

Psalms 114:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;

Analysis

When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; This opening verse launches one of Scripture's most dramatic and compact psalms celebrating the Exodus. The psalm is remarkable for its brevity—only eight verses—yet it captures the entire sweep of redemptive history from Egyptian bondage to Promised Land possession.

"When Israel went out of Egypt" (יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם/betzet Yisrael miMitzrayim) references the defining event of Israelite identity. The Exodus wasn't merely historical migration but divine deliverance demonstrating Yahweh's covenant faithfulness, sovereign power over creation, and redemptive purpose. Every subsequent generation identified with this event: "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 6:21).

"The house of Jacob" uses the patriarch's name, emphasizing covenant continuity. God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob found fulfillment in Exodus deliverance. This wasn't random tribe migration but covenant people experiencing promised redemption. The phrase "house of Jacob" also evokes familial imagery—God delivering His household, His family.

"From a people of strange language" (לְעָם לִזְנוּן/me'am lo'ez) highlights cultural alienation. Lo'ez means foreign, barbarous, unintelligible speech. Egypt represented not just geographical location but cultural-linguistic-religious foreignness. Israel dwelt among people whose language, gods, and values were

alien. This alienation intensified the bondage experience—strangers in strange land.

The psalm's genius lies in what it celebrates: not primarily Israel's valor or Moses's leadership, but nature's response to God's presence. Verses 3-6 describe seas fleeing, Jordan turning back, mountains skipping like rams. Creation itself recognizes and responds to the Creator. The God who delivered Israel commands even inanimate creation.

Historical Context

Psalm 114 belongs to the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118), recited during Passover celebrations. Jewish tradition prescribes these psalms for major festivals commemorating God's redemptive acts. Jesus and His disciples likely sang these psalms at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30).

The Exodus (circa 1446 BCE, early dating, or 1290 BCE, late dating) represented Ancient Near East's most significant slave liberation. Egypt, the era's superpower with advanced military and administrative systems, couldn't prevent a slave nation's departure. Ten plagues systematically demonstrated Yahweh's supremacy over Egyptian gods—Nile (Hapi), sun (Ra), fertility (Apis)—culminating in Passover's death angel.

Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14) and Jordan River crossing (Joshua 3) form bookends to wilderness wanderings. The psalm references both, showing God's consistent intervention. At Red Sea, waters parted allowing Israel's passage while drowning Egyptian army. At Jordan, waters stopped upstream allowing entrance into Promised Land. Both miracles involved water obeying divine command.

The phrase "people of strange language" captures exile's alienation. Throughout Scripture, language barriers symbolize separation from God's people and purposes. At Babel, God confused languages, scattering nations (Genesis 11:1-9). At Pentecost, God reversed Babel's curse, enabling multi-lingual Gospel proclamation (Acts 2:1-11). The Exodus began reversing Babel's judgment, forming

a people who would know God's language—His Word, Law, and ultimately His Living Word, Jesus Christ.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the Exodus event continue to shape identity for both Jews and Christians today?
2. What does it mean to be delivered 'from a people of strange language,' and how does this apply to conversion from worldly culture to kingdom culture?
3. How does nature's response to God's presence (seas fleeing, mountains skipping) reveal creation's recognition of the Creator?
4. In what ways does the Passover lamb prefigure Christ's sacrifice, and how does this psalm celebrate both Old and New Covenant redemption?

Interlinear Text

וָיָצֵא	שְׂרָאֵל	מִמִּצְרַיִם	בֵּית	יַעֲקֹב	מִלְּעַם
went out	When Israel	of Egypt	the house	of Jacob	from a people
H3318	H3478	H4714	H1004	H3290	H5971

לְלִשָּׁנָה:

of strange language

H3937

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 81:5 (References Egypt): This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.

Exodus 13:3 (References Egypt): And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten.

Genesis 42:23 (Parallel theme): And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

Isaiah 11:16 (References Israel): And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:1 (References Egypt): Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night.

Deuteronomy 26:8 (References Egypt): And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: