



Acts 7.²⁻⁸

²And he said, ‘Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, ³and said unto him, ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.’

⁴Then came he out of the land of the Chaldæans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. ⁵And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. ⁶And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. ⁷‘And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge,’ said God: ‘and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.’ ⁸And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

In offering his defense against blasphemy, Stephen reminded his prosecutors of the command that God issued to Abraham: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.” This voluntary exodus from the wicked comforts of home is a common, indeed, persistent feature of God’s people.

The most famous exodus, of course, is found in the Book of the same name. “But,” one might object, “Israel’s exodus from Egypt was not an exodus ‘from the wicked comforts of home,’ but from wicked Egyptian slavery.” True enough. Yet, once Israel had left what had been their home for generations, they soon forgot the wickedness of Egyptian slavery because of the difficulty of following God’s path to a better land and society.

“And the children of Israel said unto [Moses and Aaron], ‘Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’”¹

“We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.”²

Leaving home behind, even a bad, wicked home, to pursue a home in keeping with the Lord’s principles is hard work that often entails great personal sacrifice.

Generations later, the people of Israel found themselves enmeshed in the Babylonian captivity. One might think that the captives would be chomping at the bits to get out and return home. One would not think

¹ Exodus 16.³

² Numbers 11.⁵⁻⁶

there would be any need for a command to leave. Yet...

“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.”³

Yet, even here, Babylon had become home for many. Even after the command/ invitation to leave, many, the majority even, choose to stay in Babylon.

The Book of Mormon is a history of one exodus after another. There is the original exodus from Jerusalem found in 1 Nephi. Many, perhaps a majority, of those commanded to leave the wicked comforts of home were not happy campers.

“They did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness...”⁴

“They were desirous to return unto the land of Jerusalem.”⁵

“It would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions. Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy.”

Yes, leaving sin and wickedness behind is difficult, often uncertain work. Yet, just as he called ancient Israel to do it, and Lehi, and Nephi,⁷ and Mosiah,⁸ and Alma,⁹ he called latter-day “saints” to do it. The danger of wickedness seems to always be lurking where the comfort of home is. And it was no different for the early “saints.” Danger and wickedness lurked everywhere in 18th century America. So, the “saints” were commanded to leave.

“Wherefore, prepare ye, prepare ye, O my people; sanctify yourselves; gather ye together, O ye people of my church, upon the land of Zion, all you that have not been commanded to tarry. Go ye out from Babylon. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord... Yea, verily I say unto you again, the time has come when the voice of the Lord is unto you: Go ye out of Babylon; gather ye out from among the nations, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”¹⁰

They tried. But like so many before them, they couldn’t let go the comfortable wickedness of home. The society God intended to establish asked for too much. It was too difficult.

“Behold, I say unto you, there were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them; therefore by these things they polluted their inheritances.”¹¹

³ Isaiah 52.¹¹

⁴ 1 Nephi 2.¹¹

⁵ 1 Nephi 7.⁷

⁶ 1 Nephi 17.²⁰⁻²¹

⁷ 2 Nephi 5.⁵

⁸ Omni 1.¹²

⁹ Alma 18.³⁴

¹⁰ DC 133.^{4-5, 7}

¹¹ DC 101.⁶

So, they were exiled from Zion and made to dwell in the desert. I'll let the reader decide whether they have done any better in the desert home of the past hundred and seventy years.

So, I think of all this "getting out" as I contemplate the opening lines of Stephen's defense. In speaking of Abraham's "getting out" of his country, Steven wasn't, I believe, simply "doing history." I sense that he was speaking in parable. He, like many before and after him, had come to the conclusion that Jesus' followers were going to have to "get out." They were going to need to turn from their Jewish traditions and begin their own independent Christian traditions; for Jewish religious and political leaders were, as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other Hebrew prophets lamented, had become little different from the nation's original Egyptian overlords.

The Lord made the same determination about America in the 18th century. It was not a place where disciples of Jesus could dwell comfortably. I, for one, have made the same determination in this, the 21st century. America is a dangerously wicked place. A new version of Babylon. Its wickedness is a danger to all who remain. I hear the call renewed, "Go ye out from Babylon." This going out is certainly mental and emotional and spiritual. It may be physical as well, for all I know. But, whether mental or physical, our going out must, as always, be accomplished without resorting to violence.¹² But get out we must. Our spiritual lives depend on it. But, maybe, even our physical lives depend on it.

"For behold, and lo, vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly as the whirlwind; and who shall escape it? The Lord's scourge shall pass over by night and by day, and the report thereof shall vex all people; yea, it shall not be stayed until the Lord come; for the indignation of the Lord is kindled against their abominations and all their wicked works."¹³

"And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations..."¹⁴

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: may 27, 2024)

¹² See DC 63.²⁹⁻³¹

¹³ DC 97.²²⁻²⁴

¹⁴ DC 87.⁶