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# THE Book of Mormon, THE Gathering of Israel, AND THE Second Coming

*The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is a tangible sign to the world that the Lord has commenced gathering Israel and fulfilling covenants He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

Chapter 5 of *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* is devoted entirely to the Book of Mormon. This chapter teaches that the Book of Mormon:

- Is the keystone of our religion.
- Testifies of Jesus Christ.
- Supports the Bible.
- Answers questions of the soul.
- Draws people nearer to God.



All of these assertions are absolutely true, but they are made from our point of view as mortal beings. What would be the perspective of our Father in Heaven and of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, on the Book of Mormon?

Their perspective would surely be shaped by two long-standing promises They have made to all mankind. These two promises are interrelated, well documented, still in force, and yet to be fulfilled. The first is Their ancient promise to gather scattered Israel. The second is Their long-standing promise of the Second Coming of the Lord.

### The Abrahamic Covenant and the House of Israel

In the dispensation of Abraham, God made a covenant with Father Abraham that through his lineage, people of all nations would be blessed. Other important components of

that promise were made as well. These promises, given first to Abraham and later reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob, included:

- A large posterity.<sup>1</sup>
- The inheritance of certain lands.<sup>2</sup>
- The seed of Abraham would bear the priesthood unto all nations, that all might be blessed through Abraham's lineage.<sup>3</sup>
- Those not descended from Abraham who accept the gospel would become the seed of Abraham through adoption.<sup>4</sup>
- The Savior of the world would come through Abraham's lineage.<sup>5</sup>

Many of Abraham's descendants—the tribes of ancient Israel—eventually rejected the teachings of the Lord and



killed the prophets. Ten tribes were carried captive into Assyria. From there they became lost to the records of mankind, though not lost to the Lord. Two tribes remained for a short time, but because of their rebellion they were taken captive into Babylon. When they returned, they were favored of the Lord, but again they rejected Him!

### The Scattering and Gathering of Israel

A loving but grieving Father scattered Israel far and wide, but He promised that one day scattered Israel would be gathered back into the fold. This promise was just as emphatic as the promise of the scattering of Israel.<sup>6</sup> Isaiah, for example, foresaw that in the latter days the Lord would send “swift messengers” to these people, who were “scattered and peeled” (Isaiah 18:2, 7).

As prophesied, *all* things were to be restored in this dispensation. Therefore, the long-awaited gathering of scattered Israel must come as part of that restoration.<sup>7</sup> The gathering of Israel is interrelated with the second promise because the gathering is a necessary prelude to the Second Coming of the Lord.<sup>8</sup> Again, that heavenly perspective is ever evident.



This concept of the gathering is one of the important teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Lord has declared, “I give unto you a sign . . . that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion” (3 Nephi 21:1).

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is a tangible sign to the world that the Lord has commenced gathering Israel and fulfilling covenants He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>9</sup> We not only teach this concept, but we also get to participate in it! We do so as we help to gather the elect of the Lord on both sides of the veil.

Mercifully, the invitation to “come unto Christ” (Jacob 1:7)<sup>10</sup> can also be extended to those who died without a knowledge of the gospel.<sup>11</sup> Part of the preparation on behalf of those who live on the other side of the veil requires earthly efforts of those who live on this side of the veil. We gather pedigree charts, create family group sheets, and do vicarious temple work to gather individuals unto the Lord and into their families.<sup>12</sup>

This dispensation of the fulness of times was foreseen by God as the time to gather, both in heaven and on earth. The Apostle Peter knew that after a period of apostasy, a restoration would come. He declared:

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; . . .

“Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19, 21).

In our day, Peter, James, and John were sent by the Lord with “the keys of [His] kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times,” in which He would “gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (D&C 27:13).<sup>13</sup>

Many aspects of the Abrahamic covenant have already been fulfilled. The Savior of the world did indeed come



through the lineage of Abraham, through Jacob's son Judah. Land was allocated for an inheritance long ago. A map in the LDS edition of the Bible shows how the land inherited by the tribes was divided among the descendants of Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh.<sup>14</sup> We learn from the Book of Mormon that the land reserved for the lineage of Joseph was the American hemisphere.<sup>15</sup>

The great promise that *all* nations would be blessed by the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has yet to be fulfilled. But this promise of the gathering, woven through the fabric of all scriptures, will be fulfilled just as surely as were the prophecies of the scattering of Israel.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Gathering as a Prelude to the Second Coming**

Why is this promise of gathering so crucial? Because the gathering of Israel is necessary to prepare the world for the Second

Coming! And the Book of Mormon is God's instrument needed to accomplish *both* of these divine objectives.<sup>17</sup>

The Book of Mormon is a gift from God to the entire world. It is the only book the Lord has testified to be true.<sup>18</sup> It is a gift from Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, Moroni, and its inspired and martyred translator, the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Book of Mormon is purposely addressed to the remnant of the house of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the Second Coming, we know it is "now nigh at hand, and in a time [yet] to come" (D&C 63:53). And when the Savior comes again, it will not be in secret.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, much work must be done to gather Israel and prepare the world for the glorious Second Coming.

### **The Gathering of Israel in This Dispensation**

Thanks to the Book of Mormon, we know when this promised gathering will take place: "Wherefore, our father hath not

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***In the temple we receive our ultimate and highest blessings, as promised to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.***

spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled *in the latter days*; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (1 Nephi 15:18; emphasis added).

Six hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, prophets knew that the gathering of Israel would take place “in the latter days.”

To Latter-day Saints, the honored name *Abraham* is important. Each member of the Church is linked to Abraham.<sup>21</sup> The Lord reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant in our day through the Prophet Joseph Smith.<sup>22</sup> In the temple we receive our ultimate and highest blessings, as promised to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>23</sup>

We need to gain that heavenly perspective. We need to know about the Abrahamic covenant and understand our responsibility in helping to bring about the promised gathering of Israel. We need to know *why* we are

privileged to receive patriarchal blessings and learn of our connection to ancient patriarchs. We need to know that Jacob’s son Joseph became the birthright son after Reuben lost his birthright.<sup>24</sup> Joseph and his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became the seed to lead in the gathering of Israel.<sup>25</sup> Other tribes were to follow.

Think of those heavenly messengers who brought precious keys of the priesthood to the Lord’s restored Church. On April 3, 1836, after the Lord had accepted the Kirtland Temple, came Moses, who restored “the keys of the gathering of Israel” (D&C 110:11). Next, “Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed” (D&C 110:12). Thus the Abrahamic covenant was renewed as part of the Restoration! Then came Elijah, who restored keys of the sealing authority, as prophesied by Malachi.<sup>26</sup> Those keys are necessary to seal the families of gathered Israel and enable them to enjoy the greatest of all blessings, that of eternal life.

What is the perspective of the Father and the Son regarding the Book of Mormon? They see it as evidence of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith. They see it as the instrument by which people can learn more about Jesus Christ, believe His gospel, and join His Church. They see it as the text to clarify our connection with the biblical house of Israel. The Book of Mormon declares the advent of the gathering<sup>27</sup> and is God's instrument to bring about that gathering. Without the Book of Mormon, there would be no gathering of Israel.<sup>28</sup>

The Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel. Without the Book of Mormon, we would know little about the Atonement of Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> Because it teaches of the Atonement, the Book of Mormon helps us to repent, make and keep sacred covenants, and merit the ordinances of salvation and exaltation. It leads us to the temple, where we can qualify for eternal life.

Here on earth we can have that heavenly perspective in all we do. With that perspective, we see that missionary work is crucial to the gathering of Israel. In many nations, our missionaries search for those of scattered Israel.

Zion exists wherever righteous Saints gather.<sup>30</sup> Publications, communications, and congregations give nearly all Church members access to the doctrine, keys, ordinances, and blessings of the gospel, regardless of location. As a convenience to Saints across the globe, 143 temples are available, and more are coming.<sup>31</sup>

Saints in every land have equal claim upon the blessings of the Lord. Spiritual security will always depend upon *how* we live, not *where* we live.

The gathering of Israel is *not* an ultimate endpoint. It is but the beginning. The end to which we endure includes the endowment and sealing ordinances of the temple. It includes our entrance into a covenant relationship with God either by lineage or adoption and then dwelling with Him and our families forever. That is God's glory—eternal life for His children.<sup>32</sup>

Our loving Father in Heaven truly wants His children to return to Him, not by coercion but by individual choice

and personal preparation. And He wants them sealed as eternal families.

That is our Heavenly Father's perspective. That is the Beloved Son's perspective. And it can be our perspective as well. ■

*From an address given during the seminar for new mission presidents at the Provo Missionary Training Center on June 26, 2013.*

#### NOTES

1. See Genesis 13:16; 22:17; Abraham 3:14.
2. See Genesis 12:1, 7; Abraham 2:6.
3. See Abraham 2:9, 11.
4. See Galatians 3:26–29; Abraham 2:10.
5. See Genesis 49:10, 24.
6. See Isaiah 11:12; 22:16–18; 3 Nephi 15:20–22; Abraham 2:10–11.
7. See 1 Nephi 15:18; see also the title page of the Book of Mormon.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 133:8–17.
9. See Genesis 12:2–3; 26:3–4; 35:11–12; see also chapter headings for 3 Nephi 21 and 29.
10. See also Omni 1:26; Moroni 10:30, 32; Doctrine and Covenants 20:59.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 137:5–8.
12. See 1 Corinthians 15:29; 1 Peter 4:6.
13. Paul also prophesied of our day: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times [the Lord] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (Ephesians 1:10).
14. See Genesis 35:23–26; 41:50–52. The tribe of Levi provided priests among the people and was neither numbered as a tribe nor received a tribal inheritance. Two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, were given land inheritances and were numbered among the tribes in the stead of their father. The number of twelve tribes was thus maintained.
15. See Ether 13:8; see also Genesis 49:22.
16. See Leviticus 26:44; Deuteronomy 4:27–31; 28; 29; 30:1–10; Nehemiah 1:9; Isaiah 11:11–12; Jeremiah 31:7–12; Ezekiel 37:21–22; Amos 9:14–15; Matthew 24:31; Jacob 6:2. See also Russell M. Nelson, “The Exodus Repeated,” *Ensign*, July 1999, 6–13. The gathering of Israel is particularly forecast in Isaiah 49–51 and Jacob 5.
17. See Matthew 24:14; Doctrine and Covenants 133:17.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 17:6.
19. See Mormon 7:10; 9:37; Moroni 10:31–34.
20. See Isaiah 40:5.
21. The covenant may also be received by adoption (see Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; Galatians 4:5–7).
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:58; 132:31–32.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–40; 132:19; Abraham 2:11.
24. See 1 Chronicles 5:1.
25. Ephraim was given the birthright in Israel to bear the message of the Restoration to all nations and to lead the gathering of scattered Israel (see Jeremiah 31:7–9; Doctrine and Covenants 64:36; 133:32–34).
26. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16; see also Malachi 4:5–6.
27. The doctrine related to the scattering and gathering of the house of Israel is among the earliest lessons taught in the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 10:14).
28. See Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 554.
29. The word *atonement* in any of its forms appears in only one verse of the King James Version of the New Testament (see Romans 5:11). It appears in 24 verses of the Book of Mormon.
30. See Doctrine and Covenants 97:21.
31. As of May 2014.
32. See Moses 1:39.