup> to the individual



deliverance that Nephi pleaded for (see 2 Nephi 4:27–33). First, we will consider some examples of the deliverance of groups of people.

Helaman 5 describes the fearful cloud of darkness that descended upon the Lamanites who had imprisoned the brothers Nephi and Lehi. The Lamanites cried out, “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?” The inspired Aminadab instructed: “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, . . . and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you” (Helaman 5:40–41). Of course, the cloud represented their spiritual darkness which they could not perceive until God showed them that their spiritual darkness was like this cloud of physical darkness. When the cloud was removed, a holy fire encircled every soul, and then they were able to sense the sweetness of spiritual fire and the joy of having been delivered from their darkness by the light and love of Jesus Christ.

A second example appears in King Mosiah’s observation, following the miraculous escape of King Limhi’s people, that “were it not for the interposition of their all-wise Creator, and this because of their sincere repentance, they must unavoidably remain in bondage until now. But behold, he did *deliver* them because they did humble themselves before him; and because they cried mightily unto him he did *deliver* them out of bondage; and thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him” (Mosiah 29:19–20).

Not only does this passage mention deliverance by divine power but, like the passage in Helaman 5, it also explains how deliverance is obtained: “And thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him” (Mosiah 29:20). Thus it would appear that repentance, humility, and crying mightily to the Lord are taught repeatedly as the means by which one gains access to divine deliverance “in all cases.”

## JOURNEYS

One important means by which the Book of Mormon makes divine deliverance understandable to us is through accounts of journeys, such



as the classic example alluded to by prophets throughout the Book of Mormon: the Exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt. These prophets used the Exodus as the prototype of deliverance, usually for the purpose of bringing the people to repentance through remembrance of God's miraculous deliverance in the past. Wherever the Exodus appears in the Book of Mormon, it appears within the larger concept of deliverance.

For example, Nephi urged his brothers to help build the boat. He recounted the Exodus to enlist their confidence and cooperation (see 1 Nephi 17:23–31). He reminded them that on the Israelite journey, God fed His people manna (see 1 Nephi 17:28), that He caused water to come from the rock (see 1 Nephi 17:29), that He provided light and direction, and that He did “all things for them which were expedient for man to receive” (1 Nephi 17:30).<sup>3</sup> Nephi compared the Exodus to the journey on which the Nephites were about to embark. He told his brothers that on this journey, too, God would be their light (see 1 Nephi 17:13), would make their food sweet (see 1 Nephi 17:12), and would provide every necessary thing for the journey—if they would keep his commandments. The Lord promised, Nephi explained further, that “after ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 17:14). One reason for requiring people to undertake journeys in the Book of Mormon is to make it possible for them to have experiences that drive them to their extremity, at which point they discover the delivering power of God.

All major journeys in the Book of Mormon are allegorical as well as actual, reflecting not only the different kinds of the Lord's deliverances but also the principles on which the deliverances depend. All these journeys typify every person's sojourn on earth and the tasks that each is given to accomplish. Only God has the overview of the journey, and only God knows what will be needed along the way. He offers everything each person needs to succeed in the quest. As the Book of Mormon amply illustrates, however, people must often be persuaded to receive Christ's divine deliverance for their earthly journeys.



The destination of each divinely guided journey is a promised land where spiritual enlargement will be possible. The land prepared by God is “a land which is choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 2:20; Ether 1:42). And, as the journeys represent the individual’s sojourn on earth, so the destinations represent the kingdom of heaven, or reentering the presence of God. Again, the journeys represented in the Book of Mormon typify everyone’s earthly sojourn and his or her need for divine help at every juncture.

Four examples will suffice to illustrate the principles underlying deliverance on journeys:

1. Lehi’s journey to the New World.

2. Alma the Elder’s journey from the land of Nephi across the wilderness to the land of Zarahemla.

3. The trek of King Limhi and Ammon to Zarahemla.

4. The Jaredite voyage to the choice land.

The first example is Lehi’s journey. On their way to a promised land, Lehi and his family began a seemingly impossible trip through dangerous wilderness and across a terrifying ocean. Alma provided the allegorical interpretation of this journey and emphasized both the necessity as well as the ease of consulting the Lord in all our affairs (Alma 37:38–47). In the book of Alma we learn the name of Lehi’s ball or director, Liahona, which signifies a compass (Alma 37:38). Because constant revelation is a difficult spiritual reality for people to grasp, the Lord designed the palpable Liahona not only to help Lehi’s family find their way to the promised land but also to teach the principles on which revelation depends, illustrating how individuals actually go forward depending on God as though they were holding a Liahona in their hands. Nephi explained how his family made the compass work:

“And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.

“And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see



that by small means the Lord can bring about great things” (1 Nephi 16:28–29).

Alma explained further: “And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day.

“Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey;

“Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions” (Alma 37:40–42).

We learn at least four simple but profound principles here that teach us how to go to the Lord for help:

1. If they just *believed* that the ball would deliver them, it did. Simple belief connects the believer with the powers of heaven.

2. Not only did their belief make the ball work but they also received many other miracles, even day by day.

3. Although the means were small, the works were marvelous. As a ship is worked by a small helm (see D&C 123:16), so the powers of divine deliverance are engaged by small means on earth; that is, by belief, humility, humble petitioning of the Lord, obedience, and persistence.

4. When the travelers grew lazy and neglected to ask, divine deliverance ceased, and they became hungry, thirsty, and lost. Perhaps it is not the mysterious nature of revelation and divine grace that keeps us from pursuing heavenly help but the energy that the Lord may require of us—the faith, the diligence, and the heeding.

Alma explained the symbolism of the Liahona’s delivering power: “I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

“For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

“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 37:43–45).

The Lord provides physical symbols of spiritual realities to help the reader understand unseen spiritual powers. The tools of deliverance are interesting in themselves: the Liahona, the plates of brass, the sword of Laban, fire, clouds, boats, and shining stones. Each instrument of deliverance represents the unseen but real, accessible spiritual power in the Savior.

The second and third examples of journeys, both recorded in Mosiah, illustrate again the *conditions* on which divine deliverance is granted. God provides deliverance in response to the preparation and righteousness of the people. For example, in the case of Alma’s group in Helam, the people escaped during broad daylight as the enemy miraculously slept, in contrast to the more natural escape of Limhi’s community, which took place under cover of night while drunken Lamanites slept (see Mosiah 22–24). Clearly some deliverances happen miraculously, whereas others occur more naturally and progress more slowly. In the case of Limhi’s group, the people needed more time to repent of Abinadi’s martyrdom before they were ready for deliverance, and so the Lord took more time: “The Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities; nevertheless the Lord did hear their cries, and began to soften the hearts of the Lamanites that they began to ease their burdens; yet the Lord did not see fit to *deliver* them out of bondage” (Mosiah 21:15).

Alma’s group, on the other hand, had believed on Alma’s words alone, had left their property, and had risked their lives to be baptized; therefore, they were prepared to exercise more faith and to accept miraculous deliverance:



“Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.

“And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and *deliver* them out of bondage.

“ . . . That ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

“ . . . And they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.

“And it came to pass that so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will *deliver* you out of bondage” (Mosiah 24:12–16).

The Lord suits the type of deliverance to the spiritual needs of the groups involved.

The fourth example is the Jaredite journey across the ocean. This journey provides another example of physical and spiritual deliverance. Tangible instruments of deliverance abound here. Moroni recorded that when the Jaredites crossed the great deep in their watertight vessels, the Lord “caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land. . . .

“ . . . Many times [they were] buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind. . . .

“ . . . When they were encompassed about by many waters they did cry unto the Lord, and he did bring them forth again upon the top of the waters. . . .

“ . . . They were driven forth; and no monster of the sea could break them, . . . and they did have light continually, whether it was above the water or under the water” (Ether 6:5–7, 10).

The recurrent motif of light in these journeys, and in this case from shining stones, draws our attention. During the Exodus, Jehovah led the

children of Israel by a pillar of fire. The Lord had earlier told the brother of Jared, “For behold, I am the Father, I am the *light*, and the life, and the truth of the world” (Ether 4:12). In the course of the terrifying journey, these Jaredites could see the light from the stones and understand that it represented the unseen but very powerful love of Jesus Christ. The journey through the deep also recalls the Savior’s teaching about the winds and rains that beat vainly upon the invincible man or woman of Christ (see Matthew 7:24–25).

### PERSONAL DELIVERANCE

The Book of Mormon offers help from personal trouble. Nephi, angry and in despair, gave us a good description of depression:

“O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

“I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do easily beset me.

“And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins” (2 Nephi 4:17–19).

But as Nephi’s heart turned to many evidences in his own life of the Lord’s love and intervention, he rebuked himself for his despair because he remembered the principle of deliverance. Nephi’s is perhaps the most sublime expression in scripture of faith in the Savior’s power to deliver:

“Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.

“Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

“Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

“O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou *deliver* me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? . . .

“Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice



unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God” (2 Nephi 4:28–31, 35).

Moroni taught that despair comes of iniquity (see Moroni 10:22). By *iniquity* he seems to mean lack of faith in the deliverance offered by the Savior. He stated, “Christ truly said . . . : If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me” (Moroni 10:23). That is, because there is a Savior, there are solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems.

The life of Alma the Younger demonstrates several examples of individual deliverance. He declared that he was “supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; . . . and I do put my trust in him, and he will still *deliver* me” (Alma 36:27). Alma gave the benefit of his belief and experience to his son: “I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be *delivered* out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 38:5). Although in the following passage he did not use the word *deliverance*, he clearly described a release from his own personal hell:

“For three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

“ . . . I was thus racked with torment. . . .

“ . . . I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

“And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Alma 36:16–20).

Later, as a more mature missionary, Alma viewed the abysmal apostasy of the Zoramites and exclaimed: “O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. . . . O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success.” Then, speaking for his

companions he said: "Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ" (Alma 31:31–32). "And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ" (Alma 31:38). Thus Alma impressed us with the point that divine deliverance is readily available to those who will come to the Lord.

All the dilemmas illustrated in the Book of Mormon contain dangerous elements uncontrollable by mortals, so that when deliverance comes, no one will be confused about the One from whom it comes. Life's path is strewn with seemingly unsolvable dilemmas so that people will be driven to God for help. The Lord's methods may be based on the principle that the greater the trouble, the more likely one will turn to Him for help. We are reminded that the only way that God can teach how faith works is through experience, some of it necessarily very dangerous. When the hand of God is revealed in the midst of a seemingly unsolvable situation, one's confidence in the presence of God gains strength.

The principles of misery and happiness operate in each sphere along the path to salvation. A person can experience spiritual death, misery, sorrow, and suffering here as well as hereafter. One can experience oneness, joy, consolation, and peace here as well as hereafter. All these experiences are governed by spiritual principles. Oneness with Christ produces spiritual life and happiness here, now, and forever. Neglect of the spiritual principles embraced by the Atonement causes many of the miseries of spiritual death here and hereafter. The consequences of obedience to or neglect of these principles may differ in intensity between this mortal estate and the next life but not in their essential quality. Only obedience to Christ's atonement delivers us from the negative end of the spectrum of experience, whatever estate we inhabit.

After considering only a sampling of the deliverances described in the Book of Mormon, and having noted their prevalence, I suggest that the book's authors and editors, under divine direction, used the term *deliverance* as one of the organizing principles for the entire Book of



Mormon. Therefore, if the Book of Mormon is really about deliverance, it is also about Christ's atonement.

Because deliverance is a major function of the Savior's atoning sacrifice, the illustrations of deliverance serve as metaphors for such other synonyms of *atonement as redemption* and *salvation*. Therefore, every instance of deliverance is also an instance of redemption, salvation, or at-one-ment. I conclude that the Book of Mormon was provided, at least in part, to illustrate how grace and atonement actually work in the lives of those who come to Christ. Obviously Limhi and his people trekking across a wilderness some two thousand years ago may mean little to the reader until he realizes that Limhi's journey is analogous to his own life journey. Thereafter, a person will read the Book of Mormon differently as he or she grasps the insight that humility, prayer, and obedience can draw down divine deliverance in the midst of one's own wilderness trials. The Book of Mormon is a handbook of principles for traveling one's earthly path by the divine enabling power of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon, quick and powerful, the living word of God, is designed so that the reader who approaches it with humility can use it for personal revelation; that is, as a personal Liahona. The Book of Mormon is itself a tool of deliverance. Nephi made the same point with this instruction: "Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will *tell you all things what ye should do*" (2 Nephi 32:3).

We have seen that the instances of deliverance throughout the Book of Mormon can infuse the reader with hope for deliverance from his or her own troubles, instruct one in how to go to the Lord for help, and fill the soul with faith in the eternal constancy and accessibility of the great Deliverer.

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## NOTES

1. This figure also includes a few instances of *deliver* to mean "to hand over" as in "the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands" (1 Nephi 3:29) or "I did deliver the plates unto my brother Chemish" (Omni 1:8). Obviously synonyms

like *save* and *preserve* might be studied in combination with *deliverance*. My objective here is not a word study but a demonstration of how the Lord used one word to make clearer the abstract principle of God's grace.

2. See S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (summer 1990): 111–26, for discussion of Exodus language used in the Book of Mormon.

3. The word *expedient* is interesting, suggesting that God must take care not to provide too much deliverance so that individuals have sufficient experience with the forces that govern the natural world.