

## **The Gathering of Scattered Israel** **Russell M. Nelson, Ensign, Nov. 2006**

My beloved brothers and sisters, thank you for your faith, your devotion, and your love. We share an enormous responsibility to be who the Lord wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do. We are part of a great movement—the gathering of scattered Israel. I speak of this doctrine today because of its unique importance in God’s eternal plan.

### **Abrahamic Covenant**

Anciently, the Lord blessed Father Abraham with a promise to make his posterity a chosen people.<sup>1</sup> References to this covenant occur throughout the scriptures. Included were promises that the Son of God would come through Abraham’s lineage, that certain lands would be inherited, that nations and kindreds of the earth would be blessed through his seed, and more.<sup>2</sup> While some aspects of that covenant have already been fulfilled, the Book of Mormon teaches that this Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled only in these latter days!<sup>3</sup> It also emphasizes that we are among the covenant people of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> Ours is the privilege to participate personally in the fulfillment of these promises. What an exciting time to live!

### **Israel Became Scattered**

As descendants of Abraham, the tribes of ancient Israel had access to priesthood authority and blessings of the gospel, but eventually the people rebelled. They killed the prophets and were punished by the Lord. Ten tribes were carried captive into Assyria. From there they became lost to the records of mankind. (Obviously, the ten tribes are not lost to the Lord.) Two remaining tribes continued a short time and then, because of their rebellion, were taken captive into Babylon.<sup>5</sup> When they returned, they were favored of the Lord, but again they honored Him not. They rejected and vilified Him. A loving but grieving Father vowed, “I will scatter you among the heathen,”<sup>6</sup> and that He did—into all nations.

### **Israel to Be Gathered**

God’s promise for the gathering of scattered Israel was equally emphatic.<sup>7</sup> Isaiah, for example, foresaw that in the latter days the Lord would send “swift messengers” to these people who were so “scattered and peeled.”<sup>8</sup>

This promise of the gathering, woven all through the fabric of the scriptures, will be fulfilled just as surely as were the prophecies of the scattering of Israel.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Church of Jesus Christ in the Meridian of Time and the Apostasy**

Prior to His Crucifixion, the Lord Jesus Christ had established His Church. It included apostles, prophets,

seventies, teachers, and so forth.<sup>10</sup> And the Master sent His disciples into the world to preach His gospel.<sup>11</sup>

After a time the Church as established by the Lord fell into spiritual decay. His teachings were altered; His ordinances were changed. The Great Apostasy came as had been foretold by Paul, who knew that the Lord would not come again “except there come a falling away first.”<sup>12</sup>

This Great Apostasy followed the pattern that had ended each previous dispensation. The very first was in the time of Adam. Then came dispensations of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others. Each prophet had a divine commission to teach of the divinity and the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. In each age these teachings were meant to help the people. But their disobedience resulted in apostasy. Thus, all previous dispensations were limited in time and location. They were limited in time because each ended in apostasy. They were limited in location to a relatively small segment of planet earth.

### **The Restoration of All Things**

Thus a complete restoration was required. God the Father and Jesus Christ called upon the Prophet Joseph Smith to be the prophet of this dispensation. All divine powers of previous dispensations were to be restored through him.<sup>13</sup> This dispensation of the fulness of times would not be limited in time or in location. It would not end in apostasy, and it would fill the world.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Gathering of Israel—an Integral Part of the Restoration of All Things**

As prophesied by Peter and Paul, all things were to be restored in this dispensation. Therefore, there must come, as part of that restoration, the long-awaited gathering of scattered Israel.<sup>15</sup> It is a necessary prelude to the Second Coming of the Lord.<sup>16</sup>

This doctrine 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.”<sup>17</sup> The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is a sign to the entire world that the Lord has commenced to gather Israel and fulfill covenants He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>18</sup> We not only teach this doctrine, but we participate in it. We do so as we help to gather the elect of the Lord on both sides of the veil.

The Book of Mormon is central to this work. It declares the doctrine of the gathering.<sup>19</sup> It causes people to learn about Jesus Christ, to believe His gospel, and to join His Church. In fact, if there were no Book of Mormon, the promised gathering of Israel would not occur.<sup>20</sup>

To us the honored name of Abraham is important. It is mentioned in more verses of scriptures of the Restoration

than in all verses of the Bible. <sup>21</sup> Abraham is linked to all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <sup>22</sup> The Lord reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant in our day through the Prophet Joseph Smith. <sup>23</sup> In the temple we receive our ultimate blessings, as the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>24</sup>

### **The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times**

This dispensation of the fulness of times was foreseen by God as the time to gather, both in heaven and on earth. Peter knew that after a period of apostasy, a restoration would come. He, who had been with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, 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.” <sup>25</sup>

In modern times the Apostles 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.” <sup>26</sup>

In the year 1830 the Prophet Joseph Smith learned of a heavenly messenger named Elias, who possessed keys to bring to pass “the restoration of all things.” <sup>27</sup>

Six years later the Kirtland Temple was dedicated. After the Lord accepted that holy house, heavenly messengers came with priesthood keys. Moses appeared <sup>28</sup> “and committed ... the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north.

“After this, 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.” <sup>29</sup>

Then Elijah the prophet came and proclaimed, “Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse.” <sup>30</sup>

These events occurred on April 3, 1836, <sup>31</sup> and thus fulfilled Malachi’s prophecy. <sup>32</sup> Sacred keys of this dispensation were restored. <sup>33</sup>

### **Gathering of Souls on the Other Side of the Veil**

Mercifully, the invitation to “come unto Christ” <sup>34</sup> can also be extended to those who died without a knowledge of the gospel. <sup>35</sup> Part of their preparation requires earthly efforts of others. We gather pedigree charts, create family group sheets, and do temple work vicariously to gather individuals unto the Lord and into their families. <sup>36</sup>

### **To Participate in the Gathering: A Commitment by Covenant**

Here on earth, missionary work is crucial to the gathering of Israel. The gospel was to be taken first to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” <sup>37</sup> Consequently, servants of the Lord have gone forth proclaiming the Restoration. In many nations our missionaries have searched for those of scattered Israel; they have hunted for them “out of the holes of the rocks”; and they have fished for them as in ancient days. <sup>38</sup>

The choice to come unto Christ is not a matter of physical location; it is a matter of individual commitment. People can be “brought to the knowledge of the Lord” <sup>39</sup> without leaving their homelands. True, in the early days of the Church, conversion often meant emigration as well. But now the gathering takes place in each nation. The Lord has decreed the establishment of Zion <sup>40</sup> in each realm where He has given His Saints their birth and nationality. Scripture foretells that the people “shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise.” <sup>41</sup> “Every nation is the gathering place for its own people.” <sup>42</sup> The place of gathering for Brazilian Saints is in Brazil; the place of gathering for Nigerian Saints is in Nigeria; the place of gathering for Korean Saints is in Korea; and so forth. Zion is “the pure in heart.” <sup>43</sup> Zion is wherever righteous Saints are. Publications, communications, and congregations are now such that nearly all members have access to the doctrines, keys, ordinances, and blessings of the gospel, regardless of their location.

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

This work of Almighty God is true. He lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church, restored to accomplish its divine destiny, including the promised gathering of Israel. President Gordon B. Hinckley is God’s prophet today. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.