

Come to Zion

ELDER D. TODD CHRISTOFFERSON

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In our families and in our stakes and districts, let us seek to build up Zion through unity, godliness, and charity.



The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age; it is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day; but they died without the sight; we are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter-day glory” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007], 186).

Zion is both a place and a people. Zion was the name given to the ancient city of Enoch in the days before the Flood. “And it came to pass

in his days, that he built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion” (Moses 7:19). This Zion endured for some 365 years (see Moses 7:68). The scriptural record states, “And Enoch and all his people walked with God, and he dwelt in the midst of Zion; and it came to pass that Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying, Zion is fled” (Moses 7:69). Later, Jerusalem and its temple were called Mount Zion, and the scriptures prophesy of a future New Jerusalem where Christ shall reign as “King of Zion,” when “for the space of a thousand years the earth shall rest” (Moses 7:53, 64).

The Lord called Enoch’s people Zion “because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Elsewhere He said, “For this is Zion—the pure in heart” (D&C 97:21).

The antithesis and antagonist of Zion is Babylon. The city of Babylon was originally Babel, of Tower of Babel fame, and later became the capital of the Babylonian empire. Its principal edifice was the temple of Bel, or Baal, the idol referred to by Old Testament prophets as “The Shame,” given the sexual perversions that were associated with its worship. (See Bible Dictionary, “Assyria and Babylonia,” 615–16; “Baal,” 617–18; “Babylon, or Babel,” 618.) Its worldliness, its worship of evil, and the captivity of Judah

there following the conquest of 587 B.C. all combine to make Babylon the symbol of decadent societies and spiritual bondage.

It is with this backdrop that the Lord said to the members of His Church, “Go ye out of Babylon; gather ye out from among the nations, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (D&C 133:7). He called for the elders of His Church to be sent forth across the world to accomplish this gathering, commencing an effort that continues in full vigor today. “And behold, and lo, this shall be their cry, and the voice of the Lord unto all people: Go ye forth unto the land of Zion, that the borders of my people may be enlarged, and that her stakes may be strengthened, and that Zion may go forth unto the regions round about” (D&C 133:9).

And so today the Lord’s people are gathering “out from among the nations” as they gather into the congregations and stakes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that are scattered throughout the nations. Nephi foresaw that these “dominions” would be small but that the Lord’s power would descend “upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, . . . who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they [would be] armed with righteousness” (see 1 Nephi 14:12–14). The Lord calls upon us to be beacons of righteousness to guide those who seek the safety and blessings of Zion:

“Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations;

“And that the gathering together upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes, may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth” (D&C 115:5–6).

Under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith, early members of the Church attempted to establish the

center place of Zion in Missouri, but they did not qualify to build the holy city. The Lord explained one of the reasons for their failure:

“They have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them;

“And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:3–4).

“There were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them; therefore by these things they polluted their inheritances” (D&C 101:6).

Rather than judge these early Saints too harshly, however, we should look to ourselves to see if we are doing any better.

Zion is Zion because of the character, attributes, and faithfulness of her citizens. Remember, “the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). If we would establish Zion in our homes, branches, wards, and stakes, we must rise to this standard. It will be necessary (1) to become unified in one heart and one mind; (2) to become, individually and collectively, a holy people; and (3) to care for the poor and needy with such effectiveness that we eliminate poverty among us. We cannot wait until Zion comes for these things to happen—Zion will come only as they happen.

Unity

As we consider the unity required for Zion to flourish, we should ask ourselves if we have overcome jarrings, contentions, envyings, and strifes (see D&C 101:6). Are we individually and as a people free from strife and contention and united “according to the union required by



the law of the celestial kingdom”? (D&C 105:4). Forgiveness of one another is essential to this unity. Jesus said, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10).

We will become of one heart and one mind as we individually place the Savior at the center of our lives and follow those He has commissioned to lead us. We can unite with President Thomas S. Monson in love and concern for one another. In general conference last April, President Monson spoke to those estranged from the Church and to all of us when he said: “In the private sanctuary of one’s own conscience lies that spirit, that determination to cast off the old person and to measure up to the stature of true potential. In this spirit, we again issue that heartfelt invitation: Come back. We reach out to you in the pure love of Christ and express our desire to assist you and to welcome you into full fellowship. To those who are wounded in spirit or who are

struggling and fearful, we say, Let us lift you and cheer you and calm your fears” (“Looking Back and Moving Forward,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, May 2008, 90).

At the end of July this year, young single adults from several countries in eastern Europe gathered outside Budapest, Hungary, for a conference. Among this group were 20 young men and women from Moldova who had spent days obtaining passports and visas and over 30 hours traveling by bus to get there. The conference program included some 15 workshops. Each person needed to select the two or three that he or she most wanted to attend. Rather than focus exclusively on their own interests, these Moldovan young adults got together and made plans so that at least one of their group would be in each class and take copious notes. Then they would share what they had learned with each other and later with the young adults in Moldova who could not attend. In its simplest form, this exemplifies the unity and love for one another that, multiplied thousands of times in different ways, will “bring again Zion” (Isaiah 52:8).

Holiness

Much of the work to be done in establishing Zion consists in our individual efforts to become “the pure in heart” (D&C 97:21). “Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom,” said the Lord; “otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself” (D&C 105:5). The law of the celestial kingdom is, of course, the gospel law and covenants, which include our constant remembrance of the Savior and our pledge of obedience, sacrifice, consecration, and fidelity.

The Savior was critical of some of the early Saints for their “lustful . . . desires” (D&C 101:6; see also D&C 88:121). These were people who lived in a non-television, non-film,



non-Internet, non-iPod world. In a world now awash in sexualized images and music, are we free from lustful desires and their attendant evils? Far from pushing the limits of modest dress or indulging in the vicarious immorality of pornography, we are to hunger and thirst after righteousness. To come to Zion, it is not enough for you or me to be somewhat less wicked than others. We are to become not only good but holy men and women. Recalling Elder Neal A. Maxwell's phrase, let us once and for all establish our residence in Zion and give up the summer cottage in Babylon (see Neal A. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* [1990], 47).

Caring for the Poor

Throughout history, the Lord has measured societies and individuals by how well they cared for the poor. He has said:

“For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the

children of men to be agents unto themselves.

“Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (D&C 104:17–18; see also D&C 56:16–17).

Furthermore, He declares, “In your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld” (D&C 70:14; see also D&C 49:20; 78:5–7).

We control the disposition of our means and resources, but we account to God for this stewardship over earthly things. It is gratifying to witness your generosity as you contribute to fast offerings and humanitarian projects. Over the years, the suffering of millions has been alleviated, and countless others have been enabled to help themselves through the generosity of the Saints.

Nevertheless, as we pursue the cause of Zion, each of us should prayerfully consider whether we are doing what we should and all that we should in the Lord's eyes with respect to the poor and the needy.

We might ask ourselves, living as many of us do in societies that worship possessions and pleasures, whether we are remaining aloof from covetousness and the lust to acquire more and more of this world's goods. Materialism is just one more manifestation of the idolatry and pride that characterize Babylon. Perhaps we can learn to be content with what is sufficient for our needs.

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy against people who suppose “that gain is godliness” (1 Timothy 6:5).

Said he, “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

“And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Timothy 6:7–8).

In much of the world, we are



entering upon unsettled economic times. Let us look after one another the very best we can. I remember the story of a Vietnamese family that fled Saigon in 1975 and ended up living in a small mobile home in Provo, Utah. A young man in the refugee family became the home teaching companion to a Brother Johnson who lived nearby with his large family. The boy related the following:

“One day Brother Johnson noticed that our family had no kitchen table. He appeared the next day with an odd-looking but very functional table that fit nicely against the trailer wall across from the kitchen sink and counters. I say odd-looking because two of the table legs matched the tabletop and two did not. Also, several small wooden pegs stuck out along one edge of the worn surface.

“Soon we used this unique table daily for food preparation and for eating some quick meals. We still ate our

family meals while we sat on the floor . . . in true Vietnamese fashion.

“One evening I stood inside Brother Johnson’s front door as I waited for him before a home teaching appointment. There in the nearby kitchen—I was surprised to see it—was a table practically identical to the one they had given to my family. The only difference was that where our table had pegs, the Johnsons’ table had holes! I then realized that, seeing our need, this charitable man had cut his kitchen table in half and had built two new legs for each half.

“It was obvious that the Johnson family could not fit around this small piece of furniture—they probably didn’t fit comfortably around it when it was whole. . . .

“Throughout my life this kind act has been a powerful reminder of true giving” (Son Quang Le, as told to Beth Ellis Le, “Two-of-a-Kind Table,” *Liabona*, July 2004, 45; *Ensign*, July 2004, 63).

The Prophet Joseph Smith said,

“We ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object” (*Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 186). In our families and in our stakes and districts, let us seek to build up Zion through unity, godliness, and charity, preparing for that great day when Zion, the New Jerusalem, will arise. In the words of our hymn:

*Israel, Israel, God is calling,
Calling thee from lands of woe.
Babylon the great is falling;
God shall all her tow’rs o’erthrow. . . .*

*Come to Zion, come to Zion,
And within her walls rejoice. . . .*

*Come to Zion, come to Zion,
For your coming Lord is nigh.
 (“Israel, Israel, God Is Calling,”
Hymns, no. 7)*

I bear witness of Jesus Christ, the King of Zion, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■