

# THE PLAN OF SALVATION IN THE FIRST SIX BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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If “all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of” Christ (2 Nephi 11:4), then why do Christ and His mission not seem to be readily apparent in the Old Testament? Part of the answer, of course, is that Christ and His mission *are* apparent to those with eyes to see. For example, only the Old Testament tells the story of the Creation and the Fall, without which there would be no need for Christ’s Atonement.<sup>1</sup> Other teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ are equally plain and clear, such as the Ten Commandments. Also evident are “the first of all the commandments” (Mark 12:29), “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,” a quote from Deuteronomy 6:5, and the second, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” found in Leviticus 19:18.

Another part of the answer is that “many parts which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26) have been excised from the Bible. For example, the books of Zenos and Zenock, which were no doubt among the books on the brass plates and which spoke plainly and unambiguously of

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Christ and His mission, were removed from the scriptural record before the Old Testament, as we currently know it, was canonized.

As far as those parts that were changed or taken out of the Old Testament are concerned, there is not much that can be done to recover them at present. With the exception of a few passages that have been preserved in the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation, the restoration of the missing and changed parts must await the discovery of more ancient documents that might contain the missing texts, or the reception of more revelation from the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Not all the plain and precious parts that are now missing were removed by some beady-eyed, nefarious scribe wielding a cleaver, or, in some cases, the ancient equivalent of an X-Acto knife. Indeed, if someone had a mind to, the plain and precious parts could be eliminated without tampering with the text at all. All that was needed was to mystify or to muddle the gospel understanding of the passage. Such obfuscation could produce the same results as excision, making these gospel truths unavailable to the reader of the Old Testament.

Those plain and precious parts of the gospel of Christ in the Old Testament that are missing because of obfuscation can, at least partially, be restored with a little help. As the Apostle Paul said of some of his contemporaries, “Their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament,” but a correct understanding can be restored because the “vail is done away in Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:14). That the lenses of Christianity can help to make clear what once had been muddled was recognized fairly early in Christian history. The author of *Recognitions of Clement*, possibly written between AD 200 and 250, opined that even though “things were indeed plainly spoken *by Him*, but are not plainly written” now because “of the sin which has grown up with men,” “when they are read, they cannot be understood without an expounder.”<sup>3</sup> Nothing much has changed since the third century AD. Iniquity and disbelief continue to obscure the plain words of the prophets, unless an “expounder,” most reliably the Holy Ghost, helps to restore the plain and precious parts.

Nevertheless, not all has been lost. Even with limited light, Christians through the ages have long known and taught that the Old Testament teaches about Christ and His work by direct prophecy, and also through

history,<sup>4</sup> parable, allegory, metaphor, simile, symbolism, synecdoche, etc.—teaching methods that are not always clear or self-evident. A few examples that are commonly known will suffice.<sup>5</sup> God declared through Isaiah that there would be both a triumphant Savior of the world (see Isaiah 52) and a Suffering Servant who would take upon Himself our “griefs,” “sorrows,” “transgressions,” and “iniquities” (Isaiah 53). The God of the Old Testament spoke of the Messiah as “the stone which the builders refused” but which “is become the head stone of the corner” (Psalm 118:22), the same stone mentioned in Matthew 16:18 and Ephesians 2:20. God also prophesied through the Psalmist, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1), the anguished cry of the Savior on the cross (see Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34). Indeed, “the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare [the gospel] to every kindred, nation, and tongue” (Mosiah 3:13).

As beautiful as the Old Testament is as seen through traditional Christian glasses, the lenses of the Restoration provide an even more precise, complete, and detailed witness of Christ and His mission. For Latter-day Saints, the Old Testament is the oldest witness for Jesus Christ. We understand that Christ as a member of the Godhead created this earth, as outlined in Genesis, under the Father’s direction. He spoke to the prophets of the Old Testament. He gave the law to Moses. Throughout the Old Testament, His hand was stretched out still for the redemption of Israel and of the whole world because He is the triumphant Messiah and the Suffering Servant. He is the chief cornerstone the builders rejected. Thus much of the obfuscation that has veiled the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament can be removed. The dusty layers and opaque encrustations covering the Old Testament can become transparent when viewed through the glasses of the Restoration.

Besides excision and obfuscation, a third reason makes it difficult to see Christ in the Old Testament. God Himself explained that He had a hand in making the Old Testament hard to understand. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob said that all the holy prophets before his time “had a hope of [Christ’s] glory” (Jacob 4:4) long before He was born. But Jacob went on to say that those who heard the prophets by and large “were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets.” At the same time that they rejected the plain testimony

of the prophets concerning Christ, they also “sought for things that they could not understand.” Therefore, “because they desired it,” God took “away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they [could not] understand” (Jacob 4:14). As a result, many parts of the Old Testament contain things that are not clear and plain, because that is what the people wanted. For example, as Nephi said, “Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of [Nephi’s] people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:1).

Nevertheless, it was never the intention of a loving Heavenly Father “that the Gentiles [or anyone else, for that matter] shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness . . . because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back” (1 Nephi 13:32), especially those parts that God Himself made difficult because of unbelief and wickedness, giving them instead “many things which they cannot understand” (Jacob 4:14). Perhaps when Christ said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7), He intended, at least in part, that His admonition be applied when reading the Old Testament. For those of His children who “behold with [their] eyes, and hear with [their] ears, and set [their] heart upon all that [God] shall shew [them]” (Ezekiel 40:4), “the mysteries of God” will “be unfolded” to them (Mosiah 2:9), including the understanding of the Old Testament as a testament of “the gospel of the Lamb.”

Therefore, it seems to me that if God closed the door to understanding the Old Testament for those who “sought for things that they could not understand” (Jacob 4:14), then it seems equally probable that God also left the door open for those who would understand, for those who do ask, who do seek, and who do knock. With them God willingly shares all the knowledge and understanding that they are willing to receive. In the words of Elder James E. Talmage, “Two men may hear the same words; one of them listens in indolence and indifference, the other with active mind intent on learning all that the words can possibly convey. . . . The one is wise, the other foolish; the one has heard to his eternal profit, the other to his everlasting condemnation.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, true believers can

exclaim, as Isaiah did, “The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (Isaiah 50:5).

At the risk of presuming to know what holy writ is trying to convey, the rest of this paper will illustrate one of the ways I believe the Old Testament teaches the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be more precise, I will explain how the first six books of the Old Testament, often called the Hexateuch, provide an outline of the Plan of Salvation through the details of the stories they contain.<sup>7</sup> My explanation consists of two interwoven parts: first, an explanation of the symbols, metaphors, and similes that represent parts of the Plan of Salvation; and second, how knowledge of various parts of the Plan of Salvation as presented in the Hexateuch might apply today.

In my treatment of this material I will use two different methods, eisegesis and exegesis. Though quite different and in some respects almost opposite approaches, both are legitimate avenues of interpretation. Eisegesis means that the reader comes to the text with preconceived ideas and reads into the text those ideas, filling in the holes and reading between the lines according to the reader’s presuppositions. This is partially what I mean when I suggest that looking at the Old Testament through the lenses of the Restoration helps to bring clarity to the text. However, the very nature of eisegesis can and has led to strange and even fantastic readings of the scriptures.<sup>8</sup>

Exegesis means reading out of the text. In this method, very little is assumed when approaching the text; instead, the text is examined in every detail, from smaller questions about which copy of the text is the most accurate—through examination of the spelling, syntax, grammar, authorship, and the setting in real life of the passage—to larger questions about parallel and cognate literatures. For example, if I look up the root of a word, either for a King James English word or for a Hebrew word, and then see how the meaning of the root helps to explain the text, then I would be reading out of the text.

Though many of the explanations of symbols and metaphors that I will use are already well known, I will present many original and lesser-known explanations. And there are many more examples that cannot be included here. However, the uniqueness of my approach is not found in pointing out the meanings, whether new or already known, of the types

and shadows of the gospel in the Old Testament. Rather, my contribution consists of stitching together a few well-known symbols, a few less well-known ones, and a few hitherto unrecognized or entirely new images. The end result will be a beautiful tapestry, incomplete as it must be because of present constraints, of the Plan of Salvation as presented in the Hexateuch.

Briefly stated, the portrait of the Plan of Salvation in the first six books of the Old Testament begins with the Eisodus, literally the “entering into” Egypt, and ends with the completion of the Exodus, literally “exiting” Egypt and reentering the Promised Land. In the beginning, Jacob and his family lived in the Promised Land, a metaphor for the celestial kingdom, the presence of God, the land that was the ultimate promise to Abraham. But Jacob and his family could not stay there permanently. They had to leave the Promised Land and enter Egypt. In the Old Testament, Egypt symbolized, through a rather compelling synecdoche, the world and its attendant mortality.

In Egypt, over the course of many years, the family of Jacob became acquainted with, accustomed to, and habituated to the world, and they grew into a large family. Then a prophet arrived to lead them back to the Promised Land. Reluctant at first, they finally left Egypt and experienced several consequential and instructive events in their wanderings. In the end, the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and took possession of the land promised them as their inheritance. With this basic outline in mind, it is possible to explore the story of the Eisodus and the Exodus in much greater detail in order to discover the Old Testament teachings concerning “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8).

The Plan of Salvation has its beginnings in the premortal world. There we chose to leave our Heavenly Father’s presence in order to continue to make progress toward our eventual return to the celestial Promised Land. However, neither the premortal existence nor the Promised Land of the Eisodus was the ultimate goal, but, rather, both were stages along the path, the one very real and the other highly symbolic of the real. The ultimate goal was to return to God’s presence. As Paul so beautifully stated in the New Testament, “by faith Abraham” sought for an inheritance in a city “whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:8, 10). That is, Abraham’s quest was not for a piece of real estate in mortality, but rather he was seeking a celestial inheritance.

The promise of receiving a land, both the symbolic Promised Land and the celestial kingdom, had been given to Abraham and his descendants, but the realization of the promise in both cases could only come after a sojourn in a foreign land. Just after God gave Jacob a new name, Israel, He also promised him that “a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land” (Genesis 35:11–12). The realization of Israel’s posterity becoming nations and kings could only happen if he left the Promised Land—the presence of God—and descended to Egypt. The need to leave the presence of God was symbolized in Genesis by the famine, a metaphor which made it clear to Jacob and his family that they could not go on in their present circumstances; they had to leave the Promised Land in order to perpetuate life. Therefore, even though the promise of land for Abraham’s descendants had been given years earlier to Abraham, the right to permanently dwell in the Promised Land could only come through leaving it for a season and then returning, precisely as we had to leave temporarily the presence of God in order to be able to return one day forever. The promise of being able to inherit the celestial kingdom was also given to us long before we entered mortality.

It is significant that while still in the promised land, Jacob wrestled with God, calling the place where they struggled “Peniel,” which means “the Face of God,” or, as Jacob himself explained, “I have seen God face to face” (Genesis 32:30). Indeed, we did see God face-to-face in our premortal existence. It was also in the premortal life that a great struggle took place for the hearts and minds of God’s family. In light of the possible symbolic meaning of Jacob’s struggle, his reception of a new name must also be seen as symbolic.<sup>9</sup> The name Israel can be translated, among other possibilities, as “God has prevailed,” meaning that in the epic, premortal struggle, God prevailed among the two-thirds part of the hosts of heaven. Those of us who came to the earth also had “prevailed” in our premortal wrestle with good and evil. As God told Israel, “for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men” (Genesis 32:28). Likewise, after winning the battle in the premortal life, we became heirs of the kingdom, endowed with power, though in mortality “lessened a little from *elohim*,” but “wreathed with glory and splendor” (Psalm 8:5; author’s translation).

Just as we were foreordained in the premortal life before coming to the earth, so too Jacob received a promise and a blessing from God before leaving for Egypt, “Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again” (Genesis 46:3–4). Notice that leaving the Promised Land is described as a descent, and returning is ascending. Likewise, we also have the promise given of the Father that He will be with us when we come down into this life if we do not reject Him. We have the promise that we can return to His presence again and live with Him throughout eternity if we have been faithful. That is perhaps why, in the beautifully symbolic language of Genesis 50:13, when Jacob died, Joseph and his brothers returned their father’s body to the Promised Land for burial. For the same symbolic purpose, the writer of Genesis recorded that Joseph also extracted a promise from his people that after his death, his remains would be transported back to the Promised Land (see Genesis 50:25), home to the God who gave him life. All of God’s children in this world will be taken back physically into His presence.<sup>10</sup>

Joseph in many ways is a Christ figure.<sup>11</sup> Already in the Promised Land, he is singled out from among his brothers. He is the oldest son of Jacob’s beloved wife, Rachel, whose name means “ewe” and whose son would then be the “lamb.” Joseph’s father gave him a special piece of clothing, clothing being symbolic of status and position. The symbolism should not be lost on Latter-day Saints. One of Joseph’s own brothers, Judah, suggested that he be sold into slavery. Eventually a caravan of Midianites passed by and Joseph was sold to his distant cousins for the price of a slave, as Christ also would be sold by Judas (the name Judas being the Greek form of the Hebrew Judah) for the price of a slave.

Joseph, as a type of Christ, entered Egypt in the lowly status of a slave in order to prepare a place for his family who would unwittingly follow him into Egypt. There in Egypt he suffered the temptations that are the common lot of mortals, yet he did not give in to temptation but maintained his purity and integrity. Using divine inspiration and his own native intelligence, he raised himself up from slavery to wearing the ring of the king. In effect, he became the *de facto* ruler of the world that was Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, who remained the *de jure* ruler. So it is also with Christ, who rules and serves under His Father.



As next in command to the king, Joseph could not only plan for and save temporally every soul of Egypt, but he could also prepare for and save his own kindred in Egypt. In like manner, Christ is our Savior, both in the universal sense that He atoned for Adam's transgression for all people of this world, and in the particular sense that He atoned for personal sin for all those who confess, repent, and enter the covenant with Him, becoming "the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters" (Mosiah 5:7).

While serving as the savior of all the inhabitants of Egypt and of his own kindred, Joseph performed one of the most Christlike acts of any recorded in scripture. He freely forgave his brothers for the wrongs they had committed against him when it was in his power to exact terrible vengeance. His brothers even expected retribution in the manner of the world: "When Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him" (Genesis 50:15). But it was not in Joseph's heart to seek vengeance. Instead, in the manner of Christ and not the world, he taught them that his being sold into Egypt had been fortuitous and, in the grand scheme of things, certainly foreordained: "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). In like manner, all the blunders, pettiness, and even sin that people have perpetrated throughout this earth's existence, as symbolized by the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers, God has used for his own purposes, turning them "unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20) for the celestial kingdom. So it was that Jacob, his twelve sons, and their families, altogether seventy souls (see Genesis 46:27),<sup>12</sup> a wonderfully symbolic number, came into the world that was Egypt to be greeted by their savior.

In the world of Egypt, "the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty," so that "the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). It is also part of the Plan of Salvation that we begin to acquire posterity here in a literal and symbolic preparation for posterity without number in the celestial kingdom; that is, we have been commanded to multiply and fill the earth and to begin to become "a great nation" here and now. While none of us ever realizes fully this part of the Abrahamic promise in this life, the concern for the fulfillment illustrates one of the reasons that families are so important. It

is also one of the reasons that a different “king over Egypt” who “knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1:8), in a remarkable prefiguring of the tenth plague, tried to destroy the families of God’s chosen people by ordering the destruction of the male babies born to the Hebrews. (King Herod would try again in the New Testament with a striking postfiguring of the tenth plague.)

As is always the case in mortality, Egypt began to subvert the children of God and to co-opt them for its own selfish purposes. Thus it was, after several hundred years of living in the world called Egypt, that the children of Israel had no doubt lost the living memory of the Promised Land and had forgotten that Egypt was never intended to be their final inheritance, just as this earth was never intended to be the sum of our existence. And like us, they could not escape on their own the condition in which they found themselves. Such a situation called for an unusual means of rescue, a prophet extraordinaire. Out of their midst, Moses was called, and in remarkable symbolism of our own existence, he was born a Hebrew but raised an Egyptian. He was in the world but not of the world.

With good reason, many people see in Moses a Christ figure. For example, like Christ, Moses did for the Israelites what they could not have done on their own, namely, release them from slavery. In our case, Christ has freed us from spiritual bondage. However, without rejecting Moses as a messianic figure, it is also possible to see Moses as the archetypal prophet. First of all, he was called from his “own nation and tongue” (Alma 29:8), as God usually calls prophets. In spite of being brought up in the household of the king of Egypt, he knew that he was not one of them, but rather one of the Hebrews. But as long as he was in the household of the king of the world that was Egypt, he could not be called as the prophet, because no one of this world can become a prophet. Neither can the world bestow the legitimate priesthood through a descendant of one who “would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham” (Abraham 1:27). Through a series of events, Moses was led to stand on hallowed ground, outside the purview of Egypt. There he received his Melchizedek Priesthood ordination (see D&C 84:6) and his assignment to lead God’s people back to the Promised Land (see Exodus 3), that is, back to God’s presence.

Moses knew that at least some, if not many, of God’s people would be reluctant to leave the world of Egypt. After all, they had a good life there with plenty to eat and, most importantly, time to create large families.

No matter that they were enslaved and that they had complained to God about their situation. Perhaps they had naively asked, “O God, can’t you do something about my overbearing overseer? But don’t ask me to stop making adobes and to start wandering out into the desert.” Therefore, Moses’ first task was to convince the Hebrews of the need to return to the Promised Land. It is no easy task, as any missionary can attest, to convince people who are comfortable of the need for a paradigm shift. In addition, while trying to convince the people of God to leave the world of Egypt, he also had to convince the Egyptians to allow God’s people to leave—no simple task by any measure.

In the beginning, Moses made only a modest request, namely, that Pharaoh should let the people of God go “three days’ journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord [their] God” (Exodus 5:3), that is, to temporarily leave the employ of Egypt in order to serve God. But even this modest request was denied because the self-proclaimed king of this world does not want his subjects serving the true God or truly serving their fellow beings, even if for only a short time. The king of this world wants us to believe that there is no time for extraneous activities that divert attention away from his manufactured distractions. He even warns us about leaving his employ. He would rather keep people busy constructing the adobe bricks of his kingdom and engaged in other mundane activities that distract the children of God from what should be their primary concern, making the journey back to God. Making a living, getting an education, going to social events, tending a garden, shopping for clothing, fixing up old cars, hunting, seeking political office, serving on various committees, writing academic papers and presenting them—while these activities are often necessary in and of themselves, they can become the equivalent of making adobes if they distract us from serving our God or detain us in Egypt when we should be journeying to the Promised Land.

Even though each of the various plagues that afflicted the Egyptians has its symbolism, I will only touch upon the tenth plague. This last plague was designed to demonstrate “how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (Exodus 11:7), that is, the children of God, though living in the world, are not supposed to be of the world. They are supposed to be peculiar, not in the sense that they

are weird and strange, but in the sense that they belong to God and not to the world.

The plague itself was the death of the firstborn of those who did not avail themselves of the Passover. In the ancient world, the firstborn often had rights and obligations above and beyond the other children. Primarily, the firstborn was to preside over the family estate upon the death of the parents. In other words, the firstborn was to perpetuate the heritage of the family. Therefore, the death of the firstborn symbolized, among other things, the symbolic end of that family's heritage. Or, as Malachi stated, "all that do wickedly" shall be consumed by the Lord and left with "neither root nor branch" (Malachi 4:1).

The Passover is a powerful metaphor or symbol that most Latter-day Saints—indeed, most Christians who read Exodus—understand in its more salient features clearly. The "lamb . . . without blemish, a male of the first year" (Exodus 12:5) stands for Christ, the Messiah, who "came . . . to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). It is the blood of the paschal lamb that spares the children of God from the death of their firstborn, just as it is Christ who "washed us from our [mortal] sins in his own blood" (Revelation 1:5).

The less salient details of the Passover are just as telling. In Old Testament times, the door of one's tent, or the gate of the city (if one lived in the city), was the place where official business was conducted. By synecdoche, the door or the gate stood for the whole of the dwelling or city. Thus, applying the blood of the sacrifice to the jambs and lintel of the door symbolized the application of the Atonement of Christ to all of one's household, that is, to every aspect of one's life, but particularly to the family's heritage here on earth and throughout the eternities.

Applying the blood of the sacrifice and eating the roasted lamb occurred in family units. The symbolism is obvious, namely, that salvation comes through family organization, that is, through God's family organization. The fact that the whole lamb was to be roasted and totally consumed before morning probably indicates that we are not allowed to pick and choose what parts of the gospel we will enjoy; we are to consume all of the gospel completely, leaving nothing undone in this life.

In other places in scripture, the Holy Ghost is described as a fire or His influence as a burning. It may be that the roasting of the lamb, rather

than being “sodden [boiled] at all with water” or eaten raw (Exodus 12:9), was intended to indicate that all gospel content must be consumed in and through the medium of the Holy Ghost.

As part of the preparation for celebrating the Passover and for the departure out of Egypt, the Israelites were to completely rid their dwellings of leaven, eating only unleavened bread for a week (see Exodus 12:19). When they left Egypt they were not to take any Egyptian leaven with them on their journey to the Promised Land (see Exodus 12:34). Christ defined the symbolism of leaven in the New Testament when He warned His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees, meaning their doctrine (see Matthew 16:11–12). Of all the ingredients in bread, of whatever kind, yeast or leaven is unique because it is the only ingredient that is alive. Yeast makes the whole loaf come alive and grow. The Pharisees could never produce a spiritually satisfying loaf of bread in all its goodness because their doctrine would never leaven the loaf in the way the Lord wanted. Like the ancient Israelites, we are to eschew the doctrines of the world. We are to cleanse our house of worldly doctrines. And, on our trip back to the celestial kingdom, we are not to take with us any doctrines of the world.

Yet in leaving Egypt, the Israelites were told to take with them all the best that Egypt had to offer, that is, to spoil Egypt of its wealth (see Exodus 3:22). So we too are commanded to “seek . . . out of the best books words of wisdom, seek learning even by study and also by faith” (D&C 109:7), but we are not to leaven our loaf with the doctrines of the world. We can study them, use them, or even scorn them, but we should not allow them to give life to our loaf and thereby change the nature of our gospel bread.

After the Israelites left their Egyptian homes behind them, the first striking occurrence must have been the appearance of the “pillar of a cloud” to lead them by day and a “pillar of fire” to give them light by night. The cloud and the fire were one and the same; in broad daylight only the smoke of the fire was visible, whereas by night only the fire could be seen.<sup>13</sup> Passages such as “And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord” (Exodus 34:5) suggest that the cloud and the fire symbolize the Lord. To be more precise, they symbolize the presence of the Lord. Therefore, perhaps the cloud and the fire also symbolize the Holy Ghost, who is present when God makes an appearance. As already

mentioned, the Holy Ghost is associated with fire (see 2 Nephi 31:14), with leading the way (see 1 Nephi 4:6), and with showing us everything we need to do (see D&C 39:6). Thus it is that the children of God were led, from the time they left Egypt until they entered the Promised Land, by the visible symbol of the Holy Ghost, which in turn made the invisible presence of the Lord possible. Our journey from the beginnings of our conversion in this life until we reach the ultimate goal, the celestial kingdom, also must be guided by the Lord and mediated by the Holy Spirit, who communicates to us “all things” that we “should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

The Exodus teaches also that while following the Plan of Salvation we cannot turn our back on the world and expect to be left alone. If, like the children of Israel, we have managed to leave the world and set out on our quest to reach the celestial kingdom, the world, like Pharaoh and his hosts, will come after us to bring us back into bondage. No matter what it is that we have repented of, the ruler of this world will pursue us and try to convince us to come back and make adobes. It is only the presence of a member of the Godhead that protects our blind side from an unwarranted and unwanted attack and at the same time points the way forward.

The departure from Egypt was marked by passing through the Red Sea. Our departure from the world is also symbolized by passing through the waters of baptism. The Apostle Paul understood this metaphor when he stated, speaking of the ancient Israelites, “All our fathers were under the cloud [a reference to the pillar of fire], and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1–2). That is, they were baptized by water and by the Holy Ghost. Even today, it is the Holy Ghost that will guide God’s children to the waters of baptism, if they will let Him. Prior to baptism, the forces of this world will be marshaled to prevent individuals from entering the water. Only the Holy Ghost, if we allow Him to, will provide protection. Once having passed through the water, the world will continue to call after us and entice us with its bright lights, but it cannot follow after us. However, we can turn again on our own toward the world, long for it, sigh for it, delay our journey, or even return back to it, but only as an act of willful rebellion against the directions of the Holy Ghost.

Between passing through the Red Sea and crossing the Jordan River—that is, between baptism and entering the Promised Land of the

celestial kingdom—the Exodus story maps out certain consequential and instructive events concerning the Plan of Salvation. The most obvious of these is the manna from heaven. From the New Testament we know that the manna of the Exodus, the bread from heaven, symbolized Christ, “the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32). “Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger” (John 6:35). Christ is capable of supplying all of our day-to-day spiritual food. In fact, He knows exactly how much spiritual nourishment to provide each day, and any attempt to appropriate more than He has allotted usually produces at best nothing more than a rearrangement of ignorance.

Besides needing bread for our journey back to Heavenly Father’s presence, we also need water to sustain life; we need the Water of Life. During the Exodus, when the people thirsted for water and complained to Moses, he struck a rock, and life-sustaining water poured out to quench the immediate thirst of the Israelites (see Exodus 17:6). The symbolism of the rock throughout the Old Testament is clear; it represents the God of Israel, Jehovah, the Messiah. “The Lord [Jehovah] is my rock” (Psalm 18:2). From Christ, the Rock of our Salvation, comes the water that was promised the Samaritan woman at the well: “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst” (John 4:14).

One of the teachings the Exodus story sets forth through its presentation of the Plan of Salvation is that all those who could remember Egypt, with two exceptions, were not allowed to enter the Promised Land (see Numbers 14:30). The two exceptions, Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to enter the Promised Land, probably because they were ready to enter the Promised Land the first time they had the chance. The other representatives of the twelve tribes refused to enter the Promised Land the first time they were given that chance (see Numbers 14:22–24). Instead, they and all the rest of the Israelites were consigned to wander in the wilderness until all of that early generation had died off, a forty-year odyssey (see Numbers 14:33–34; Joshua 5:6). The number forty symbolizes the period of human gestation.<sup>14</sup> The meaning for us should be obvious: before entering the celestial kingdom, we must pass through the Sinais of mortality in order to become new creatures, untainted by the world, tried in the harness, proven worthy by having jettisoned all iniquity and other mortal trappings, and by having become as a little child.

On our journey between our conversion and entering the celestial kingdom, we are also symbolically and ceremonially introduced into the presence of God. The Israelites, similar to Latter-day Saints, were supposed to become “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) unto God. However, the Israelites rejected God’s invitation to ascend the mountain (see Deuteronomy 9:23), saying to Moses, “Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19), ironically missing the opportunity to become alive in the fullest sense. It was not supposed to be that way, and it should not be that way for Latter-day Saints on our journey. Latter-day Saints are to embrace, and by and large have embraced, the Melchizedek Priesthood, and, if faithful, shall become kings and queens, priests and priestesses (see Revelation 5:10), calling upon God without the use of an intermediary, and accepting the obligations that come with being symbolically and ritually introduced into the celestial kingdom in the Temple.

During the trek, the children of Israel were organized along strict lines, with specific instructions about who was to lead out in their travels (the priests) and where each tribe was to encamp in relation to the Tabernacle, the transportable House of God, which formed the center of each encampment. We too should expect a hierarchical organization to help shepherd us on our individual journeys to the celestial kingdom, the Temple playing a central role in our sojourn.

In addition, detailed instructions are given concerning how to deal with iniquity while trying to follow the Plan of Salvation. For example, if a person had a skin disease (a disease of the skin is symbolic of superficial and therefore curable sin), that person must show the disease (i.e., sin) to the priest (i.e., bishop), who will determine if it is serious or not. If it is serious, the person must leave the camp of Israel (i.e., be excommunicated) and remain outside the camp until the disease is overcome. When the person believes that the disease has abated, the person must again show the diseased skin to the priest, who will determine if the person has been truly cured. If the disease has been overcome, the person then must wait a set amount of time and be examined again. If the cure has taken, the person then has to be ritually cleansed by the shedding of the blood of a sacrifice and must put on new, clean, pure clothing. The old clothing, the old trappings of sin, must be washed and cleansed also (see Leviticus 13–14).



The Plan of Salvation does not promise a free ride to anyone. The journey to the Promised Land can be and is fraught with perils if we are not careful. On one occasion some Israelites longed for the pleasures of Egypt, for “the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick” (Numbers 11:5). As tasty as these things might have been to an inhabitant of Egypt, how tawdry this list must seem when compared with the banquet set for the marriage feast of the Lamb, “A feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined; . . . yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared” (D&C 58:8–9). In other words, for those of us on our way to the Promised Land, rather than longing for the things of the world, we should be satiated at the banquet the Lord has set with the Bread of Heaven and the Water of Life.

Temptations may also come in the form of worshipping other gods, as some Israelites did at Baal-Peor (see Numbers 25:1–5). But those who do will be destroyed from among the children of God (see Deuteronomy 4:3). The First Presidency message for June 1976, written by President Spencer W. Kimball, warned the present-day members of the Church about “the false gods we worship.” “Whatever thing a man sets his heart and his trust in most is his god; and if his god doesn’t also happen to be the true and living God of Israel, that man is laboring in idolatry.” He went on to say that it was his “firm belief that when we read [the Old Testament] . . . we will see many parallels between the ancient worship of graven images and behavioral patterns in our very own experience” today. Becoming more specific, President Kimball continued:

We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan’s counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior’s teaching:

“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:44–45.)

We forget that if we are righteous the Lord will either not suffer our enemies to come upon us (see 2 Nephi 1:7) . . . or he will fight our battles for us.<sup>15</sup>

It is also significant that at the end of the forty years, the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land happened as the priests, who represent us and who were carrying the ark, waded into the river (see Joshua 3:14–16). But that is a lesson for another time.

Suffice it to say that God has made all basic gospel teachings available to those who seek and knock. He has promised us, “For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which [the mortal] eye has not seen, nor [mortal] ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of [the natural] man” (D&C 76:10).

In summary, like Jacob and his sons, we too had to leave the Promised Land before we could inherit it permanently. We had to enter mortality where an elder brother had prepared a place for us. But we must also be willing to give up that life of the world when God’s prophet comes to lead us back to the Promised Land. The journey begins with the sacrifice that represents the Atonement and continues with the reception of the Holy Ghost and baptism. If we are true and faithful, we will be led symbolically and ceremonially back into God’s presence on the Mountain of the Lord. We will eat the Bread of Heaven and drink the Water of Life and be satisfied. After jettisoning all our sins, even our favorite ones, the time will come when we will cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, never to leave again.

And thus, God in his mercy has given to all the world an outline and many of the details of the great Plan of Salvation for those who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand the plain and precious parts in His scriptures.

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## NOTES

1. Besides the Genesis account, there are the two accounts of the Creation in the Pearl of Great Price, both from Old Testament times.

2. The books of Abraham and Moses in the Pearl of Great Price are examples of additional texts or revelations containing plain and precious parts of the gospel.

3. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, American edition, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 83a. For a discussion of the date, see the introduction on page 74. I thank my colleague Matthew Roper for this reference.

4. Seeing history as teaching about the Savior has led to the theological school called Heilsgeschichte.

5. See any Christian printing of the Old Testament wherein the passages that speak of the Messiah are printed in red. For example, The Holy Bible, Red Letter Edition (Oxford: Oxford, n.d.), states on the title page, “The Old Testament prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, His Messianic dignity and redeeming work, printed in red letters.”

6. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915), 297.

7. Interwoven with the Plan of Salvation in these books are other gospel teachings. But I confine myself here to the more salient parts of the Plan of Salvation. Admittedly, I have chosen convenient but somewhat arbitrary beginning and ending points for my explanation.

8. For illustrations of questionable conclusions that might result from careless eisegesis, see Alonzo Gaskill’s chapter on the church fathers in this volume. For an entire novel about bad eisegesis, see Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*.

9. In addition to the types and shadows of the Plan of Salvation in the Hexateuch, there are also many allusions to Temple material. I do not discuss these allusions in this paper.

10. See, for example, 2 Nephi 2:10; 9:22, 38; Alma 11:41, 44; 42:23; Helaman 14:15–17; and Mormon 9:12–13. I thank my colleague D. Kelly Ogden for these references.

11. For a discussion of early eastern Christian interpretations of Joseph as a type of Christ, see the excellent article by Kristian S. Heal, “Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 1 (2002): 29–49, with much detail and copious footnotes. For a Latter-day Saint viewpoint on ways in which Joseph symbolizes Christ, see also Andrew C. Skinner, *Prophets, Priests, and Kings: Old Testament Figures Who Symbolize Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 45–53.

12. Just because a number has symbolic meanings does not mean that it cannot also be literal.

13. See passages such as “They have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night” (Numbers 14:14).

14. The commonly expressed period of human gestation is nine months. But my friend Joseph Cannon mentioned to me one day in the fall of 2007 that the more precise length of human gestation is actually closer to forty weeks than it is to nine months.

15. Spencer W. Kimball, “The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976, 4, 6.