

## Champions For Zion

### Chapter One - Building Zion Was Central to the Gospel and LDS Church

Before my ward was chopped into little pieces, we had a very intimidating High Priest group. We had a retired professor of religion, who had been our previous Stake President, and, happened to be the one who excommunicated an eminent LDS scholar. We also had a retired career Institute teacher who habitually poo-poo'd our Stake President's efforts to encourage our stake to build Zion. A third brother, was an armchair scriptorian who enjoyed rubbing shoulders with the first two. I affectionally referred to these three as "The Sanhedrin".

Being the secretary of our High Priest Group, I had the opportunity every quarter to teach priesthood on whatever topic I picked. Naturally, I picked the topic of Zion, having been enamored by the subject since my teenage years decades ago. With the Sanhedrin watching me closely, I knew I had to justify anything I taught about Zion using scripture and the words of latter-day apostles and prophets. If I didn't, I suspected my fate might be similar to the aforementioned LDS scholar -- were I too be judged wanting.

Every single time I taught, Brother InstituteTeacher would interupt and say, and I quote, "We can't build Zion, only Jesus can build Zion". What he said was technically true, we mortals can't build Zion without God's wisdom to guide us. But this well-meaning brother's statement felt like he was suggesting we sit around and wait for God to do all the work, or, to at least wait to be "commanded in all things" Zion. Brigham Young strongly refuted this attitude. He said in 1870:

*Are we prepared now to establish the Zion that the Lord designs to build up? ... "Well," says one, "I thought the Lord was going to do this." So He is, if we will let Him. That is what we want: we want the people to be willing for the Lord to do it. But He will do it by means. He will not send His angels to gather up the rock to build up the New Jerusalem. He will not send His angels from the heavens to go to the mountains to cut the timber and make it into lumber to adorn the city of Zion. He has called upon us to do this work; and if we will let Him work by, through, and with us, He can accomplish it; otherwise we shall fall short, and shall never have the honor of building up Zion on the earth.*

This is one of my greatest concerns, that we American Latter-day Saints will lose that honor through our inaction. An early apostle shared this concern, as we'll show in a later chapter.

Back to my story. Because these three men were so highly regarded in our ward, I knew that I had to be very careful about what I taught. This prompted me to search through all the records of talks given by apostles and prophets to find quotes about building Zion that were *irrefutably* clear, and, to see exactly what *they* believed and taught about the subject. And so I did. I found over 500 quotes from the 40 year time period between 1849 and 1889. I found some real jewels that I used during my lessons... to the consternation of the Sanhedrin.

As I read through these hundreds of quotes, a very clear and startling picture began to come into focus. I was *amazed* to discover just how central the building of Zion was to the early LDS Church: their missionaries preached it, the leaders taught that it was God's will that they build it, and they even taught that having the priesthood **obligated** us to build Zion. I came to see that they saw building Zion as being much, much more than the spiritual goal of becoming pure in heart. To them, building Zion was as much an economic effort as it was a spiritual one. They worked diligently to make Utah's economy independent and self-sufficient and they referred to this same effort as "building Zion". They referred to America's economy "Babylon", and they worked tirelessly to create a literal, brick and mortar, here-and-now Zion economy in Territorial Utah as the prophesied alternative to Babylon.

Unfortunately, due to political, economic and social forces, the US Government literally conquered the Mormons in

the late 1880s and put an end to their Zion-building efforts, forcing them to integrate into America's capitalistic economy. Leonard J. Arrington, who later was called as Church Historian, said that "the church no longer offered a geographic and institutional alternative to Babylon.... Individualism, speculation, and inequality – once thought to be characteristics of Babylon — were woven into the fabric of Mormon life." *Ouch*.

Please, please, please don't think that what I report to you here is in any way a criticism of the modern LDS Church. It is not. I imagine the Church is in a very precarious position such that it cannot, at least in the United States, encourage the building of Zion communities, like it did in the mid-1800s. I am not critical in the least of the Church and its leaders, I'm just reporting what I found in my research.

I do lean towards believing that it's pretty much the members' fixation on the "delicacies" of Babylon that prevents us from building Zion now. I do believe that we LDS here in America have been "blinded by the subtle craftiness of men" (D&C 123:12). Elder David R. Stone of the Seventy, in his 2006 General Conference talk titled, "Zion in the Midst of Babylon", explained how we are blind to Babylon's culture that pervades our daily lives and pulls us away from the values of Zion:

*We see Babylon in our cities; we see Babylon in our communities; we see Babylon everywhere.*

*And with the encroachment of Babylon, we have to create Zion in the midst of it. We should not allow ourselves to be engulfed by the culture which surrounds us. We seldom realize the extent to which we are a product of the culture of our place and time....*

*People in every culture move within a cocoon of self-satisfied self-deception, fully convinced that the way they see things is the way things really are.*

*Our culture tends to determine what foods we like, how we dress, what constitutes polite behavior, what sports we should follow, what our taste in music should be, the importance of education, and our attitudes toward honesty. It also influences men as to the importance of recreation or religion, influences women about the priority of career or childbearing, and has a powerful effect on how we approach procreation and moral issues. All too often, we are like puppets on a string, as our culture determines what is "cool"....*

*Seduced by our culture, we often hardly recognize our idolatry, as our strings are pulled by that which is popular in the Babylonian world.*

Having been first conquered by the US Government in the late 1880s, then swallowed up by America's culture, we LDS are so saturated with the values of Babylon that we see them as "normal" and we see the pursuit of Zion as fanatical, which is 180 degrees opposite of the case during the 1800s. As we will see from the quotes in this and later chapters, Zion was the norm in the Church then, and Babylon's values of individualism, wealth-seeking, and materialism were strongly rejected.

Again, I'm not criticizing the Church. What I *am* saying to my fellow members is five-fold:

1. According to Moses 7:62, Christ won't return until at least one Zion society is built, the New Jerusalem.
2. As members, waiting to be "commanded in all things" pertaining to Zion is probably not a wise strategy (see D&C 58:29).
3. Getting some practical experience building Zion communities might be a great way to prepare ourselves and our children for building the official one. "Practice makes perfect," right?
4. I truly believe, in my heart, that God would smile upon such an effort, and would see it as us doing "many good things of their own free will, and to bring to pass much righteousness. For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward" (D&C

58:26-28). I can hardly imagine a better good we could do than building Zion communities as a practice run and learning experience.

5. In regards to the last days, Christ said, "And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day" (1 Nephi 13:37). I seek the Lord's blessings for myself and my fellow Saints, that is all.

*OK, let's get to the quotes!*

As I gathered the 500+ quotes, I noticed that they easily fell into 13 categories. 92 of those quotes fit into a category I labeled "Building Zion is Central to the Gospel". I then noticed those 92 quotes could be divided up into the following subcategories:

### **1. Building Zion was taught by our early Missionaries.**

In 1860, speaking from the perspective of a British convert, President Brigham Young made a statement that clearly shows that building Zion was part of the early missionaries' message. He said, *"You came to England and preached the Gospel, and told me not to trust in man, but to seek unto the Lord my God... and receive a witness for myself and know for myself that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God, that the Book of Mormon is true, and that God has set to his hand to gather the house of Israel and build up Zion."*

The next quote, from 1862, shows that the early missionaries were using the Bible to show investigators the prophecies in it about what the Lord would do in the last days, and then testify that the LDS Church was actively working to bring those things about.

Here's the quote, *"While the meek of the earth remain scattered among the wicked, the Elders of this Church can go forth with the Old and New Testament in their hands, and show what the Lord is going to do in the latter days, the great miracles he will perform, the gathering of his people, the saving of his Saints, the building up of Zion, the redeeming of the house of Israel, the establishing of the New Jerusalem, the bringing back of the ten tribes... and this is proclaimed to both Saint and sinner."*

Ten years earlier, Brigham had said, *"When you had obeyed the first ordinances of the Gospel, [in other words, when you were first taught it by the missionaries] then you discovered that the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel, that Zion might be built up and Israel gathered from the four winds. These doctrines have been taught and re-taught again and again. I think there is not a man here who did not fully understand them while in his native country."*

### **2. Building Zion Was Considered a Core LDS Doctrine.**

In 1867, President Brigham Young made a statement that shows that building Zion was a core doctrine of our church. He said, *"A great many have said to you and me, 'Just leave out Joe Smith, the Book of Mormon, and modern revelations, and you will become popular.'... We are not going to leave out Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, nor the gathering, nor the building up of Zion."*

In fact, 5 years earlier in 1862, he said, *"If I lay [aside] the Book of Mormon, I shall have to deny that Joseph is a Prophet; and if I lay [aside] the doctrine and cease to preach the gathering of Israel and the building up of Zion, I must lay [aside] the Bible; and consequently, I might as well go home as undertake to preach without these three items."*

Then twenty years later, President John Taylor reiterated, *"One part of the Gospel is that we should be gathered together to a land that should be called Zion. Have we been doing this? Yes."*

### 3. Building Zion is Central to the Church's Mission

According to 17 of the 92 quotes, building Zion was considered one of the primary missions of the Church during Utah's territorial years. Remember back in 1981, President Spencer W. Kimball outlined very succinctly the three-fold mission of the Church? Lately it has been amended to a four-fold mission by President Monsen.

Unfortunately, no leader in the early days of the church sat down and took the time to outline its mission in such a clear and distinct way as President Kimball. However, in reading these 17 quotes, it became very clear what that mission included. Here's three of them that are representative:

In 1857 Brigham said, *"There is no time allotted to us to use outside of the limits of duty. But in doing our duty, in serving our God, in living our religion, in using every possible means to [1] send forth the Gospel of salvation to the inhabitants of the earth, [2] to gather Israel, and [3] establish Zion, and [4] build up the kingdom of heaven upon the earth are incorporated all blessings, all comforts that men can desire."*

Five years later, Apostle Daniel H. Wells said, *"Here is the Mission of the Saints to go and aid in the gathering of the poor, to labor here for the building of the Temple... and prepare to redeem Zion and to build up the waste places thereof, and to establish the principles of righteousness and truth upon the earth."*

In 1878, within a year of Brigham's death, President John Taylor reiterated the Church's mission and building Zion's role in that mission. He said, *"...we have a mission to perform, and that is to preach the Gospel..., to build up his Zion upon the earth, and to prepare a people for the time when the bursting heavens will reveal the Son of God..."*

After reading all 17 quotes, it becomes clear that the Church's mission at that time included three major elements:

1. Preach the gospel,
2. Gather the Saints, and
3. Build Zion, in that order.

### 4. Building Zion is Central to God's Last Days Plan

Not only was building Zion a central part of the mission of the early LDS Church, our leaders made it very clear that building Zion was a central element in God's over-arching, big-picture plan in the Last Days to prepare Earth for the second Coming of Christ. Of the 24 quotes in this subcategory, here are five that are spread out over the 40 year span.

In 1853, President Young said, *"...we will round up our shoulders, and bear up the ponderous weight, carry the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, gather Israel, redeem Zion, and continue our operations until we bind Satan, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ; and no power can hinder it... for the Lord manages the helm of the ship of Zion; and on any other ship I do not wish to be."*

Seven years later, in 1860, Brigham further expounded:

*"The Latter-day Saints throughout the valleys in these mountains and throughout the world ought to be learning what they are on this earth for. They are here to increase and multiply, to enlarge, to gather the house of Israel, redeem Zion, build up the Zion of our God, and to promote that eternal intelligence that dwells with the Gods... until every obnoxious principle in the hearts of men is destroyed, and the earth returns to its paradisaical state, and the Lord comes and dwells with this people, and walks and talks with them as he did with Father Adam. That is our business, and*

*not to suffer all our energies to be expended in merely preparing to die [or, in our day, retire]."*

In 1879, one and a half years after Brigham passed, President John Taylor made it very clear that this doctrine had not changed. He said, *"...the time had come, in the councils of heaven, that it was necessary to start the latter-day work, and to prepare a people, gathering them together to build up Zion and establish the kingdom of God upon the earth, that His will might be done upon the earth as it is done in heaven."*

In 1883, Apostle Charles W. Penrose outlined God's big-picture plan for the earth in the most eloquent language. He said, *"The Saints of God will be gathered, and there is no power [that] can stop their gathering. They will come to Zion, and build temples to the Most High God. They will unite together, and build up the Zion of God, and prepare the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus, whose right it is to reign; and every kingdom, every government, every society and every power upon the face of the earth that fights against Zion will become like the dream of a night vision.... But Zion will arise and shine, and the glory of God will rest upon her; and all the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and His Christ. Then there will be liberty to all. Then the chains and shackles that bind the oppressed will fall to the ground, and light and truth will go forth until the whole earth is immersed in the spirit thereof, and every nation, kindred, tongue and people will sing praises to the Most High and to the Lamb forever."*

In 1889, nearly two years after John Taylor's death, President Wilford Woodruff briefly summarized God's over-arching plan, and Zion's role in that plan, when he said *"...Joseph Smith was reserved to lay the foundation of this great Kingdom and dispensation of salvation to the whole human family in these last days, to build up Zion, to establish God's Kingdom, and to prepare it for the coming of the Son of Man."*

## **5. Building Zion Was a Primary Focus of LDS Leaders**

The largest subcategory of quotes makes up nearly 1/3rd of the 92. This subcategory includes quotes by prophets and apostles, spanning 33 years from 1854 to 1887, that clearly show that building Zion was a primary focus of the leaders of the LDS Church, and, that they expected it to be a primary focus of the general membership.

Brigham, 1862, *"I have Zion in my view constantly".* pretty clear.

Heber C. Kimball, 1863, *"May the Lord multiply his blessings upon you, brethren and sisters... and may He bless all those who do good, who love righteousness and desire the welfare and building up of Zion".*

Brigham, 1867, *"We have many duties to perform, and a great work is before us. We have Zion to build up, and upon this we are all agreed..."*

Apostle George A. Smith, 1867, *"I bear my testimony to the truth of the counsel and instruction that we have received this morning, and I trust they will be treasured up in good and honest hearts, and that men and women will consider these things and realize that we have one great interest, which is to build up Zion...."*

Brigham, 1873, *"The Lord has blessed me; he has always blessed me; from the time I commenced to build up Zion, I have been extremely blessed. I could relate circumstances of so extraordinary a character in regard to the providences of God to me, that my brethren and sisters would say in their hearts, "I can hardly give credence to this." But my heart has been set in me to do the will of God, to build up his kingdom on the earth, to establish Zion and its laws, and to save*

*the people..."*

Wilford Woodruff, 1873, *"My brethren and sisters, we are commanded not to give the whole of our attention to the accumulation of earthly things; we are commanded also to lay up treasures in heaven. We are required to build up Zion on the earth..."*

Apostle Joseph F. Smith, 1877, *"Then let us search after truth... that we may comprehend the Gospel, be able to sustain the hands of the servants of God in their efforts to build up Zion, and work out our own salvation."*

Apostle George Q. Cannon, 1881, *"It is probable that today Brother Orson Pratt is the oldest living member of the Church, and certainly there is no man in the Church who has labored longer and more diligently and with a greater spirit of self-sacrifice in proclaiming its principles... for I know that there is no desire so strong in his breast... the desire to proclaim the truth, and to win souls unto Christ, and to help establish that Zion, of which God has laid the foundation."*

John Taylor, 1882, *"Some people think we are a set of ignorant boobies, who do not know what we are talking about, and they try to overrun the faith of the Latter-day Saints by sophistry, falsehood and folly. Whilst the fact is, we are in possession of the principles of eternal life, and are operating for eternity; and then we are operating to build up the Zion of God, where righteousness can be taught, and where men can be protected, and where liberty can be proclaimed to all men of every color, of every creed and of every nation."*

Elder Franklin D. Richards, 1887, *"We mourn President Taylor's absence. We will lose his counsel. We can not well spare such men. We need such men in the Church to establish righteousness and preach the Gospel and build up Zion on the earth."*

I skipped one on purpose because it expresses my feelings exactly. John Taylor, 1874, *"I want to be the friend of God and God to be my friend; I want to help to roll forth the Kingdom of God and to build up the Zion of the Most High, and I want to see my brethren engaged in the same work, and we will do it. In the name of Israel's God we will do it."*

Let's review.

We have 92 quotes from early LDS apostles and prophets that make it very clear that building Zion was central to the Gospel and the Church.

**By reading all of these quotes we come to see five things:**

**Building Zion was taught by our early Missionaries, apparently at the direction of the Brethren,**

**Building Zion was considered a core doctrine of the Gospel,**

**It was central to the Church's Mission,**

**It was central to God's over-arching Last Days plan for Earth, and lastly,**

**Building Zion was a primary focus of LDS leaders who also encouraged the members to focus there as well.**

Isn't that remarkable? I never suspected to discover that building Zion was so central to the Gospel in the 1800s. That was what they were doing, that was their objective, their vision.

In the following chapters we'll see how the Saints were actively pursuing this goal as a Priesthood obligation and in a very tangible and proactive way. We'll also see how they viewed building Zion as an economic effort as well as a spiritual one, and, that they diligently strove to become economically self-sufficient as a people. We'll see how these brick-and-mortar efforts at building Zion were meant to keep the Saints in food, clothing, and shelter when the prophesied fall of "Babylon" finally came.