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Zion Zion Zion: Keys to Understanding Ether 13

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Jeff O'Driscoll

Introduction

Gospel study requires careful attention to context, as context is often essential in establishing which of many possible meanings the writer intends to convey. Attention to context is crucial to gaining an appropriate mental image of Zion. The bulk of the comments that follow, therefore, deal with the study of Zion in a few specific verses of scripture, the context of those verses, and comments made by various modern prophets which are directly pertinent to understanding Zion. Certain verses are rather ambiguous, but by considering each possibility we hope to be enlightened.

Zion in Context

Clearly the concept of Zion refers to a lifestyle, a social structure (4 Nephi; Moses 7:18; D&C 105:5), and a state of mind (D&C 97:21; Moses 7:18). Whether in the time of Enoch, among the Nephites after the Savior's visit, or in this dispensation, a Zion people are "pure in heart" (D&C 97:21). They are "of one heart and one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness," and among them are found "no poor" (Moses 7:18). Neither is there any manner of sin "nor any manner of -ites; but they [are] in one the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God" (4 Nephi 1:15–17). These blessings came to Zion people because they

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built Zion in the only way possible—“by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:5).

In this dispensation, “Zion” also refers to various geographic locations. For example, many revelations refer to Zion in Jackson County, Missouri (D&C 57:2–3). Specifically, “Independence is the center place” of Zion, and therein is the designated site, already dedicated, for the temple-complex of Zion (v 3; see also *History of the Church* 1:196–99; hereafter *HC*). The Prophet Joseph Smith provided a detailed plat of the city and, using that plat as a pattern, instructed the Saints, “When this square is thus laid off and supplied, lay off another in the same way, and so fill up the world in these last days; and let every man live in the city, for this is the city of Zion” (*HC* 1:358). This is consistent with the Lord’s counsel found in a subsequent revelation concerning Zion:

There is none other place appointed than that which I have appointed; neither shall there be any other place appointed than that which I have appointed, for the work of the gathering of my saints—Until the day cometh when there is found no more room for them; and then I have other places which I will appoint unto them, and they shall be called stakes, for the curtains or the strength of Zion. (D&C 101:20–21)

When we consider such instruction, we can more easily understand the Prophet’s declaration that “the whole of America is Zion itself from north to south. . . . It is the Zion where the mountain of the Lord should be” (*HC* 6:318). Brigham Young notes that “Zion will extend eventually, all over this earth. There will be no nook or corner upon the earth but what will be in Zion. It will all be Zion” (*Journal of Discourses* 9:138; hereafter *JD*). Elder Matthew Cowley further explained, “In your homes where the priesthood of God exists, there is Zion. And to you whose lives are committed to righteousness, I say unto you, You are Zion” (441). The incumbency under which the Saints labor is, as President Brigham Young said, to “begin and make Zion in our own hearts, and then extend it to our neighborhoods, and so continue until the Lord shall reign upon the earth” (*JD* 1:245). Note the Lord’s declaration, “This is Zion—THE PURE IN HEART” (D&C 97:21).

Whether we discuss the nature of Zion’s sociotheocratic system, its people, or its geography, the value of establishing context to elucidate meaning is demonstrated. Nowhere is this more true than in

Ether chapter 13 where the cities of Zion are mentioned. As will be seen, only context can determine the different cities Ether refers to by the same name, as do other prophets. While most of the verses are quite clear, some concepts require additional study. In preface to the study of those verses, we must note some facts.

Three Holy Cities

President Joseph Fielding Smith spoke of three holy cities:

In the day of regeneration, when all things are made new, there will be three great cities that will be holy. One will be the Jerusalem of old which shall be rebuilt according to the prophecy of Ezekiel. One will be the city of Zion, or of Enoch, which was taken from the earth when Enoch was translated and which will be restored; and the city Zion, or New Jerusalem, which is to be built by the seed of Joseph on this the American continent. (*Answers to Gospel Questions* 2:105; hereafter *Answers*)

Note that two of these cities are called Zion. They are distinguished by reference to Enoch and Joseph and events which are unique to their identification. Context makes the reference clear. We shall see, however, that there is yet another holy city, a composite Zion, which consists of the united and combined cities of Enoch and the New Jerusalem. This city is also called Zion, and knowledge of it comes to us through the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price.

Two Zions Become One Zion

The prophet Enoch may be best known among Latter-day Saints for his success in establishing a Zion community. He thus seems the appropriate recipient and disseminator of any special revelation on the subject. Indeed, such revelation came; and we are fortunate to have a glimpse into the same. The Lord spoke to Enoch: "And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten . . . and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth" (Moses 7:62). President Ezra Taft Benson, on one occasion, quoted this verse and explained, "The Book of Mormon is the instrument that God designed to 'sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out [His]

elect' (Moses 7:62)" (4). This verse clearly refers to our time—the dispensation of the fulness of times. Where will the elect be gathered? That gathering, said the Lord, is “unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City . . . for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem” (Moses 7:62). To Enoch, the archetypal Zionist prophet, the Lord continued:

Then shalt thou and all thy city meet *them there* [that is, Enoch’s city Zion, meets Zion, the New Jerusalem, in this land], and we will receive them into our bosom, and they shall see us; and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other; And *there shall be mine abode, and it shall be Zion*, which shall come forth out of all the creations which I have made; and *for the space of a thousand years the earth shall rest.* (Moses 7:63–64; emphasis added)

The Lord granted this knowledge to Enoch while he yet dwelt upon the earth, and while still living in the city of Zion over which he presided. Enoch was blessed with this vision of what would happen to his city—it would return to earth to meet and embrace the New Jerusalem, and they will become one city, also called Zion, and serve as the home of the Lord during the Millennium.

The above verses suggest that the Lord will physically be with Enoch in that city of Zion when it returns to earth. Joseph Smith taught that “Christ and the resurrected Saints will reign over the earth during the thousand years. They will not probably dwell upon the earth, but will visit it when they please, or when it is necessary to govern it” (HC 5:212). He clarified the words of the psalmist, saying, “Zion shall come, and God shall be in the midst of her” (JST Ps 46:5). Whether God’s presence in Zion will be literal or figurative or both, Enoch’s description of the union of these two holy cities notes the return of Zion *before* the Millennium is ushered in. This may give insight into the Saints’ millennial song, “The Lord hath brought down Zion from above. The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath” (D&C 84:100).¹ By uniting these two cities, the Lord will fulfill his sworn oath that in Enoch’s city “the heavens and the earth should come together” (JST Gen 14:35).

¹ Elder Orson Pratt commented that “the Zion which was built up by Enoch . . . will come down again at the commencement of the Millennium to meet the Zion here, according to the song in the Book of Covenants, ‘The Lord has brought up Zion from beneath, the Lord has brought down Zion from above,’ and they shall gaze upon each other’s countenances, and see eye to eye” (JD 2:103).

Zion After the Millennium, the Bride

In contrast to the return of Zion *before* the Millennium, certain scriptural passages clearly seem to refer to a city of God descending from heaven to a celestialized earth *after* the Millennium (Rev 21:10–27). Specifically answering a question as to the interpretation of Revelation 21:1–2, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith referred to and quoted Ether 13:2–11. He said, “We read in the Book of Ether that the Lord revealed to him many of the same things which were seen by John. . . . In his vision, in many respects similar to that given to John, [Ether]² saw the old city of Jerusalem and also the new city which has not yet been built” (*Answers 2*:103). Perusal of the references in Ether and Revelation confirms that they do, for the most part, refer to the same events. These passages will, therefore, be considered together in the discussion to follow.

Ether spoke of “a new heaven and a new earth” to which the “New Jerusalem” would come (13:9–10). Clearly the Apostle John described this same setting in the first two verses of Revelation chapter 21. The terminology, “a new heaven and a new earth,” is applicable to the earth whether in its paradisiacal and millennial state or in its exalted and celestial state (see McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* 531; hereafter *MD*). Also, when the “bride, the Lamb’s wife . . . that great city, the holy Jerusalem” descends from heaven as described in Revelation 21:9–10, it will descend to a celestial earth. Elder McConkie cites these later verses in Revelation and comments, “When this earth becomes a celestial sphere ‘that great city, the holy Jerusalem,’ shall *again* descend ‘out of heaven from God,’ as this earth becomes the abode of celestial beings forever (Rev 21:10–27)” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3:582; emphasis added; hereafter *DNTC*).

Though less certain context is found, the city described in Revelation 21:9–10 may be the same “holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” described by John earlier in the same chapter (Rev 21:2). This seems to be the intent of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith’s explanation of those verses (*Answers 2*:103–06). On the other hand,

² The cited reference reads “Enoch,” but from the context it appears that this may have been an error. It seems that Elder Smith intended to refer to Ether.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said verses 1–4 clearly refer to millennial earth (*The Millennial Messiah* 306; hereafter *MM*). Perhaps these verses refer to both times and circumstances in a dual-meaning prophecy. Regardless of how one interprets these verses, it is quite clear that a holy city shall twice descend, once as the Millennium is ushered in and again after the 1,000 years and a “little season” (Rev 20:3; D&C 88:110–11). Elder McConkie says, “Events to transpire after the millennial era and before the earth becomes a celestial sphere have not been revealed. We do have an account, however, of ‘the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God’ a second time, that is, after the earth has become a celestial planet” (*MD* 533; citing Rev 3:12, 21 as references).

The Preservation of Zion

Although it is clear that this earth will see a city of God descend at two different times and under two different sets of circumstances, just how this will occur is not clearly explained. If that holy city is to descend “a second time,” it is reasonable to surmise that it must have been taken back to heaven in the interim. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith explained it as follows:

After the close of the millennial reign we are informed that Satan, who was bound during the millennium, shall be loosed and go forth to deceive the nations. Then will come the end. The earth will die and be purified and receive its resurrection. During this cleansing period the city Zion, or New Jerusalem [the combined city Zion which existed throughout the Millennium], will be taken from the earth; and when the earth is prepared for the celestial glory, the city will come down according to the prediction in the Book of Revelation. (*Answers* 2:106)

Apparently, God is interested in preserving Zion. When Melchizedek and his people “sought for the city of Enoch,” they found that “God had before taken [it], separating it from the earth, having reserved it unto the latter days, or the end of the world” (JST Gen 14:34). It seems that the pattern set by Enoch’s people—that of being taken from the earth during its cleansing period—will again be observed. In Enoch’s day the earth was cleansed by water, and after the earth is again cleansed, that city will return. The composite Zion, however, will likewise be taken from the earth during its final

sanctification, and when that cleansing is complete, she will return to a celestial sphere, the home of the exalted.³

Consider just two reasons why Zion must be preserved: first, the inhabitants of those cities and, second, in Enoch's case at least, the temples therein. We read that the exalted Saints

are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son. . . . These are they who are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly place, the holiest of all. These are they who have come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of Enoch, and of the Firstborn. (D&C 76:57)

Note that Enoch is mentioned along with Melchizedek and the Savior when referring to the Holy Priesthood. He is again mentioned with the Savior in reference to the church of the Saints. These verses refer to the celestial reward promised each of the translated inhabitants of Enoch's city. The Lord, himself, refers to Enoch's city as "the general assembly of the church of the first-born" (JST Gen 9:23; see also *MD* 136).

Enoch's relationship with the Lord is reflected in his declaration, "Forasmuch as thou art God, and I know thee. . . . Thou hast made me, and given unto me a right to thy throne" (Moses 7:59). In response, the Lord promised, "Great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but *my people will I preserve* . . . to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City . . . and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem" (vv 61–62; emphasis added). As mentioned previously, this gathering will be accomplished through the instrumentality of the Book of Mormon in this dispensation. Thus the protection or preservation the Lord promised the people of Enoch—"my people will I preserve"—may also be applicable to the Saints in these last days.

³ The exact order of events is not entirely clear. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith taught that "when the earth is prepared for the celestial glory, the city will come down according to the prediction in the Book of Revelation" (*Answers* 2:106), but this is not to say that the holy city will miss out on such sanctification. Joseph Young, Sr., brother of President Brigham Young and one of the first Presidents of the Seventy, reported that the Prophet Joseph Smith taught "that inasmuch as they [Enoch's city] did not pass through all the refinement which was necessary, as the Lord lives, they would return to the earth, when they and the city would pass through the same fiery ordeals that yet await the earth; when it shall be transformed into a sea of glass, mingled with fire, and their preparations for a celestial abode of the glorified Saints shall be perfected" (11–12).

Enoch said, “Surely Zion shall dwell in safety forever”; to which the Lord responded, “Zion have I blessed” (Moses 7:20). Those who attain the status of a Zion-people are entitled to the Lord’s protection. They are they who walk with God literally and/or figuratively (v 69; Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:4). Joseph Smith said that “this Enoch, God reserved unto Himself, that he should not die at that time, and appointed unto him a ministry unto terrestrial bodies. . . . He is reserved also unto the Presidency of a dispensation” (HC 4:209). Although the inhabitants of Enoch’s city, being translated, are yet terrestrial beings (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 170; hereafter *TPJS*), they abide a celestial law (D&C 105:5). As Elder Joseph Fielding Smith pointed out, “they were living the celestial law in a telestial world” and for them “it was no longer expedient that they should remain on the earth” (*Church History and Modern Revelation* 1:195). They simply no longer needed to be subject to the things of this world, and it seems they were entitled to protection and preservation from the same. I believe this is one reason the Lord takes his holy cities from the earth.

The second reason Zion is preserved is that it is the center of temple work, the work of the Millennium. Ether points out that when the city of Enoch returns to earth, it will contain “the holy sanctuary of the Lord” (Ether 13:3). Likewise, John notes that when “the holy city, new Jerusalem, [comes] down from God out of heaven . . . the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them” (Rev 21:2–3). Enoch saw the same thing (Moses 7:62). Elder Franklin D. Richards said he wished

to speak a word in reference to the three Nephites. They wanted to tarry until Jesus came, and that they might He took them into the heavens and endowed them with the power of translation, probably in one of Enoch’s temples, and brought them back to the earth. Thus they received power to live until the coming of the Son of Man. I believe He took them to Enoch’s city and gave them their endowments there. I expect that in the city of Enoch there are temples; and when Enoch and his people come back, they will come back with their city, their temples, blessings and powers. (*JD* 25:236–37)

Remember that Enoch’s people, being translated, retain physical bodies and thus remain in a position to utilize temples to further the work. Similarly, Zion on this continent will include temples of the Most High. Joseph Smith explained that in the center place of Zion there would be 24 temples; 12 for the work of the Aaronic Priesthood

and 12 for the work of the Melchizedek Priesthood. These temples are to have divinely inspired names as revealed to the Prophet. On three of those edifices shall be found the name, "House of the Lord for the Presidency of the High and most Holy Priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of the Son of God, upon Mount Zion, City of the New Jerusalem." And on each house is to also be written, "Holiness to the Lord" (*HC* 1:359).

This work of building temples engages the Saints in Mount Zion (*D&C* 97:10–12); it is the work of the Mountain of the Lord's house (*Isa* 2:2–3), and those who labor therein are "saviours . . . on mount Zion" (*Obad* 1:21). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that when Zion is built and the Saints gathered, they will "come up as saviours on Mount Zion." He further stated:

But how are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances, baptisms, confirmations, washings, anointings, ordinations and sealing powers upon their heads, in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead, and redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with them; and herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, which fulfills the mission of Elijah. (*TPJS* 330; see also 191, 366)

Clearly there is an intimate cooperation among the Saints in this work, whether living, dead, or translated.⁴ Quoting from the aforementioned prophecies of Enoch, Joseph Smith commented, "And now, I ask, how righteousness and truth are going to sweep the earth as with a flood? I will answer. Men and angels are to be co-workers in bringing to pass this great work, and Zion is to be prepared, even a new Jerusalem, for the elect that are to be gathered from the four quarters of the earth, and to be established an holy city, for the tabernacle of the Lord shall be with them" (*HC* 2:260). That cooperation will continue when the cities of Zion become one.

At the end of the 1,000-year labor, when the temple work is complete, the need for those temples will be obviated. Of that time, John said of the holy city, "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (*Rev* 21:22). This is one reason that it seems the first few verses of Revelation chapter 21 refer

⁴ See also Brigham Young 321–22; M. Russell Ballard 200–02; *The Manti Temple* 53; George Albert Smith 564; Orson Pratt 141.

to Enoch's city descending to millennial earth, while later verses seem to refer to the composite Zion returning to celestial earth. In the first instance, John notes that "the tabernacle of God is with men" (v 3), while in the latter case he comments that "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (v 22). Elder McConkie notes that "temples, now and during the millennium, are to prepare men for a celestial inheritance. When that glorious goal is gained, heaven itself becomes a temple" (*DNTC* 3:588).

There may be other reasons why the Lord so jealously preserves his Zions (see *Zech* 8:1–3), but clearly the progress of and the promises made to the inhabitants of Zion as well as the temples therein are two such reasons. Understanding this helps us to appreciate why the Lord took Enoch and his city to heaven and why he will yet take that composite Zion back into heaven.

Review of Ether 13

Let us now review the observations and prophecies of Ether. In doing this, we should remember that Moroni, while conveying to us these words of Ether, fell under a restriction known well by the prophets. He said, "I was about to write more, but I am forbidden; but great and marvelous were the prophecies of Ether" (*Ether* 13:13). Similarly, Nephi saw a great many things which he was instructed not to write because the stewardship of that record-keeping was to fall upon John the Apostle and Revelator (*1 Nephi* 14:20–30). Perhaps the same was true in the case of Moroni's editing responsibilities, for it seems that Ether and John beheld similar visions, and perhaps it was again John's responsibility to provide the record. Elder McConkie notes, however, that "we might surmise [that] the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon contains a full and complete account of all things pertaining to the New Jerusalem and the second coming of Christ. From the writings of Ether, preserved in full on those plates, Moroni digested for us a few salient facts that enable us to glimpse what is to be" (*MM* 304).

Verses 1–4

First, we are told that the American continent is "a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord" (*Ether* 13:2; see also

MM 304) and this land is “the place of the New Jerusalem, *which should come down out of heaven*, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord. Behold, Ether saw *the days of Christ*, and he spake concerning a New Jerusalem upon this land” (Ether 13:3–4; emphasis added).

These two New Jerusalems, both to be found on the American continent, are mentioned in two consecutive verses, but refer to two entirely different cities. Context is key. One is to “come down out of heaven”⁵ while the other shall be built *in situ* in the promised land in “the days of Christ.” The first is the city of Enoch, and the sanctuary mentioned is the temple of the Lord (see MM 304). The second is the Zion yet to be built. As Latter-day Saints, we believe “that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent” (AF 10). Enoch’s city will return to this place, and Elder Orson Pratt said it may be that “all the Zions God has taken out of His creations to heaven” will also come to this place (*JD* 2:103).

Some may note that “Ether saw the days of Christ” when he spoke of “a New Jerusalem upon this land” (Ether 13:4). In a sense, the Zion society built by the Nephites after the Savior’s visit (4 Nephi) could be considered a fulfillment of those words, but Elder McConkie points out that the days of Christ seen by Ether on that occasion were “the days of his glorious Second Coming” and the “New Jerusalem seems to be the one built by the saints in the latter days” (MM 304).

It is interesting to note that when code names were used in certain revelations, the Zion to be built in our day was referred to as “the city of Enoch” and its presiding founder, Joseph Smith, Jr., as “Enoch” (see *HC* 1:255–57). The reason for those intentionally obscure designations has passed, and the designations themselves have been discontinued. The analogy of the latter-day Zion and the city of Enoch is, however, worth remembering.

Verse 5

Moroni continues to point out that Ether speaks of “the Jerusalem from whence Lehi should come—after it should be destroyed it should be built up again, a holy city unto the Lord” (Ether 13:3–5).

⁵ One may reasonably ask to where this city will return. Joseph Young Sr. notes that “Joseph Smith said . . . in the hearing of some of the saints still surviving, that the City of Enoch would again take its place in the identical spot from which it had been detached, now forming that chasm of the earth, filled with water, called the Gulf of Mexico” (12; see also Widtsoe 365).

In three short verses (vv 3–5), then, we have reference to each of the three holy cities mentioned by Joseph Fielding Smith. Ether calls them all “Jerusalem” and refers to both of the first two as New Jerusalem. Consider, however, that neither John nor Ether, in these so often referred to chapters, uses the word *Zion*. Nevertheless, the meaning is clear. Each of the New Jerusalems, each properly titled Zion, is separate and distinct in geography and in temporal existence until that time in the future when they become one.

Elder Orson Pratt indicates that the Jerusalem from which Lehi came will find a like fate as we have described for the New Jerusalem. Speaking of the final celestialization of the earth, he said,

As the earth passes through its great last change, two of its principal cities—the Old Jerusalem of the eastern continent, and the New Jerusalem of the western continent, will be preserved from the general conflagration, being caught up into heaven. These two cities, with all their glorified throng, will descend upon the redeemed earth, being the grand capitals of the new creation. (*JD* 1:332)

Speaking of this same ancient Jerusalem that will yet be rebuilt, Elder Franklin D. Richards said, “She is yet to take an important part in the great work of the latter days. Like the New Jerusalem of the American continent, this city will descend out of heaven, after the final change of the earth to its celestial condition (Rev 21:10–27). It is often called Zion in the Old Testament, and will be the capital city of gathered Israel on the Eastern hemisphere, in the latter days” (172).

Verses 6–8

In verses 6–8, Ether refers again to the “New Jerusalem [which] should be built up upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph, for which things there has been a type” (Ether 13:6). He explains this typology as follows:

For as Joseph brought his father down into the land of Egypt . . . the Lord brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto the seed of Joseph that they should perish not. . . . Wherefore, the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built upon this land; and it shall be a land of their inheritance; and they shall build up a holy city unto the Lord, like unto the Jerusalem of old; and they shall no more be confounded, until the end come when the earth shall pass away. (Ether 13:7–8)

As already noted, God moves his people from place to place to preserve and protect them, and as they have built a holy city in one

land, so shall they build one in another. With this explanation from Ether and in fulfillment of such a portent, the Zion in America should be called a *New Jerusalem*. Elder McConkie explained that “we who are of Ephraim (and of Manasseh) into whose hands the Church and kingdom has now been given shall build the city in due course, and we and our children after us [as prophesied by Ether] shall never be confounded or lose the faith; for [to] our dispensation, the promise is that the gospel shall remain with us to prepare a people for the second coming of Him whose servants we are” (*MM* 305).

Verses 9–11

Continuing on, Ether describes a time when

the end come[s] when the earth shall pass away. And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth . . . and then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb. . . . And then also cometh the Jerusalem of old; and the inhabitants thereof, blessed are they, for they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who were scattered and gathered in from the four quarters of the earth . . . fulfilling . . . the covenant which God made with their father, Abraham. (Ether 13:8–11)

Verses 9–11 along with Revelation 21:1–2 potentially have more than one meaning and fulfillment. If Ether, like John, placed importance on referring to the presence of the temple of the Lord among the people, it should be noted that in verse 3 he clearly refers to Enoch’s city and the “holy sanctuary of the Lord” found therein. In contradistinction, verse 10 mentions no temple and may, therefore, refer to a future time when the composite Zion returns to earth and God and the Lamb are the temple of that city.⁶ Not wanting to wrest the intent of these verses, let me simply say here that the terminology of “a new heaven and a new earth” is twice applicable; once at the beginning of the Millennium and again at the end (see *MD* 531). The New Jerusalem referred to in Ether 13:10 may be Enoch’s Zion returning to millennial earth; or it may be the Zion built by the Saints

⁶ Though the temple may not be in the city after the Millennium, it is interesting to note Orson Pratt, who spoke of a time after “Jesus has been on the earth a thousand years, [when] God himself is to be on the new earth. . . . The tree of life will be on the earth in the midst of that city that will descend on the earth, and whoever eats of the fruit of that tree will live forever, just the same as the tree of life [which] was placed upon the earth before Adam transgressed” (*JD* 21:327–28).

in Jackson; or the composite Zion returning to celestial earth. Perhaps it is all of these.

Verse 12

Having referred to scattered Israel and the oft-mentioned “gather[ing] in from the four quarters of the earth” in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (v 11), Ether explains that “when these things come, [they] bringeth to pass the scripture which saith, there are they who were first, who shall be last; and there are they who were last, who shall be first” (Ether 13:12). The Savior similarly taught that “there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last” (JST Luke 13:30). Elder Bruce R. McConkie paraphrased these words of Christ, saying, “There are those Gentiles in all nations to whom the gospel is offered *last* who shall be saved ahead of you Jews to whom the word of God came *first*, and there are those among you who *first* had opportunity to hear the truth who shall be *last* as to honor, preference, and salvation hereafter” (*DNTC* 1:497).

While Zenos spoke allegorically of Israel and a time when “the last . . . may be first, and . . . the first may be last” (Jacob 5:63), Nephi spoke more literally of a time when Christ “shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (1 Nephi 13:42). In the meridian of time, the gospel went first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In this dispensation the gospel goes first to the Gentiles and then to the Jews; hence, the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Our record of Ether’s writings on Zion concludes with Moroni’s editorial comment, “I was about to write more, but I am forbidden” (Ether 13:13).

Conclusions

What then of these dozen verses in the book of Ether in the Book of Mormon? What are we to conclude? Consider that these verses are Joseph Smith’s translation of Moroni’s abridgment of Ether’s words. The product of at least three prophets’ labors in at least three different

dispensations must have some import to us. We are also told of three holy cities in three dispensations, and perhaps we are told of a fourth city in yet another time. When we add to this the words of so many additional prophets, both ancient and modern, the inestimable value of the message of Zion is impressive. Indeed, it seems we are under obligation to seek an understanding of these things.

Perhaps we can conclude at least three points from Ether's writings: First, Zion is a worthy and a significant theme consistently found throughout the cannon of scripture. Second, Zion, the New Jerusalem, is to be built in this dispensation on the American continent with its center place in Jackson County, Missouri, and faithful Latter-day Saints should plan to participate. Third, the preservation of Zion has necessitated its being removed from the earth in the past and will require it in the future. Let us briefly consider each of these.

The Message of Zion

Nearly every prophet of whom we have record has discussed Zion. The message of Zion is the message of salvation. The cities of Zion are the cities of God. The church of Enoch is the Church of the Firstborn (D&C 76:67) and is composed of those whose "callings and elections were made sure, and they were all assured of . . . an inheritance of exaltation in the eternal worlds . . . and all those who gain exaltation will be joined with them" (MD 136). In his covenant with Enoch, God stated that

when men should keep all my commandments, Zion should again come on the earth, the city of Enoch which I have caught up unto myself. And this is mine everlasting covenant, that when thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward. . . . And the general assembly of the church of the first-born shall come down out of heaven, and possess the earth, and shall have place until the end come. And this is mine everlasting covenant, which I made with . . . Enoch. (JST Gen 9:21-23)

It seems an appropriate goal for every Former-day Saint and Latter-day Saint to become worthy of Zion. In *Lectures on Faith* we read "that after any members of the human family are made acquainted with the important fact that there is a God . . . the extent of their knowledge respecting his character and glory will depend upon their diligence and faithfulness in seeking after him, until, like Enoch

... they shall obtain faith in God, and power with him to behold him face to face” (2:55).

Enoch and his people were translated to a terrestrial state (*TPJS* 170), but they abide the laws of the celestial kingdom (D&C 105:5). The doctrines, messages, and spirit of Zion take us to, through, and beyond terrestrial glory to a celestial exaltation. The inhabitants of the holy cities are, as Ether said, those “whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb. . . . They have been washed in the blood of the Lamb” (Ether 13:10–11) and, as John points out, “they . . . are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27).

Zion in America

Heber C. Kimball taught that “the spot chosen for the garden of Eden [the first Zion Community] was Jackson County, in the State of Missouri, where Independence now stands” (*JD* 10:235). So shall it be again. Regarding Zion in America, there is much to consider. We now live in the time for “which our forefathers have awaited with anxious expectation,” a time “which their minds were pointed to by the angels” (D&C 121:27). That “time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld” (D&C 121:28) has come upon us⁷ and as this greater light is being shed upon the Latter-day Saints, so is their responsibility increasing (D&C 82:3). Never, to our knowledge, since the days of Enoch have the Saints had such an abundant compilation of promises regarding their role in actively participating in the building of Zion, not in a future, but in the present dispensation. This participation may take several forms.

One interesting responsibility we may not often consider is our governmental responsibility. President George Albert Smith, in the dedicatory prayer of the Idaho Falls Temple, said, “We thank thee that thou hast revealed to us that those who gave us our constitutional form of government were men wise in thy sight and that thou didst raise them up for the very purpose of putting forth that sacred document”

⁷ Wilford Woodruff said, “The day has already dawned when the light of heaven is to fill the earth; the day in which the Lord has said that nothing should be kept hidden, whether it be the things pertaining to one God, or many Gods, or to thrones, principalities or powers; the day in which everything that has been kept from the knowledge of man ever since the foundation of the earth, must be revealed; and it is a day in which the ancient prophets looked forward to with a great deal of interest and anxiety” (*JD* 24:52).

(see also D&C 101:79–80). He then spoke of the three branches of government and asked “that all may function fully and courageously in their respective branches completely independent of each other to the preservation of our constitutional form of government forever.” He also asked that “kings and rulers and the peoples of all nations under heaven” might look and be persuaded “to adopt similar governmental systems, thus to fulfill the ancient prophecy of Isaiah that ‘out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’” (564).

Similarly, George Washington, in his presidential farewell address, expressed gratitude for the support of the people and said,

Profoundly penetrated with this idea, I shall carry it with me to my grave as a strong incitement to unceasing vows that Heaven may continue to you the choicest tokens of its beneficence; that your union and brotherly affection may be perpetual; that the free Constitution which is the work of your hands may be *sacredly* maintained; that its administration *in every department* may be stamped with wisdom and virtue; that, in fine, the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete by so careful a preservation and so prudent a use of this blessing as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and *adoption of every nation* which is yet a stranger to it. (1:206; emphasis added)

If the influence of this constitutional form of government is to lead to the adoption of similar forms of government throughout the world,⁸ we are uniquely responsible for participation in the same. If this is to be one of the means by which Isaiah’s prophecy is to be fulfilled, we should be involved. We need also to support the independent administration of each branch of government as mentioned by these great men of God, a prophet and a statesman.

When the cities of Zion are united, the earth shall again see a theocracy. We are now commanded to “be subject to the powers that be, until he reigns whose right it is to reign” (D&C 58:22); but of that future time the Lord said, “Ye shall have no king nor ruler, for I will be your king and watch over you . . . and ye shall have no laws but my laws when I come, for I am your lawgiver” (D&C 38:21–22). Elder McConkie said that such is a “government by the immediate direction of God through his ministers and representatives. . . . This

⁸ Elder Parley P. Pratt also clearly taught that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America would have a worldwide influence upon the destiny of the human race (*JD* 1:138).

type of government apparently continued among the righteous portion of mankind from the days of Adam to Enoch . . . [and] when Christ comes to reign personally on earth during the millennial era, a perfect theocratic government will prevail” (*MD* 789). Zion is as pervasive in concept as it is in geography. We are not only responsible to support our constitutional government, but we are likewise responsible for building Zion in preparation for the theocracy which will supplant our present system.

Zion Preserved

Consider the removal and return of Zion to earth. Recognizing that Zion now exists in many stakes and homes throughout the world, let us acknowledge that the center place and the city are yet to be built. The city of Enoch is our model and has been for generations. Many have sought this city of God. The great high priest Melchizedek and his people “sought for the city of Enoch” (*JST Gen* 14:34). Likewise, Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (*Heb* 11:8–10). Speaking of the transcendent events which transpired at the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “This is why Adam blessed his posterity; he wanted to bring them into the presence of God. They looked for a city, etc., ‘whose builder and maker is God’ (*Heb* 11:10). Moses sought to bring the children of Israel into the presence of God, through the power of the Priesthood, but he could not” (*TPJS* 159). If Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, and Moses sought this holy city, should we not seek the same? Indeed, we should; “For God having sworn unto Enoch and unto his seed with an oath by himself; that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith . . . to stand in the presence of God” (*JST Gen* 14:30–31) has in these days restored this oath and covenant and priesthood which “holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God” (*D&C* 84:19, 39). Brigham Young said of Joseph Smith:

Did he not accomplish all that was in his heart to accomplish in his day? He did, to my certain knowledge, and I have many witnesses here that heard him declare that he had done everything he could do—he had revealed everything that could be revealed at present, he had prepared the way for the people to walk in, and no man or woman should be deprived of going into the presence

of the Father and the Son, and enjoying an eternal exaltation, if they would walk in the path he had pointed out. (*JD* 1:132)

Though I have stressed context to identify the various cities of Zion or New Jerusalem, such identification has little effect on our present obligation. Becoming a Zion people requires the same in all dispensations. We must be engaged in preparing to build the city of Zion according to the Lord's plan and timetable. As President Brigham Young said, "We must begin and make Zion in our own hearts, and then extend it to our neighborhoods, and so continue until the Lord shall reign upon the earth" (*JD* 1:245). When Zion is established, Enoch and his people and their temples shall return as part of the ushering in of the Millennium. Following that era, the worthy shall be inhabitants of that composite city, Zion, when it is removed again to heaven. Finally, when the earth is sanctified and celestialized, that Zion and its inhabitants will return, and if we qualify because of our personal righteousness, we will there be present when "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of [that city] . . . and the Lamb is the light thereof" (*Rev* 21:22–23).

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