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The Socio-Economics of Zion

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Abstract: The thrust of this chapter emphasizes the society of 4 Nephi which emerged just after the visitation of Christ to the Nephites. The Savior's teachings in 3 Nephi lay the foundations for what happens next, as he expresses the will of the Father, preaches faith and repentance, establishes his Church (which is to be led by twelve apostles), and shows how righteousness can lead to the good life on earth and eternal life hereafter. A major theme underlying Christ's visit to the Americas is the establishing of Zion. We will explore key scriptural aspects of how God's people "lived after the manner of happiness." Then, after tracing the unfortunate decline of Zion, we will conclude with a discussion of the implications of 4 Nephi for us today.



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The Search for Utopia

Throughout history, mankind has sought the "good life," a return to the Garden of Eden or some other definition of utopia which would reduce the pain and pathos of mortal existence and supplant the world with heaven on earth. This utopia has been the dream of philosophers, poets, and writers. Some thinkers have written magnificent treatises on the ideal society including Plato, *Republic*; Thomas Moore, *Utopia*; and the secular humanist, Sir Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*.

The range of visionary ideals stretches from the Taoists of Asia to Catholic theologians such as St. Augustine, from political strategists like Machiavelli to reformers like Robert Owen. In the United

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States, we have witnessed the much-heralded-claim that Wall Street capitalism will save us. Around the globe the false promise that communism would solve the world's problems has likewise been trumpeted.

The truth, however, is that the world's solution to societal stress and strain is stronger on rhetoric than reality. Seeking peace and justice, building a self-sustaining economy, and transforming the human soul are easier to talk about than actually accomplish. A major lesson from 4 Nephi is that without adherence to gospel principles taught by Christ, the true Author of Zion, the search for the good society will ultimately fall short of the ideal.

In fact, efforts of certain extremists may even make things more problematic, exacerbating the travails of mortal life such that participants are actually worse off than before their "utopia" was attempted. The disastrous mass deaths of the followers of Reverend Jim Jones in Guyana in the 1970s and the horrific tragedy of David Koresh's disciples in Waco, Texas, in 1993 are severe reminders. But many other seekers of utopia and dreamers have likewise ended up not creating the good society, but a dystopia instead. The modern literature on utopian visions is plentiful (see Beneri; Elliott; Kumar; Manuel), ranging from high ideals to low-level, anti-utopian notions. Certain contemporary groups currently seek a feminist utopia while some environmentalists pursue an "ecotopia" in nature. Some pursue the good life in rural settings while others attempt to transform the urban center by building brand new communities such as Reston, Virginia—a planned community built in 1962 with an "ideal" layout of homes, industrial center, churches, recreational facilities and a shopping mall.

Many seekers of the good life, regardless of sincere intent and/or noble desires, are tossed to and fro like small boats on a stormy sea. The message of 4 Nephi suggests that utopia ultimately must be grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. By so doing, the ultimate good society, Zion, can become a concrete reality, rather than a evasive ideal, and can last for centuries, blessing all who live therein.

The Context

Before 4 Nephi, the Nephite civilization had degenerated to a dangerously low level with great corruption and immorality. Terrible

battles occurred between the warriors of Giddianhi and the Nephite army. Hate, greed, and the lust for blood made a “great and terrible . . . appearance” (3 Nephi 4:7). Racism, pride, and the thirst for power were the drivers which overtook peace and led to war and destruction. From within Nephite society itself, secret combinations led to murder, propaganda campaigns, threats and secret tactics—all to get gain. Ravenous ambition, intimidation, and subversion of law and order all combined to bring about the collapse of civilized structures such that the system of government was broken up and “they did separate . . . into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends” (7:2).

In broad brush strokes, the condition of society in the years preceding the Savior’s visit to the Western Hemisphere reveals a tragic picture. The turning of God’s once righteous people to evil shows terrible consequences: breaking of covenants, cold hearts, stiffneckedness, excessive wealth and poverty, class distinctions, priestcrafts, envyings and inequality, slothfulness, wars, unwillingness to follow the prophets, lyings and deceivings and so on. The scriptural record documents the symptoms of ancient America’s disintegration as follows:

For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers. And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches. Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble . . . and thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up. (3 Nephi 6:11–14)

Conditions made everything ripe for destruction.

Apparently, the only way a major reversal in the degeneration of Nephite civilization could occur was through catastrophic intervention from on high. Thus, God sent mighty earthquakes, tempests, wildfires, and other forms of violent destruction. This physical turbulence served to signify the crucifixion of Jesus in Palestine and also to cleanse all but the more righteous from the Nephite world. Later, after three days of complete darkness, the voice of the Redeemer speaks to the people. He then appears in all his majesty as the resurrected and glorified Savior of all mankind. The remaining chapters of 3 Nephi (11–26) contain the record of Christ’s ministry and teachings to the survivors.

He revealed principles and ordinances not only for heavenly exaltation in the next life, but also to help people change from their fallen state here and now. The wicked world of the Nephites underwent a fundamental cleansing and the Church facilitated the process of change, empowering people to function on a higher plane, that of Zion. The good life was not to be discovered through Greek philosophy or mystic poets. Rational thinking alone would not produce utopia.

Rather, true religion was the means that enabled the people to achieve not only a heavenly state after death, but to provide practical solutions to this life's problems as well. President Joseph F. Smith clarified the role of the gospel in Book of Mormon times as well as today, as a practical way of life: "It has always been a cardinal teaching with the Latter-day Saints that a religion that has not the power to save people temporally and make them prosperous and happy here cannot be depended upon to save them spiritually and to exalt them in the life to come" ("The Truth About Mormonism" 242).

Socio-Economic Aspects of Zion Society

Key elements for enhancing our understanding of Zion, as it functioned over a period of two hundred years, are contained in the brief sketch known as 4 Nephi. Additional scripture from earlier sections of the Book of Mormon, as well as the other standard works and teachings of latter-day prophets provide essential details. Critical questions have to do with how the gospel transforms human nature. What individual and collective qualities help to create and maintain the good society? How do religious principles affect social behavior? How can righteous living build economic prosperity, peace, and happiness?

Traditional economists argue that the individual is made up of cold hearted, calculating qualities that only seek efficacy—in short, one is solely interested in maximizing self-interests. However, in the past few years, another theoretical perspective has arisen which suggests that human nature is not necessarily so one-sided. Instead, this theory asserts that human personality is somewhat conflicted, having a dual nature which includes not only the selfish, uncaring side, but also another dimension which has a higher morality, caring, and which possesses social values that are based on love and altruism.

One of the founders of this more comprehensive view is Amitai Etzioni whose classic work on socio-economics declares: "We are now in the middle of a paradigmatic struggle. Challenged is the entrenched utilitarian, rationalistic-individualistic, neo-classical paradigm" (ix), a model which he juxtaposes against this new socio-economic approach. He adds the social dimension to economic behavior which helps explain why and how people may, at times, act in behalf of their neighbors, not just themselves. Etzioni persuasively argues that a more communitarian approach will make for a healthier form of economics and reinforce altruistic tendencies in human nature.

Let us examine some core dimensions of religious practice and socio-economics which 4 Nephi reveals as factors in building a utopian or Zion society. Below are basic elements of such a framework in the Nephite world.

Spiritual Conversion

To begin with, the more righteous who were spared the awful destruction of ancient America looked to God for life. Some of these people were Church members, others were not. They sought righteous principles and practices that would sustain their new lifestyle as they attempted to become true Christians. The membership of the Church enlarged and after a couple of years everyone had been converted to the Church and a critical mass was created. This is important because it is extremely difficult to have a major impact for good in a nation's politics, legal system, enterprise and/or culture if the number of genuine Saints is minuscule. But as growing numbers of people live righteous principles, the ripple effect on a society is leveraged exponentially. In the words of President Ezra Taft Benson, Christ's "gospel is the perfect prescription for all human problems and social ills" (66). As the survivors of the great destruction described in 3 Nephi chapters 8–10 applied the Savior's teachings in their lives, they experienced a "mighty change" in their hearts, having no more desire to do evil, but to do good continually as had groups of earlier Saints who were "spiritually born of God" (Alma 5:12–14). As the vertical relationship between the individual and Heavenly Father takes root, that individual can then begin to build stronger relationships with other human beings, thus strengthening horizontal linkages.

Social Relationships

Rather than the social conflicts which characterized society in 3 Nephi, mutual respect began to govern human interaction in 4 Nephi and the love of God filled people's hearts (4 Nephi 1:15). The emphasis was on serving one another rather than "me vs. thee," and "every one did deal justly one with another" (v 2). These social dimensions required the Saints to reject Korihor's logic centuries earlier which emphasized the "management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and . . . conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime" (Alma 30:17). Instead of mocking one's brothers and sisters, a sin which seems so widely practiced by most human beings, the Saints of 4 Nephi developed the gift of charity, which is defined by a later prophet as "the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7:47). Thus, we read in 4 Nephi that people eliminated all disputations and became a genuine community of Saints. "And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people" (v 15). Those improved social ties between individuals laid the groundwork for economic linkages and the sharing of material possessions.

All Things Common

Joint sharing of material goods in 4 Nephi was a major characteristic of that Zion society. One's belongings were consecrated to the common stock fund and the needed portion was returned for one's personal and family stewardship. "And they had all things common among them" (4 Nephi 1:3). An overall goal of all true Christians, as Elder Orson Pratt puts it in his great discourse on "The Equality and Oneness of the Saints," is to achieve equality. He declares: "'Be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine.'" This is the command of Jesus Christ. . . . In what respects are the Saints required to be one? We answer: They are required to be one in things, temporal and spiritual. . . . The Saints are not only one in doctrine, but they are to be made one in temporal things, without which they cannot be made equal in spiritual things (624–27).

The consecration of real property to the general good of the group has been a distinctive practice among the faithful disciples of

Christ in other generations as well as in the 4 Nephi society. For example, New Testament Saints after the resurrection of Jesus behaved similarly. “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44–45). Unfortunately, the Palestinian attempt to create Zion was short-lived, lasting considerably fewer years than that in the 4 Nephite society. In this latter case, holding all things common led to the removal of class barriers, enabling Book of Mormon Saints to no longer distinguish between economic groups.

No Rich or Poor

According to the conditions in 4 Nephi and later scripture, a feature of God’s plan is that the poor are to be exalted and the rich humbled in the end (D&C 104:16–17). In earlier Nephite times, the Zoramites had cast the poor out of the very churches they had earlier helped build “because of the coarseness of their apparel” (Alma 32:2), thus splitting society into *Haves* and *Have Nots*. The later Nephites determined to eliminate social classifications and wealth distinctions altogether so that each person esteemed all others as herself or himself—all grew spiritually and progressed so that the group as a whole was lifted, instead of wealth concentrating in the hands of a few.

Below are several phrases from 4 Nephi which suggest the complete disappearance of traditional class conflicts: “And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults . . . nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness. . . . There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (vv 16–17).

An earlier righteous Nephite leader, king Benjamin, encouraged the *Haves* of his day to “Impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26). Note that the text emphasizes the *wants* of the poor, not what the wealthy think would be appropriate. Nor does it say that the

wealthy are to pass judgment as to who is truly worthy of receiving aid (Mosiah 4:26).

Apparently, differentiating by income, lands, flocks and herds, political privileges, race, gender, or any other artificial division is not acceptable to God. Therefore, the community of Saints in 4 Nephi were “not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (1:3). Elimination of castes and social classes reshapes the human heart, and true disciples begin to become humble of heart.

Humility

Just a few decades before the Meridian of Time, the prophet Alma had asked church members of his day: “Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God” (Alma 5:28). He also asked profound and searching questions regarding envy, making a mock of others, and so on. This is a continuous theme running throughout the entire Book of Mormon, even to Moroni, the last prophet who recorded his words on the sacred plates of gold. Moroni’s view toward us in the last days is like that of Alma’s centuries earlier: “I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up” (Mormon 8:36).

But the Saints in 4 Nephi were humble and this facilitated the development of many other aspects of their Zion society. Humility is not only a spiritual phenomenon but it is also an essential building block in creating positive social relationships, interaction in which people esteem others as themselves. Recognizing the thoughts and needs of others to be as legitimate as one’s own enables all to recognize their mutual dependence on God above, and that reinforces the ability of people to labor together in reciprocal ways.

Unfortunately, after two centuries, the virtues of humility were no longer universally evident among the Nephite people. The record notes: “And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world” (4 Nephi 1:24). Over time, as individuals grew in haughtiness, “They did persecute the true church of Christ, because of their humility” (v 29) and this quality, a necessary condition for

Zion, disappeared from the Nephite nation. The rise in pride is often accompanied by less respect for and adherence to the counsel of those who bear the priesthood, God's authority on earth.

Priesthood Power

In 3 Nephi, Jesus himself established his church, creating organizational relationships and ordaining special witnesses to minister to the membership as a whole. Being led by men who possessed the authority of God allowed the working of miracles through the name of Jesus and the creation and organization of the Saints into a united group of believers. Rather than live the lower-level practices of the law of Moses, the people of 4 Nephi reached to the higher-level gospel of Christ with its emphasis on divine principles and righteous living.

Thus the writings in 4 Nephi depict the labors of missionaries who preached repentance and established congregations of church members. As people believed and repented, they were baptized and given the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Bearers of the priesthood accomplished many miracles, "insomuch that they did heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cause the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear" (4 Nephi 1:5). God sanctified their marriages and the people grew in number and quality of life. Attending church meetings in fasting and prayer enabled the new converts to receive the word of God from the Lord's servants with thanksgiving and to be richly edified in spiritual things. Worldly values diminished and the objective of the Saints became focused on living simply and modestly.

Moderate Wealth

Of importance to all communities of Saints is their temporal well being as a group, not individual accumulation and excess. But a primary tool of Satan has always been to dangle the riches of this world before the people of God, tempting them with excessive earthly possessions. To counter this pressure, the Savior during his life on earth taught that "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt 6:19–21, 24). His counsel is to seek not the things of the Gentiles, but to be true Saints and pursue the things of the kingdom. And when the rich and/or powerful sought his advice on how to qualify for heaven, Jesus often

told them they were too materialistic and needed to give their wealth to the poor (see Luke 18:18–25). The Zion Saints of 4 Nephi focused on the things of eternity in contrast to the individuals that the Apostle James condemned in the land of Palestine, those whose “riches [were] corrupted, and . . . [whose] gold and silver [was] cankered” because they hoarded wealth to themselves (James 5:2–3).

As Jacob, son of Lehi, taught the Nephites centuries earlier, material pursuits are appropriate only in order to bless and lift others. He spelled out the proper priorities God’s people should have as follows: “But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good” (Jacob 2:18–19). He earlier had quoted Isaiah, counseling true disciples of the Savior as follows: “Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Harken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness” (2 Nephi 9:51; Isa 55:2).

However, as the Zion community of 4 Nephi began to enjoy greater material possessions, even becoming “exceedingly rich” (v 23) as God blessed them, some people began to take pride in their great wealth. The repercussions that followed included a collapse of the practice of consecration, adopting worldly dress styles, hardening of their hearts and a despising of the less fortunate (see vv 24–30). Love of riches also eroded people’s productivity, and this led to excess leisure and slothfulness, as depicted below.

Work

The dignity of labor and the importance of a strong work ethic are central economic themes of the Zion society in 4 Nephi. We read of how the people labored and rebuilt their cities which had been decimated by the quakes and fires of the earlier destruction. The result was that many regions were reestablished, homes were constructed, and the people succeeded and became prosperous. This requirement to be productive and hardworking has been stressed among God’s people in every age. Witness God’s mandate after the first beings were driven from the Garden of Eden: “And unto Adam he said . . . cursed

is the ground for thy sake. . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground” (Gen 3:17–19). So it was down not only through biblical times, but through Book of Mormon history as well. Nephi encouraged his “people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands” (2 Nephi 5:17). Later, that great model of ideal leadership, king Benjamin, worked in the fields himself. “And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes” (Mosiah 2:14).

In our own latter-day dispensation, the Lord has likewise stressed the importance of work. “Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer” (D&C 42:42). And in this century, the First Presidency of the Church, led by Heber J. Grant declared that idleness should “be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished, and independence, industry, thrift and self-respect be once more established amongst our people. The aim of the Church is to help the people to help themselves. Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership” (3).

Pure in Heart

The phrase *pure in heart* captures the ultimate definition of Zion: “Therefore, verily, thus saith the Lord, let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion—THE PURE IN HEART” (D&C 97:21). We read in the *Pearl of Great Price* that “The Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Elder Neal A. Maxwell writes that the Saints in Enoch’s Zion were able to “have goods in common because [they] first have Christ in common” (39). This process of practicing love purifies God’s children, enabling them to become holy and prepared to enjoy the presence of God. Eventually, experiencing a fulness of the Holy Ghost through becoming pure in heart led to Enoch’s and his followers’ being translated to another sphere. Thus, “Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying, ZION IS FLED” (Moses 7:69).

The combined result of all these factors we have reviewed suggests that the people of 4 Nephi had established the essence of the law of consecration, the united order of Zion. Spiritual conversion, humility, priesthood leadership, harmonious human relationships, all

things common, social and economic equality, hard work and moderate lifestyles jointly led to a socio-economic paradise. As the sacred record puts it, "Surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God" (4 Nephi 1:16). They lived then, as all true Saints surely must, in a righteous system of consecration and love.

Rise and Decline of Zion

Creating a Zion society can apparently happen through one of several ways. In Enoch's case, an evolutionary process occurred. He was called to prophesy and bear testimony at about age 65 and, in spite of what he perceived as his weaknesses, was endowed with great power from on high during the next 365 years. Gradually the hearts of the people turned to spiritual things and they consecrated everything to the Lord. The city of Zion became a place of holiness in which God himself walked and talked with Enoch and his people. Apparently, after approximately 430 years of Enoch's life, the city and all its inhabitants were translated and lifted beyond this mortal state of existence (see Moses 6:25–33; 7:68–69).

In contrast, the Zion of 4 Nephi was not an evolutionary one that occurred over centuries of prophetic preaching. Instead, it was a sudden occurrence in response to catastrophic destruction and cleansing on the American continent after the death of the mortal Messiah. The great transformation of human hearts began with the ministry of the resurrected Savior himself directly preaching, teaching, and testifying. Within two years, AD 34–36, all the people were converted to Christ, and Zion was established, knit through love into having all things common.*

Unfortunately, this Nephite Zion or utopia started to unravel after some 170 years as people first began to feel pride and wear costly clothing, and seek vain pursuits. Individualism infiltrated the sense of community, and soon, having excessive personal property was more important than voluntarily sharing with others. Pride, wealth, and the creation of social classes became like a disease, "Nephitis," or hardening of the heart. After only two centuries, unity among the Saints had diminished considerably (see 4 Nephi 1:35). Disbelief in the teachings of the Savior and the prophets resulted in a dwindling of righteousness and a quantum rise in wickedness. Racism and other

social tensions bred stereotyping and hate. Instead of being free and enjoying the blessings of peace, the people saw crime and the works of secret combinations lead to growing manifestations of Satan in the land, and as individuals became more carnal, “the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually” (Mormon 2:15).

Implications of 4 Nephi Today

Much of contemporary American society parallels the degeneration of Book of Mormon civilization. Our emphasis is on “dress[ing] for success” and the distinctions of designer clothing have become a major criteria for judging who has worth. Conspicuous consumption of houses, cars, and other “toys” is felt to be essential in keeping up with the Joneses and achieving recognition by the world. Strategists abound in our time to achieve financial rip-offs and commit fraud upon their victims. Salaries, bonuses, and other forms of compensation have created a great chasm among Americans during the past decade. In 1979 the ratio between the highest paid executive and lowest paid employee of a Fortune 500 corporation was 29:1. Currently it is in excess of 150:1 (Byrne & Hawkins 56–64). The average American worker’s income in real dollars is 10 percent below what it was in 1983 (Michel and Frankel 12–47). Some 14.5 percent of Americans are officially poor today, a total of 36.9 million people (“America’s Poor Showing”). Poverty exacerbates other problems such as rising infant mortality rates, crime, drug usage, illiteracy, and family abuse. Some three million Americans are homeless, and their need for clothes and food donations, temporary shelter and other services is far exceeds that which is being provided. Inner city violence, the breakdown of the family, ethnic discrimination on the job and in the community—all result in growing tensions. Greed and graft at the top of government and business, whether in Washington, DC, or on Wall Street, are symbols of our own national decline.

Still today, however, as in Nephite times, God’s purpose is to provide for his Saints, socio-economically as well as spiritually. The mechanism for doing this is the law of consecration, a system of gospel principles and organizational structures which undergirds every genuine Zion society, whether ancient or modern. This law does not merely consist of simple acts of individual charity, but instead it encompasses a whole way of life among God’s people.

While many people in today's world currently seek pleasure, wealth, fame and/or power, President David O. McKay declared that, as Latter-day Saints, "We are seeking a social Utopia" (91). This ever-longing dream, which he calls "the quest of the ages" (92) cannot be implemented by reading Plato's *Republic* or Cabet's *Icaria*. Nor is it going to emerge from modern American corporatism or from the socialism of Karl Marx. Rather, the solution to this quest is the establishing of Zion, drawing upon the same principles and practices that were employed in creating socio-economic well-being in the society of 4 Nephi—no contentions, having all things in common, no rich or poor, humility, moderate wealth, priesthood leadership, hard work and purity of heart. President Joseph F. Smith declared that "the Lord has revealed plans for the temporal salvation of the people. . . . If other communities would adopt the plans of consecration . . . poverty and pauperism would be greatly reduced or entirely overcome" (832–33).

Just how the latter-day Zion will be established is not fully clear. Many in the Church anticipate that, like the people of 4 Nephi, having all things common in order to create a Zion society will necessitate another cleansing catastrophe. This view holds that human nature itself preempts the possibility of building a place for the pure in heart without external intervention and destruction of all but the more righteous from on high. Yet an implication of the city of Enoch experience seems to suggest that the outpouring of God's Spirit and the hard work of preaching and prophesying may enable Zion to evolve over time. Surrounded by monstrous evil and works of darkness, Enoch testified and his people repented and were converted. In the decades that followed, Zion was fully established, although Enoch's people were still surrounded by evil that was afraid to challenge or even approach Zion.

In our own dispensation it seems we have a concrete opportunity to labor for the establishment of a modern era of Zion. This does not necessarily mean we should merely wait until, in today's vernacular, we can "leap tall buildings in a single bound." Rather, we can climb upward toward Zion, one step at a time. On 6 April 1994, the Church will have been on the earth for 164 years. While some individuals might argue that we are a long way from the Zion societies of old, compared to the 365 years it took Enoch, we may be well on our way toward that goal. My feeling is that it is up to us whether we simply

wait for destroying angels to cleanse the earth, or roll up our sleeves and get to work ourselves, here and now.

The counsel of modern prophets that we labor to create a heaven on earth is not only relevant to the world at large, but a mandate to the Saints in particular. As President Lorenzo Snow put it, Zion will be established through a socio-economic system known as the united order: "The purpose of the Order is to make the members of the Church equal and united in all things; . . . to banish pride, poverty, and iniquity and to introduce a condition of things that will prepare the pure in heart for the advent of the world's Redeemer" (259).

These are the lessons from 4 Nephi and what occurred in ancient times. The Book of Mormon reveals the crux of what we need to do currently to truly become a Zion people today. The Lord now requires of us the transformation of our lives and the creation of a genuine community of Saints. To do so will only be possible through the concentration of our moral and economic energy, and the consecration of all we have and are, to the building of the kingdom of God on earth. From Enoch to the Saints in the book of Acts, from Alma to the era of 4 Nephi, this constant theme runs throughout sacred scripture. The same is true of latter-day prophets as well. President Ezra Taft Benson has declared this doctrine in unmistakable fashion: "We must not lose sight of the fact that all that we are doing now is but a prelude to the establishment of the united order, and living the law of consecration. The individual Saints must understand this" (123).

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