

# You Can Gather Israel!

By Ahmad S. Corbitt

*First Counselor in the Young Men General Presidency*

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Almost three years ago, President Russell M. Nelson invited all youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “to enlist in the Lord’s youth battalion to help gather Israel” on both sides of the veil. He said, “That gathering is the most important thing taking place on earth today.”<sup>1</sup> I am absolutely sure you youth can do this—and do it very well—because of (1) something about your identity and (2) an enormous power within you.

Forty-one years ago, two missionaries from our Church felt led to a house in New Jersey, in the United States. In time, miraculously, both parents and all 10 children were baptized. In the prophet’s words, they “let God prevail”<sup>2</sup> in their lives. I should say “our lives.” I was the third child. I was 17 years old when I decided to make a permanent covenant to follow Jesus Christ. But guess what else I decided? I would not serve a full-time mission. That was too much. And this could not be expected of me, right? I was a brand-new Church member. I had no money. Besides, although I had just graduated from the toughest high school in nearby West Philadelphia and faced down some dangerous challenges, I was secretly terrified of leaving home for two whole years.

## Your True Identity

But I had just learned that I and all of humanity had lived with our Heavenly Father as His spirit sons and daughters before our birth. Others needed to know, as I knew, that He longed for all His children to enjoy eternal life with Him. So, before anyone was on earth, He presented all with His perfect plan of salvation and happiness, with Jesus Christ as our Savior. Tragically, Satan opposed God’s plan.<sup>3</sup> According to the book of Revelation, “there was war in heaven”!<sup>4</sup> Satan cunningly deceived a third part of Heavenly Father’s spirit children into letting him prevail instead of God.<sup>5</sup> But not you! The Apostle John saw that you overcame Satan “by the word of [your] testimony.”<sup>6</sup>

Knowing my true identity, helped by my patriarchal blessing, gave me the courage and faith to accept President Spencer W. Kimball’s invitation to gather Israel.<sup>7</sup> It will be the same for you, dear friends. Knowing you overcame Satan by the word

of your testimony before will help you love, share, and invite<sup>8</sup> now and always—to invite others to come and see, come and help, and come and belong, as that same war for the souls of God’s children rages on.

## The Powerful Faith within You

What about the enormous power within you? Think of this: you shouted for joy<sup>9</sup> to come to a fallen world where all would face physical and spiritual death. We would never be able to overcome either on our own. We would suffer from not only our own sins but others’ sins too. Humanity would experience virtually every imaginable type of brokenness and disappointment<sup>10</sup>—all with a veil of forgetfulness over our minds and the world’s worst enemy continuing to target and tempt us. All hope for returning resurrected and clean to God’s holy presence rested entirely upon one Being keeping His promise.<sup>11</sup>

What empowered you to go forward? President Henry B. Eyring taught, “It took faith in Jesus Christ to sustain the plan of happiness and Jesus Christ’s place in it when you knew so little of the challenges that you would face in mortality.”<sup>12</sup> When Jesus Christ promised He would come into mortality and give His life to gather<sup>13</sup> and save us, you did not simply believe Him. You “noble spirits”<sup>14</sup> had such “exceedingly great faith” that you saw His promise as sure.<sup>15</sup> He could not lie, so you saw Him as if He had already shed His blood for you, long before He was born.<sup>16</sup>

In John’s symbolic words, you “overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb.”<sup>17</sup> President Dallin H. Oaks taught that in that world “[you] saw the end from the beginning.”<sup>18</sup>

Suppose one day before you leave for school, one of your parents makes a true promise that you can have your favorite food when you return home! You are excited! While in school you imagine eating that food, and you can already taste it. Naturally, you share your good news with others. Looking forward to going home makes you so happy that the tests and challenges of school seem light. Nothing can take away your joy or make you doubt because of how sure the promise is! Similarly, before you noble spirits were born, you learned to see Christ’s promises in this sure way, and you tasted of His salvation.<sup>19</sup> Your great faith is like muscles that get stronger and bigger the more you exercise them, but they are already inside you.

How can you awaken your giant faith in Christ and use it to gather Israel now and triumph over Satan again? By relearning to look forward and see with that same certainty the Lord’s promise to gather and save today. He mainly uses the Book of Mormon and His prophets to teach us how. Long before Christ, the Nephite “prophets, and ... priests, and ... teachers ... [persuaded the people] to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was.”<sup>20</sup> The prophet Abinadi taught, “And now if Christ had not come into the world,

speaking of things to come as though they had already come, there could have been no redemption.”<sup>21</sup> Like Alma, Abinadi “look[ed] forward with an eye of faith”<sup>22</sup> and saw God’s sure promise of salvation as already fulfilled. They “overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and ... the word of their testimony” long before Christ was born, just as you did. And the Lord gave them power to invite and gather Israel. He will do the same for you as you look forward in faith, see Israel gathered—globally and in your own “circles”<sup>23</sup>—and invite all!

Hundreds of missionaries built upon their powerful premortal faith in Christ by envisioning those they contacted or taught dressed in baptismal and temple clothing. In a talk titled “Begin with the End in Mind,”<sup>24</sup> President Nelson shared a personal example of doing this and instructed mission leaders to teach our missionaries to do the same. Knowing they exercised this great faith in Jesus Christ in the premortal world immensely helped our dear missionaries “hear Him”<sup>25</sup> and activate their enormous faith to gather Israel as the Lord promised.

Of course, imagining lies harms faith.<sup>26</sup> My friends, intentionally envisioning or viewing things that conflict with who you really are, especially pornography, will weaken your faith in Christ and, without repentance, could destroy it. Please use your imaginations to increase faith in Christ, not ruin it.

## The Children and Youth Program

The Children and Youth program is a prophetic tool to help you youth power up your great faith. President Oaks taught, “This program is designed to help you become more like our Savior in four areas: spiritual, social, physical, and intellectual.”<sup>27</sup> As you youth lead—*lead*—in living the gospel, caring for others, inviting all to receive the gospel, uniting families for eternity, and organizing fun activities,<sup>28</sup> the great faith in Christ you had in the premortal life will resurface and empower you to do His work in this life!

Also, personal goals, “especially short-term goals,”<sup>29</sup> help you reignite your powerful faith. When you set a good goal, you are looking forward, as you did before, and seeing what your Heavenly Father wants you or another to become.<sup>30</sup> Then you plan and work hard to achieve it. Elder Quentin L. Cook taught, “Never underestimate the importance of planning, setting goals ... , and [inviting others]—all with an eye of faith.”<sup>31</sup>

The choice is yours! The Lord said of you, “The power [to choose] is in them.”<sup>32</sup> Elder Neil L. Andersen explained, “Your faith will grow not by chance, but by choice.”<sup>33</sup> He also said, “[Any] honest questions [you may have] ... will be settled with patience and an eye of faith.”<sup>34</sup>

I testify that (1) your true identity and (2) the enormous power of faith in Christ within you will enable you to “help prepare the world for the Savior’s return by inviting all to come unto Christ and receive the blessings of His Atonement.”<sup>35</sup> May we all share the joy of the Book of Mormon’s sure promise:

“The righteous that hearken unto the ... prophets, and ... look forward unto Christ with steadfastness ... notwithstanding all persecution ... shall not perish.

“But [Christ] ... shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him.”<sup>36</sup>

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.