

Safely Gathered Home

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We are in a unique position to gather Israel on both sides of the veil as never before under the Father's plan.

President Russell M. Nelson, our beloved prophet, has profoundly emphasized that our unique responsibility is to help gather scattered Israel and prepare the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.¹ The Father of our spirits desires His children to be *safely gathered home*.

Our Heavenly Father's plan for safely gathering His children to our heavenly home is not based on worldly success, economic status, education, race, or gender. Father's plan is based on righteousness, keeping His commandments, and receiving sacred ordinances and honoring the covenants we make.²

The divinely inspired doctrine that we are all brothers and sisters and "all are alike unto God" underlies this great work of gathering. This doctrine accords with those who deeply desire for people of diverse economic and racial status to experience better lives. We applaud and join in such efforts. Moreover, we desire for all of God's children to come unto Him and receive the eternal blessings He offers through His gospel.³ In the Lord's preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, He declares, "Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together."⁴

I love that the very first verse in the Doctrine and Covenants includes the people who are on "the islands of the sea." I have had three specific calls to serve and live on the islands of the sea. I first served as a young missionary to the British Isles, second as a new General Authority in the Philippine Islands, and then as Area President in the Pacific Islands, which includes many Polynesian islands.

All three of these areas have successfully gathered believers to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Missionaries first arrived in the British Isles in 1837. This was one year after Joseph Smith's dedication of the Kirtland Temple, where Moses 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."⁵ The early success in the British Isles is

legendary. By 1851, over half the members of the Church were baptized converts living in the British Isles.⁶

In 1961, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley visited and initiated full-time missionary efforts in the Philippine Islands. At that time there was only one Filipino Melchizedek Priesthood holder. Amazingly, there are over 850,000 members of the Church today in the Philippine Islands. I admire the Filipino people; they have a deep and abiding love for the Savior.

Perhaps less well known is the ongoing missionary effort to the Polynesian Islands. It commenced in 1844 when Addison Pratt arrived in what is now French Polynesia.⁷ Many Polynesians already believed in eternal families and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. Today almost 25 percent of Polynesians, in the Polynesian Islands, are members of the Church.⁸

I once listened to a 17-year-old girl on a distant Tahitian island who was a seventh-generation member. She paid tribute to her ancestors who had been converted in 1845 on Tubuai, two years before early Church members arrived in the Salt Lake Valley.⁹

Our doctrine is clear that there will be a time and a season for all people to receive and to respond to the gospel message. These examples are just a part of a much larger picture. President Nelson has continuously emphasized that the gathering of Israel is “*the greatest* challenge, ... cause, and ... work on earth today.”¹⁰

Until the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ, including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the revelation and priesthood keys given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, understanding of the gathering of Israel was fragmentary and limited.¹¹

The distinctive name “Israel” was the title conferred upon Jacob.¹² It came to represent the posterity of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. The original promise and covenant to Father Abraham is set forth in Abraham 2:9–10, which reads in part:

“And I will make of thee a great nation, ...

“And I will bless [all nations] through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father.”

During the Council in Heaven in the premortal existence, the plan of salvation was discussed and *sustained*. It included certain laws and ordinances of the priesthood instituted before the foundation of the world and predicated upon the gathering.¹³ It also included the overriding principle of agency.

After several centuries as a powerful people, including the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, Israel was divided. The tribe of Judah and part of the tribe of Benjamin became the kingdom of Judah. The remainder, identified as the ten tribes, became the kingdom of Israel.¹⁴ After 200 years of separate existence, the first scattering of Israel occurred in 721 BC when the ten tribes of Israel were carried away captive by the Assyrian king.¹⁵ They later went to the north countries.¹⁶

In 600 BC at the commencement of the Book of Mormon, Father Lehi led a colony of Israelites to the Americas. Lehi understood the scattering of Israel of which he was a part. He is quoted by Nephi as saying that the house of Israel “should be compared like unto an olive tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.”¹⁷

In the so-called New World, the history of the Nephites and Lamanites as set forth in the Book of Mormon ends in approximately AD 400. Descendants of Father Lehi are spread throughout the Americas.¹⁸

This is clearly described by Mormon in 3 Nephi 5:20, which reads: “I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi. I have reason to bless my God and my Savior Jesus Christ, that he brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem.”¹⁹

Clearly the high point in Israel’s chronological history is the birth, message, ministry, and mission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.²⁰

After the Savior’s eternity-shaping death and Resurrection, a second well-known scattering of Judah occurred between AD 70 and AD 135 when, due to Roman oppression and persecution, the Jews dispersed throughout the then-known world.

President Nelson has taught, “The Book of Mormon came forth as a sign that the Lord had commenced to gather [the] children of the covenant.”²¹ Thus, the Book of Mormon, translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith through the gift and power of God, is directed to Lehi’s descendants, scattered Israel, and Gentiles who are adopted into the tribes of Israel. The chapter heading to 1 Nephi 22 reads in part, “Israel will be scattered upon all the face of the earth—The Gentiles will nurse and nourish Israel with the gospel in the last days.” The Book of Mormon title page reads that one of the book’s purposes is for “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.” With the Restoration and Book of Mormon, the concept of gathering Israel has greatly expanded.²²

Those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ, regardless of lineage, become part of gathered Israel.²³ With that gathering and the numerous temples built and announced, we are in a unique position to

gather Israel on both sides of the veil as never before under the Father's plan.

President Spencer W. Kimball, speaking of the literal gathering of Israel, stated: "Now, the gathering of Israel consists of joining the true church and ... coming to a knowledge of the true God. ... Any person, therefore, who has accepted the restored gospel, and who now seeks to worship the Lord in his own tongue and with the Saints in the nations where he lives, has complied with the law of the gathering of Israel and is heir to all of the blessings promised the Saints in these last days."²⁴

"The gathering of Israel now involves conversion."²⁵

As viewed through a clear lens, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have the great privilege of loving, sharing, inviting, and helping gather Israel to receive the fulness of the Lord's covenant blessings. This includes Africans and Europeans, South and North Americans, Asians, Australians, and those upon the isles of the sea. "For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men."²⁶ "This gathering shall continue until the righteous are assembled in the congregations of the Saints in the nations of the world."²⁷

No one has addressed the gathering more directly than President Russell M. Nelson: "*Anytime* you do *anything* that helps *anyone*—on either side of the veil—take a step toward making covenants with God and receiving their essential baptismal and temple ordinances, you are helping to gather Israel. It is as simple as that."²⁸

Where is the Church today? In the 62 years since I commenced serving a mission in 1960, the number of full-time missionaries serving under a call from the prophet has increased from 7,683 to 62,544. The number of missions has increased from 58 to 411. The number of members has increased from approximately 1,700,000 to approximately 17,000,000.

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily impacted some of our opportunities to share the gospel. It also provided experience using new technology, which will greatly enhance the gathering. We are grateful that members and missionaries are now expanding efforts to gather scattered Israel. Growth continues everywhere, especially South America and Africa. We also appreciate that so many across the world have responded to President Nelson's powerful invitation for increased missionary service. Nevertheless, our commitment to love, share, and invite can be greatly expanded.

An essential part of this missionary effort is for individual members to become beacon-light examples²⁹ wherever we live.³⁰ We cannot be in camouflage. Our Christlike example of kindness, righteousness, happiness, and sincere love for all peoples can create not only a guiding beacon light for them but also an understanding that there is a safe

harbor in the ordinances of salvation and exaltation of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Please understand that there are remarkable blessings in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The scriptures speak of joy and peace, forgiveness of sins, protection from temptations, and sustaining power from God.³¹ Looking beyond this mortal life, we will be prepared to share the gospel with those “in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead.”³²

My specific prayer today is for every child, young man, young woman, family, quorum, Relief Society, and class to review how we individually and collectively accept dramatic counsel to help gather Israel that has been issued by the Lord and our beloved prophet.

We respect agency. In this secular world, many will not respond and participate in the gathering of Israel. But many will, and the Lord expects those who have received His gospel to urgently strive to be a beacon-light example that will help others come to God. This allows our brothers and sisters across the earth to enjoy the supernal blessings and ordinances of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and be *safely gathered home*.

I bear my sure and certain apostolic witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ and our Father in Heaven’s plan for us in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Russell M. Nelson, “Welcome Message,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 7.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
3. See 2 Nephi 26:33.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 1:1. In Doctrine and Covenants 1:4, the Lord continues, “And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.”
5. Doctrine and Covenants 110:11.
6. In 1851, there were 52,165 total members of the Church. According to Church records and the “Religious Census of 1851” in England and Wales, there were over 28,000 members in those locations (see Robert L. Lively Jr., “Some Sociological Reflections on the Nineteenth-Century British Mission,” in *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain*, ed. Richard L. Jensen and Malcolm R. Thorp [1989], 19–20).

7. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth*, 1815–1846 (2018), 494–95, 514–15, 573.
8. Tonga: 45 percent; Samoa: 31 percent; American Samoa: 22.5 percent; and French Polynesia: 7 percent.
9. See *Saints*, 573–74.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
11. This unique and powerful doctrine is contained in the Book of Mormon and succinctly in the tenth article of faith, which begins, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes” (see James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. [1924], 314–44).
12. As recorded in Genesis 32:28, the scriptural account reads, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men.”
13. See Joseph Smith, in “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1,” 1572, josephsmithpapers.org; see also Joseph Smith, “Discourse, 11 June 1843–A, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” [42–43], josephsmithpapers.org; Joseph Smith, “Discourse, 11 June 1843–A, as Reported by Willard Richards,” [241], josephsmithpapers.org.
14. See Bible Dictionary, “Israel, Kingdom of”; James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 315. Rehoboam and his subjects were known as the kingdom of Judah and were located in the southern part of modern Israel.
15. See 2 Kings 17:23.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 133:26; see also Doctrine and Covenants 110:11.
17. 1 Nephi 10:12. Ammon later said, “Blessed is the name of my God, who has been mindful of this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body in a strange land” (Alma 26:36).
18. President Spencer W. Kimball, speaking of Lamanite Israel, taught that Zion is all the Americas. He said, “We are in Israel and are being gathered” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 439).

19. When Father Lehi was instructed to take his family and depart into the wilderness, at least part of the reason was that Jerusalem would be destroyed (see 1 Nephi 2). The destruction of Solomon's Temple, the downfall of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the tribe of Judah occurred in about 586 BC.

"Israel was conquered in about 720 B.C.E., and its 10 tribes driven into exile. ... [In Jerusalem,] Solomon's Temple sustained several attacks by foreign powers before finally, in 586 B.C.E., being totally destroyed by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king" (David B. Green, "The History of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem," *Haaretz*, Aug. 11, 2014, haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-history-of-the-temple-in-jerusalem-1.5256337). See also 2 Kings 25:8–9.
20. See Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (2000).
21. Russell M. Nelson, "Children of the Covenant," *Ensign*, May 1995, 33; see also "Covenants," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 88.
22. See Russell M. Nelson, in R. Scott Lloyd, "Seminar for New Mission Presidents: 'Swift Messengers' to Scattered Israel," *Church News*, July 13, 2013, thechurchnews.com. President Nelson has stated that the gathering "is not a matter of physical location; it is a matter of individual commitment. People can be 'brought to the knowledge of the Lord' [3 Nephi 20:13] without leaving their homelands" ("The Gathering of Scattered Israel," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 81). See also 3 Nephi 21:1–7.
23. Our doctrine is clear; the Lord scattered the tribes of Israel because of their rebellion and their unrighteousness. However, the Lord also utilized the scattering of His chosen people among the nations of the world to bless those nations. (See Guide to the Scriptures, "Israel—The Scattering of Israel," scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.)
24. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 439.

25. Summary heading in Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 438. See also “*All Are Alike unto God*,” ed. E. Dale LeBaron (1990), a collection of 23 conversion stories by Black African Latter-day Saints. Sister Julia N. Mavimbela said that before she joined the Church and came to the word *Israel*, she would “throw the book aside and say, ‘It is for the whites. It is not for us. We are not chosen.’ Today I know I belong to a royal family, if I live righteously. I am an Israelite, and when I was doing my ordinances in the temple, I captured the feeling that we are all on earth as one family” (in “*All Are Alike unto God*,” 151).
26. Doctrine and Covenants 1:2.
27. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 438.
28. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel.”
29. The Apostle Paul told his young friend Timothy to “be ... an example of the believers” (1 Timothy 4:12).
30. See 3 Nephi 18:24.
31. See Mosiah 18:8–13; 3 Nephi 18:25; Doctrine and Covenants 18:10–16; 31:5; 62:3.
32. Doctrine and Covenants 138:57.