

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

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, sevens, 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 be-

cause 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.

### NOTES

1. See Genesis 12:1–2; Doctrine and Covenants 132:29–32; Abraham 2:6–11.
2. See Genesis 26:1–4, 24, 28; 35:9–13; 48:3–4; John 8:33, 39; Acts 3:25; 1 Nephi 17:40; 2 Nephi 29:14; Jacob 5; Ether 13:7–8; Doctrine and Covenants 52:2.
3. See, for example, 1 Nephi 15:12–18.
4. See 1 Nephi 14:14; 15:14; 2 Nephi 30:2; Mosiah 24:13; 3 Nephi 29:3; Mormon 8:15; Doctrine and Covenants 133:26–34.
5. The tribe of Levi provided priests among the people and was not to be numbered as a tribe or to receive tribal inheritance. Two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and

- Ephraim, were given land inheritances. They were numbered among the tribes, in the stead of their father, Joseph. The number of twelve tribes was thus maintained.
6. Leviticus 26:33; see also Jeremiah 9:16.
  7. See Genesis 22:16–18; 3 Nephi 20–22; Abraham 2:10–11.
  8. Isaiah 18:2, 7.
  9. See Leviticus 26:44; Deuteronomy 4:27–31; 28; 29; 30:2–5; Nehemiah 1:9; Isaiah 11:11–12; Jeremiah 31:7–8, 10–12; 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.
  10. See Luke 10:1, 17; Ephesians 4:11; Articles of Faith 1:6.
  11. See Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15.
  12. 2 Thessalonians 2:3. “Falling away” is translated from the Greek *apostasia*, meaning “apostasy.”
  13. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:18; 132:45.
  14. See Isaiah 27:6.
  15. See 1 Nephi 15:18; see also Book of Mormon title page, paragraph 2.
  16. See Doctrine and Covenants 133:17.
  17. 3 Nephi 21:1.
  18. See Genesis 12:2–3; 26:3–4; 35:11–12; and chapter headings for 3 Nephi 21; 29.
  19. Doctrines relating to the scattering and gathering of the house of Israel are among the earliest lessons taught in the Book of Mormon: “After the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; . . . the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:14).
  20. See Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 554.
  21. Abraham is mentioned in 506 verses of scripture: 216 are in the Bible; 290 are in the scriptures of the Restoration.
  22. The covenant may also be received by adoption (see Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; Galatians 3:26–29; 4:5–7; Abraham 2:9–10).
  23. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:58; 132:31–32.
  24. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–40; 132:19; Abraham 2:11.
  25. Acts 3:19, 21.
  26. Doctrine and Covenants 27:13. 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).
  27. Doctrine and Covenants 27:6.
  28. It is appropriate that Moses, who first led God’s children to the land of their inheritance, would be the one to commit the keys of the gathering of Israel to the restored Church. Moses had come to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration and there had bestowed upon them the same priesthood keys in their day. At the conference of the Church in April 1840, the Prophet Joseph Smith appointed Orson Hyde to go to Jerusalem and there dedicate the land for the return of the Jews and scattered Israel (see 2 Nephi 9:2; 10:7–9; 25:16–17, 20; 3 Nephi 21:22–28; D&C 29:7–8). On Sunday, October 24, 1841, Elder Hyde knelt on the Mount of Olives and dedicated that land for the gathering of the Jews and of Israel to their ancient inheritance.
  29. Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–12.
  30. Doctrine and Covenants 110:14–15.
  31. Significant is the fact that Moses, Elias, and Elijah came on Easter Sunday, at the beginning of Passover.
  32. See Malachi 4:5–6.
  33. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:16.
  34. Jacob 1:7; Omni 1:26; Moroni 10:30, 32; Doctrine and Covenants 20:59.
  35. See Doctrine and Covenants 137:6–8.
  36. See 1 Corinthians 15:29; 1 Peter 4:6.
  37. Matthew 10:6; 15:24.
  38. See Jeremiah 16:16.
  39. 3 Nephi 20:13.
  40. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:6; 11:6; 12:6; 14:6.
  41. 2 Nephi 9:2.

42. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, Mexico City Mexico Area Conference 1972, 45.
43. Doctrine and Covenants 97:21.

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The choir sang “How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place.”

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### **President Hinckley**

We are grateful to the choir for their beautiful music. Following my remarks, they will sing “Come, Ye Thankful People,” and the benediction will then be offered by Elder W. Douglas Shumway of the Seventy. We shall meet again at 2:00.

## **President Gordon B. Hinckley**

### **President Hinckley’s health**

My brothers and sisters, let me first deal with a personal matter.

The President of the Church belongs to the entire Church. His life is not his own. His mission is to serve.

Now, as all of you know, I am somewhat old in years. I had my 96th birthday last June. I have learned from many sources that there is considerable speculation concerning my health. I wish to put the record straight. If I last a few months longer, I will have served to an older age than any previous President. I do not say this to be boastful but rather grateful. Last January I underwent major surgery. It was a miserable experience, particularly for one who had never previously been a patient in a hospital. Following this was the question as to whether I should undergo further treatment. I chose to do so. My doctors have called the results miraculous. I know that the favorable results come from your many prayers in my behalf. I am deeply grateful to you.

The Lord has permitted me to live; I do not know for how long. But whatever the time, I shall continue to give my best to the task at hand. It is not an easy thing to preside over this large, complex Church. Nothing escapes the attention of the First Presidency. No major decision, no expenditure of funds is made without their approval. The responsibility and stress are great.

But we shall carry on as long as the Lord wishes. As I said last April, we are in His hands. I feel well; my health is reasonably good. But when it is time for a successor, the transition will be smooth and according to the will of Him whose Church this is. And so, we go forward in faith—and faith is the theme I wish to discuss this morning.

### **Moving forward with faith**

From the beginning this Church has moved forward with faith. Faith was the strength of the Prophet Joseph.

I am grateful for the faith that took him into the grove to pray. I am grateful for his faith to translate and publish the Book of Mormon. I am grateful that he went to the Lord in prayer that was answered with the bestowal of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. I am grateful that in faith he organized the Church and set it on its course. I thank him for the gift of his life as a testimony to the truth of this work.

Faith was also the moving power behind Brigham Young. I often reflect on the tremendous faith he exercised in bringing a very large number of people to settle this Salt Lake Valley. He knew very little of the area. He had never seen it, except in vision. I suppose he had studied what meager information there was, but he knew almost nothing of the soil or the water or the climate. And yet when he