

SECOND DAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 157th Semiannual General Conference commenced at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, October 4, 1987. President Ezra Taft Benson presided, and President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir, with Brothers Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger conducting and Brother John Longhurst at the organ.

President Hinckley made the following remarks at the outset of the meeting.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

President Ezra Taft Benson, who has presided at all sessions of this conference, has asked that I conduct this fifth and concluding session of the 157th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We extend a sincere welcome to all assembled in the Tabernacle and to those seated in the Assembly Hall, where Elders Robert B. Harbertson and Hans B. Ringger are seated on the stand. We send also our greetings and

blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, cable, or by means of satellite transmission.

The Tabernacle Choir, with Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger directing and John Longhurst at the organ, will begin this service by singing "Rejoice, A Glorious Sound Is Heard." The invocation will be offered by Elder John H. Groberg of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Rejoice, A Glorious Sound Is Heard."

Elder John H. Groberg offered the invocation.

President Hinckley

The choir will now sing "Our Savior's Love." Following the singing, Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our first speaker.

The choir sang "Our Savior's Love."

Elder L. Tom Perry

Purposes of celebrations

We have just completed a summer in which we have commemorated several events of great historical significance. On the twenty-fourth of July, we celebrated the 140th anniversary of the arrival of the Mormon pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley. At the same time we were commemorating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first LDS missionaries in Great Britain. Finally, citizens of these great United States,

members of the Church and non-members alike, recently celebrated the 200th birthday of their Constitution.

Each of these events has had a marked and lasting impact on the history of the Church. As I participated in many of the festivities dotting this historic summer, I pondered the purpose of celebrations.

Celebrating events of the past focuses our thoughts on our history. We take the opportunity to review the past. We glean from the experiences of the

past as we anticipate the future. Cicero wrote this of history:

"Not to know what has been transacted in former times is to be always a child. If no use is made of the labors of past ages, the world must remain always in the infancy of knowledge" (in *The International Dictionary of Thoughts*, comp. John P. Bradley, et. al. [Chicago: J. G. Ferguson Publishing Co., 1969], p. 362).

Ancient Israel's celebrations

This summer has rekindled in me an interest in our heritage and history. I have been intrigued by the similarities found there and am especially fascinated with the parallelism between the Hebrew nation and our own Church history.

The man prepared by our Heavenly Father to be the leader of the Hebrew nation was Moses. His illustrious name adorns the pages of ancient history. The Lord revealed through Moses the feasts and events that the Israelites should hold as perpetual reminders of their deliverance from slavery and the birth of their new nation. These celebrations took two forms. First they were celebrations of the actual historical events, such as the Passover, to remind the people of Israel of the Lord's hand in delivering them. Then there were traditions tied to periods of time determined by various multiples of the number seven.

Of course, the seventh day was the Sabbath, a day of rest, the seventh month a time of harvest. Then, as we read in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, there were special instructions pertaining to the seventh year and the fiftieth year:

"Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;

"But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. . . .

"And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven

times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years.

"Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.

"And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family" (Leviticus 25:3-4, 8-10).

Every fiftieth year, the land was to be returned to the original owners or their descendants; all Israelites sold into slavery for debt were to be freed; and the land, as in the seventh or sabbatical year, was to lie fallow. Even in our day, the tradition of sabbatical years is perpetuated by universities, which encourage faculty members to go on sabbaticals, roughly every seventh year. The word *jubilee*, generally interpreted, means "ram" or "ram's horn" and refers to the horn used to proclaim the beginning of the Jubilee Year, or the fiftieth year.

There seem to be four purposes for celebrations and traditions of ancient Israel, each of which could be applied as a guide and an influence to the way we celebrate and the meanings we give to our celebrations.

Traditions that strengthen faith

First, the traditions preserved the religious faith and strengthened the spiritual fiber of the people of Israel. As an example, let us review the messages implicit in the celebration of the Jubilee Year. An excerpt from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* tells us that "the fiftieth year was to be a time of proclaiming liberty to all the inhabitants of the land. God had redeemed His people from bondage in Egypt (Lev. 25:42); and none of them was again to be reduced to the status of . . . slave. . . . God's chosen child

was not to be oppressed. . . . Indeed, as citizens of the theocratic kingdom, masters and servants had become brothers together. . . . Thus, as seen in its widest application, only through its loyalty to God could Israel as a nation ever hope to be free and independent of other masters.

"A second feature of the Jubilee was that of the restitution of all real property. The purpose was to demonstrate that the earth is subject basically to God's law, and not to man's desires. . . . God's specific legislation concerned the inalienability of Israel's land titles. It required the reversion of all hereditary property to the family that originally possessed it and the reestablishment of the initial arrangement regarding God's division of the land. It did not teach either the socialistic economic theory that a person is entitled to ownership of goods on the basis of his need . . . or the free-enterprise system that allows an unlimited expansion of private property. On the contrary, it established a fixed title to the property assigned by God" (Geoffrey W. Bromley, ed., 4 vols. [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968], 2:1142).

What powerful messages these are—that the Israelites were God's chosen children, and that all they possessed was God's, and that only He could permanently grant title to the land. Truly, these messages, couched in the tradition of the Jubilee Year, reminded the people of Israel of their spiritual genealogy and their indebtedness to the Lord.

Celebrations of Christmas and Easter, our annual Pioneer Day observance, events commemorating the restoration of the Aaronic and the Melchizedek priesthoods, the Relief Society birthday parties, and pageants—all cause us to remember our spiritual heritage and increase our gratitude to the Lord for all He does for us.

Political component of traditions

Second, Israel's celebrations and traditions had a political component.

These were times of uniting the tribes to form a closer union.

Celebrations that commemorate important events in our native lands should receive our support and attention. I was impressed with how vigorously and appropriately members of the Church residing in the United States celebrated the 200th year of the Constitution.

After all, we declare in the twelfth article of faith, "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." We find that this counsel is continually needed in the Church today. All members of the Church should be committed to obeying and honoring the laws of the land in which they live. We should be exemplary in our obedience to the governments that govern us. The Church, to be of service to the nations of the world, must be a wholesome influence in the lives of individuals who embrace it, in temporal as well as spiritual affairs.

In Matthew, the twenty-second chapter, we recall the account of the Pharisees attempting to entangle the Savior in the conflict they perceived in His teachings between Church and state:

"Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?"

"But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?"

"Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny."

"And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?"

"They said unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:17-21).

Continuing after the Savior's ministry, the Apostles urged the Saints to be orderly and law-abiding. Writing to Titus, Paul declared, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" (Titus 3:1).

As Church members, we live under the banner of many different flags. How important it is that we understand our place and our position in the lands in which we live! We should be familiar with the history, heritage, and laws of the lands that govern us. In those countries that allow us the right to participate in the affairs of government, we should use our free agency and be actively engaged in supporting and defending the principles of truth, right, and freedom.

Cultural impact of traditions

Third, Israel's celebrations and traditions had a cultural impact. Their festivals and feasts were times of sharing talents and accomplishments. They were a time of sharing practical knowledge associated with advancements in the arts and sciences.

An important part of our pioneer heritage is an appreciation of all the cultural arts. Our pioneer forebears literally danced and sang their way across the plains. It was a way they kept their spirits high in the face of tremendous hardships.

As the pioneers settled communities, they built theaters, organized bands and choruses, and sent artists on missions to gain the experience and training necessary to develop their talents fully. Certainly, we honor our pioneer heritage by making beauty and culture one of the centerpieces of our commemorations. And by so doing, are we not also offering praise to the Lord through the beautiful creations of our hands and our minds?

Social significance of traditions

Finally, the celebrations and traditions of ancient Israel had a deep social significance. They were times of building a sense of community, a time of reaffirming a brotherhood and sisterhood shared by everyone, a time of bonding families together.

In the general conference of 1880, President John Taylor announced a

Jubilee Year of the Church. He proposed to the body of the Church several ways to celebrate the Jubilee Year—ways that drew the community of Saints more closely together. President Taylor said:

"It occurred to me that we ought to do something, as they did in former times, to relieve those that are oppressed with debt, to assist those that are needy, to break the yoke off those that may feel themselves crowded upon, and to make it a time of general rejoicing" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1880, p. 61).

President Taylor then proposed that—

First, one-half of the debt of the members to the Perpetual Emigration Fund would be released.

Second, the poor would be released from the back tithing they had committed for.

Third, the Church would raise a herd of a thousand milk cows, to be distributed to the poor and needy. The Church would contribute three hundred cows, and the rest would be gathered from the stakes of the Church.

And finally, the Relief Society would gather bushels of wheat to be loaned to the poor to be used as seed. Then, after the harvest, the loan could be repaid, thus establishing a permanent store of seed wheat. (Someone asked President Taylor if the wheat was to be loaned without interest. He replied, "Of course it is; we do not want any nonsense of that kind; it is the time of jubilee") (in Conference Report, Apr. 1880, p. 64; see also pp. 62–63).

What a marvelous effect President Taylor's proposal must have had on the Church's social structure! By recasting the traditions of ancient Israel in a way to respond to present-day needs, President Taylor showed the members how to be true Latter-day Saints.

Praise God through celebrations

Celebrating important historical events perpetuates traditions, but it does not replace the study of history.

Rather, it encourages study. We build bridges between the present and the past and bring relevance and interest to our study of history. When we celebrate, we remember. Sometimes we reenact that which has gone on before. When we honor tradition, we actually do what our ancestors did.

I hope as we continue to commemorate historical events and reclaim our traditions that we always celebrate with a purpose. I pray that we will make our celebrations more meaningful by reaffirming our spiritual, political, cultural, and social values. As members of this glorious church, we share a rich heritage. We literally stand on the shoulders of the giants of faith, vision, and spirit who preceded us.

When we honor them and their many sacrifices, we preserve their achievements and the principles and values for which they stood. And it provides us a wonderful way in which to praise God!

We learn from ancient Israel that there is a place for commemorative events. Let us build in our families,

communities, and nations, traditions of a lasting nature that will consistently remind us of the Lord's eternal truths and of our forebears who preserved them for our day.

God grant that we may ever keep alive the rich heritage which is ours, especially by building family traditions as constant reminders of our standards and our values.

This is the Lord's work in which we are engaged. I bear witness of that. He lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. That we may be engaged in His work is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder L. Aldin Porter, who was sustained at the April conference as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

Elder L. Aldin Porter

The Brethren will never lead us astray

Shortly after this call came to me, I was traveling by plane from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to Salt Lake City. A young businessman stepped to my seat in the plane and introduced himself as a Latter-day Saint. He asked if I was traveling to attend meetings, and I answered, "Yes."

"Will you see President Benson?"

"I think that is unlikely in view of the nature of the meetings."

"When you see him, will you tell him that though we have never met, I have a deep love for him?"

He returned to his seat.

It was late in the day; soon the lights were dimmed, giving me ample opportunity to think about that experience.

Brothers and sisters, there is great safety in having a love for the Brethren. As we traveled through the night, I remembered an experience that had come to me in this tabernacle some years ago. It was, I believe, the last time that President Joseph Fielding Smith spoke in a general priesthood meeting. He said:

"Now, brethren, I think there is one thing which we should have exceedingly clear in our minds. Neither the President of the Church, nor the First Presidency, nor the united voice of the First Presidency and the Twelve will ever lead the Saints astray or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1972, p. 99; or *Ensign*, July 1972, p. 88).