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# What Is Zion?

By Roger Yarrington

Zion, to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, means God's kingdom on earth. The philosophy of Zion is not the center of our message, however. Our message is Jesus Christ. But we believe Zion will be the result when a group of people are successful in applying his teachings to group living.

Our concept of Zion comes from the Scriptures. It finds foundation in the Bible. In the Doctrine and Covenants, a book of modern-day revelation, the theory of Zion takes on blueprint form.

The Bible tells us that Christ preached a gospel of the kingdom.

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.”—Matt. 4: 23.

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is ful-

filled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”—Mark 1: 14, 15.

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.”—Matt. 24: 14.

## AN EARTHLY KINGDOM

The thought that God’s kingdom will someday be an earthly kingdom also springs from biblical Scripture. The best example of this is probably the Lord’s Prayer, wherein we are taught to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Also in the Bible we find these sayings:

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—Matt. 6: 33.

“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—Matt. 3: 1, 2.

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—Matt. 4: 17.

“The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.”—Matt. 13: 38.

## A SOCIAL GOSPEL

The idea that Christ's gospel is a social gospel and that accepting the gospel of Christ results in a new experience in group living can be seen in his teachings.

C. R. Ettinger, an R. L. D. S. minister, touched on this in a sermon titled “The Doctrine of the Kingdom.”<sup>1</sup> “Six of the Ten Commandments are social. A majority of the Beatitudes have reference to social needs and social relations. The parables of Jesus emphasize the kingdom. The kingdom of God cannot come into being without the doctrine of Christ and in like manner the doctrine of Christ sin-

cerely believed and vigorously acted upon cannot fail to bring about the kingdom.”

“Early in the history of the Restoration this kingdom theme was sounded: ‘Seek to bring forth and establish my Zion’ (Doctrine and Covenants 12: 3 a). Since then the challenge of the kingdom has permeated the restored church,” added Ettinger.

A revelation was given to the Saints of Zion’s Camp on the banks of Fishing River in Missouri, June 22, 1834.

“But firstly, let my army become very great, and let it be sanctified before me, that it may become fair as the sun, and clear as the moon, and that her banners may be terrible unto all nations: that the kingdoms of this world may be constrained to acknowledge that the kingdom of Zion is in very deed the kingdom of our God and his Christ; therefore, let us become subject unto her laws.”—Doctrine and Covenants 102: 9.

## OTHERS HAVE TRIED IT

The concept of the perfect society dwelling in peace and righteousness is not original with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Utopians such as Sir Thomas More, followed by Bacon, Andrea, Campanella, and Spence have all had their theories about creating a perfect society. They omitted God, however. Shakers, Harmonists, the Oneida Society, and Amana Societies included God but slighted the individual. Zion is a harmonious relationship of both God and man.

John Spargo, an Englishman, saw the truth when he said:

“It is all too obvious and certain that the attainment of a perfect social state depends, not upon economic re-adjustment alone, but upon the deeper and profounder processes of moral regeneration. The minds and wills of the citizens as individuals must be socialized and brought into harmony with the moral law before there can be a

perfect social life.”—from *Nation's Business*, March, 1929.

Our point this far, then, is built on the following conclusions:

1. God is concerned with establishing a kingdom.

2. His kingdom will someday be established on earth.

3. His kingdom is to be a social institution.

4. His kingdom will result when his gospel is applied to group living.

5. This kingdom caused by harmonious living with man and God is called Zion.

## SOME MYTHS CONCERNING ZION

Positive thought excels negative thought, but it might be a good idea to start out a picture of Zion by dispelling some myths and seeing what Zion is not going to be like.

*Zion will not be a utopia.* There will be people facing everyday

problems. The perfect atmosphere there will not come from perfect conditions but rather from perfect people meeting their problems in a Zioniac manner.

*Zion will not be a theocracy.* We do not see our Zion as a political government with a church official doubling as head of church and state. We believe that the founding and development of the United States has been through divine guidance pointing toward a climate where social experiment such as Zioniac living is possible. The political possibility of Zion is owed to the United States, and political allegiance will always be due to the government of this country by members of the church in the U.S.A.

*Zion will not be a communistic society.* Communism and the principles of Zion stand at opposite poles. Whereas Communism teaches and practices the subordination of self to state and strict regimentation and discipline, the Zioniac plan

emphasizes the dignity of the individual, free choice in participation, and complete agency. We believe a person is not adapted to Zionism unless he becomes a part of it out of his own sincere desire. Communism teaches state ownership. We believe in private ownership and enterprise with the individual voluntarily consecrating his surplus. If he has no surplus, he will still give one tenth of his increase (that income which is left after deducting his necessary living expenses) and make offerings.

## A DEFINITION OF ZION

We stated in the beginning that Zion is to be God's kingdom on earth. To be more definite and concrete, Zion may be described as any one or all of three things: a place, a condition, and a process.

*Zion is a place.* We were told as early as 1831:

“In this land which is the land of Missouri, which is the land which I have appointed and conse-

crated for the gathering of the Saints: wherefore this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion. . . . The place which is now called Independence, is the Center Place.”—Doctrine and Covenants 57: 1.

This was the year following the organization of the church of Jesus Christ and before it had built a building in Independence. We have followed the commandment through an orderly and legal process of land purchases. Independence is now the site of the Auditorium, our world’s headquarters; Herald House, the church publishing division; the Independence Sanitarium and Hospital; and the largest concentration of membership in the world. Independence and the Greater Kansas City area have more than thirty congregations of the Reorganized Church. This concentration and ever-expanding growth are symbolic of the movement we term the “Gathering” of the Saints to the Center Place.

*Zion is a condition.* President Israel A. Smith told the Saints in 1947, "Zion conditions are no further away nor any closer than the spiritual condition of my people justifies." Zion is more than a place and 100 per cent church membership. The establishment and continuance of a Zion will be marked and recognizable only by the spiritual condition of the people living there. Zion is an attitude and a way of life. The Doctrine and Covenants (94: 5 c) states, "Let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion, THE PURE IN HEART."

Also in the Doctrine and Covenants we find this description of a city built by the prophet Enoch which was called Zion and was so perfect that it was taken up into heaven:

"And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there were no poor among them."—Doctrine and Covenants 36: 2 h.

Perhaps that is our best idea of Zion when we speak of it as a condition. Putting it on an individual basis, we believe the words of Jesus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3: 3).

*Zion is a process.* This again is attested to in the Bible when it quotes Christ as teaching his disciples:

"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within {or, in the midst of} you."  
—Luke 17: 20, 21.

The concept of Zion, born in the Old Testament and taught by Christ, has been in the process of growing for centuries. We consider the church of Jesus Christ to be operating in the "latter days"—that the process is now beginning to achieve concrete results in the Center Place.

The concepts of man are greatly limited by his lack of learning and

his human limitations. The growing process resulting in what we call Zion may well be only the beginning for a process well beyond our human dreams. We certainly do not wish to propose our present limited view of the city of Zion as an end. Rather we think of it as a means to something even more perfect than we can comprehend. Zion in its fundamental stages, however, is a foreseeable destination.

## ZIONIC PRINCIPLES

When God gave man agency, he also gave him the principle of accountability. Being a wise steward over our talents and being able to account well and faithfully for their use is called stewardship. Stewardship is a philosophy of both spiritual growth and hard economics. It is our means of achieving Zion.

Stewardship may be said to consist of two sets of laws. The spiritual law as taught by Christ and

the temporal law as taught by our church are two distinct emphases although they actually must work together. The acceptance of the first is necessary before the second may follow.

Just as Christ gave commandments for following his plan of righteous living, we also have rules by which the financial law may be met. The financial law of Christ's church merits a more detailed study than these few pages can offer. A church tract titled *Stewardship*,<sup>2</sup> written by Paul A. Wellington, has been prepared in the question-answer style and should be helpful in gaining a better understanding.

Outlining the program in general terms, it is this:

1. Each person practices private ownership and enterprise and pays one tenth of his increase to the church as tithing.

2. Freewill offerings and a consecration of surplus are contributions made to the church over and above the tithing payments.

3. Each member is accountable yearly to his bishop through a financial statement wherein he states his increase, tithing payments, and amounts due.

4. The financial law is an obligation to be met, yet there are no fines or punishments imposed by the church on those whose conscience allows them to ignore the law. In a Zion community, compliance with the financial law should be as much a necessity as compliance with any other of the spiritual commandments of God.

The basic need of our day is not for more social or economic laws nor for changes in those already revealed. We have both the spiritual and economic guides for building Zion. When compliance is realized, we shall have a start on Zion.

The call to build Zion has come from all the Scriptures of our church. The call has come from the Bible to "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteous-

ness." The call has come from the Book of Mormon saying, "And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost." The call has come from the Doctrine and Covenants commanding, "Seek to bring forth and establish my Zion."

Christ is our gospel—Zion our goal. "Zion shall be" is our testimony.

A free tract folder listing other publications of the church will be mailed to you if you will address your request to Herald Publishing House, Independence, Missouri.

1. *The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like . . .*  
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2. Available through Herald House.

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