

The Philosophies of Michael Cox, mingled with Scripture

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The Spiritual Exodus

May 21, 2007

1st Nephi 17

Nephi, at the beginning of this powerful chapter, starts to talk about the great blessings that they have had in their 8-year journey¹ from Jerusalem to Bountiful. Nephi understands that they are being blessed because they are keeping the commandments, therefore “he doth nourish them and strengthen them... wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.”² Laman and Lemuel saw things just a little different than Nephi did. “And [we] have suffered all things, save it were death; and it would have been better that [we] had died before [we] came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions.”³ Same situation, different views. We all have trials in our life. We all have things that don’t quite go right. Do we look at them as great blessings, like Nephi did, or that we have suffered and that perhaps it would have just been better to have died than to have gone through them? Laman and Lemuel then go on to say “these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, [we could] have been enjoy[ing] our possessions... and we might have been happy.”⁴ If only we had that new video game, if only we had that new plasma TV, if only our house was bigger, if only we had a boat, if only we had better toys... we could have been happy. Do we play the “if only” game? What caused Nephi to be happy?

Nephi attempts to help his brothers grow their faith. He talks about the Exodus of Moses and the Children of Israel. He reminded them of how the Children of Israel were in bondage and God led them to the Promised Land. This was, like Nephi’s exodus, a physical exodus from the wicked of the world. Jeremiah 16:14-16 tells us that in the future, people won’t try to grow people’s faith by talking about the Exodus anymore. Instead, they will grow people’s faith by talking about the gathering of Israel and the great Latter-day missionary work⁵. This Latter-day missionary work is, in most cases, not a physical exodus but rather, a spiritual one. Will you leave Babylon and enter Zion? If you do so and are righteous, God will favor you⁶. If you don’t, he won’t.

After the Children of Israel left Egypt, they became thirsty. Moses, with the power of God, was able to give them water by striking a rock.⁷ Their physical thirst was quenched by God that day on their physical exodus. How can we quench our spiritual thirst on our spiritual exodus? When teaching the Woman at the Well, Jesus offered her “living water” that if she drank would never thirst again.⁸ What is this living water? How do we get it?

While on their physical exodus, the Children of Israel messed up. At one point, God sent fiery flying serpents which bit them.⁹ God then instructed Moses to make a brazen Serpent and put it on a pole that “every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live”.¹⁰ “The only labor they had to perform was to look”¹¹, yet many didn’t, because it was too simple. In our spiritual exodus from Babylon, we will

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mess up. As long as we keep our eye on Jesus Christ and do the simple things that He has asked us, we shall live. It's that simple. Will we perish because we won't look?

Nephi tells his brothers that if God "should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done. And now, if the Lord has such great power [to be able to turn the waters to earth], and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?"¹² Just like the Children of Israel had a hard time raising their head to look at the Brazen serpent, so too did Laman and Lemuel believe that God could teach Nephi how to build a ship. The Israelites wanted something huge, some great and marvelous thing to heal them. If God had told Nephi to turn the ocean into land, that would have been something great and marvelous. But He didn't. He chose something simple. As Alma would teach his son Helaman, "that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass"¹³. In our spiritual exodus, are we looking for the huge marvelous miracles, or the small and simple things? Will God be able to speak unto us in a still, small voice? Or, like Laman and Lemuel, are we past feeling?¹⁴

Let us all press on as we leave Babylon and establish Zion!

¹ 1 Nephi 17:4

² 1 Nephi 17:3

³ 1 Nephi 17:20

⁴ 1 Nephi 17:21

⁵ For more information, see "The Philosophy of Michael Cox: Jeremiah 16:14-16"

⁶ 1 Nephi 17:35

⁷ Exodus 16:6. See also 1 Nephi 17:29

⁸ John 4:7-14

⁹ Numbers 21:6. See also 1 Nephi 17:41

¹⁰ Numbers 21:8

¹¹ 1 Nephi 17:41

¹² 1 Nephi 50-51

¹³ Alma 37:6

¹⁴ 1 Nephi 17:45