The House of Israel: From Everlasting to Everlasting

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The Role of the House of Israel From Premortality Through the Millennium

About three years ago I was startled by a question from a bright young woman in a rather large introductory Book of Mormon class. We were about two-thirds of the way through the second half of the Book of Mormon. She said, essentially, "Brother Millet, you continue to use a phrase that I don't understand. Maybe others in the class have the same problem. You keep referring to 'the house of Israel.' What do you mean?" For a full ten seconds I stood in wonder. It had never occurred to me that at this point in the two-semester course I needed to define and describe something so fundamental. I briefly explained during the period and asked her to see me after class. I learned that she was an 'A' student, had been raised in the Church, had completed four years of seminary, and had an excellent knowledge of the gospel.

Just last year in a large class on the Book of Mormon for returned missionaries, a young man raised his hand during our discussion of the Savior's teachings in 3 Nephi concerning the destiny of Israel. He asked: "Brother Millet, I don't mean to be disrespectful or irreverent in any way, but I need to know: What difference does it make if I am of the house of Israel? Why does it matter that my patriarchal blessing specifies that I am of the tribe of Ephraim?" During this same class period, I asked the class: "How many of you are adopted into the house of Israel?" Of the eighty members of the class, perhaps sixty raised their hands, evidencing their own misunderstandings concerning patriarchal declarations of lineage.

These instances and others illustrate what I sense to be a particular problem among many Latter-day Saints as this century draws to a close and as we draw nearer to the time when the Holy One of Israel will return to reign over his covenant people. I sense frequently among young and old a lack of covenant consciousness, not necessarily in regard to the covenants and ordinances required for salvation, but rather in a lack of feeling appropriate kinship and identity with ancient Israel and with the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and of understanding and carrying out the responsibilities we have inherited from them.

In our democratic and egalitarian society, in a time when equality and brotherhood are all important, I fear that we are losing a feel for what it means to be a covenant people, what it means to be a chosen people. Too many even among the Latter-day Saints cry out that such sentiments are parochial and primitive, that they lead to exclusivism and racism. Others contend that to emphasize Israel's chosen status is to denigrate and degrade others not designated as Israel.

Careful and prayerful study of scripture—particularly the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon—will not only bring people to understand in their minds the origins and destiny of the descendants of Jacob, but will also cause them to know in their hearts what it means to come to earth through a chosen lineage and what God would have them do to be a light to the world, particularly to so many who sit in spiritual darkness. I feel that the words of the Lord to ancient Israel should be received by modern Israel with sobriety and humility, but they must be received and believed if we are to realize our potential to become a holy people and a royal priesthood. Jehovah spoke millennia ago of "Israel, whom I have chosen" (Isa. 44:1) and assured the Israelites that "you only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2; see also Isa. 45:4). This paper will deal with the house of Israel—its place and
mission in the earth, how and why God has chosen them, and what things lie ahead for the people that God delights to call his "peculiar treasure." The subject is vast and obviously worthy of volumes, but I will attempt to touch only briefly upon what I perceive to be crucial elements in understanding Israel's past, present, and future.

Israel in Premortality

Zenos' allegory of the olive tree draws to a close as the millennial day witnesses the gathering of Israel by the chosen servants in great numbers and as the Gentiles join with Israel to constitute one royal family.

And thus they labored, with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard, even until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard, and the Lord had preserved unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; and they became like unto one body; and the fruits were equal; and the Lord of the vineyard had preserved unto himself the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning." (Jacob 5:74; italics added.)

I believe this passage refers to Jehovah's love and tender regard for Israel, which stretches beyond her mortal origins and sojournings and reaches back to the premortal day wherein certain souls qualified for a select status.

Following our birth as spirits, being endowed with agency, each of the spirit sons and daughters of God grew and developed and progressed according to their desires for truth and righteousness. "Being subject to law," Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote,

"and having their agency, all the spirits of men, while yet in the Eternal Presence, developed aptitudes, talents, capacities, and abilities of every sort, kind, and degree. During the long expanse of life which then was, an infinite variety of talents and abilities came into being. As the ages rolled, no two spirits remained alike. . . . Abraham and Moses and all of the prophets sought and obtained the talent for spirituality. Mary and Eve were two of the greatest spirit daughters of the Father. The whole house of Israel, known and segregated out from their fellows, was inclined toward spiritual things."1

Perhaps the greatest foreordination, based on premortal faithfulness, is foreordination to lineage and family: certain individuals come to earth through a designated channel, through a lineage that entitles them to remarkable blessings but also a lineage which carries with it burdens and responsibilities. As a people, therefore, we enjoy what my colleague Brent Top calls "a type of collective foreordination—a selection of spirits to form an entire favored group or lineage." Yet, he adds, "although it is a collective foreordination it is nonetheless based on individual premortal faithfulness and spiritual capacity."2 In the words of Elder Melvin J. Ballard, Israel is "a group of souls tested, tried, and proven before they were born into the world. . . . Through this lineage were to come the true and tried souls that had demonstrated their righteousness in the spirit world before they came here."3 Remember the days of old," Moses counseled his people, "consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee: thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance" (Deut. 32:7-9; italics added). In speaking to the Athenians, the apostle Paul declared: "God that made the world and all things therein . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:24, 26; italics added). President Harold B. Lee explained that those born to the lineage of Jacob, who was later to be called Israel, and his posterity, who were known as the children of Israel, were born into the most illustrious lineage of any of those who came upon the earth as mortal beings. All these rewards were seemingly promised, or foreordained, before the world was. Surely these matters must have been determined by the kind of lives we had lived in that premortal spirit world. Some may question these assumptions, but at the same time they will accept without any question the belief that each one of us will be judged when we leave this earth according to his or her deeds during our lives here in mortality. Isn't it just as reasonable to believe that what we have received here in this earth [life] was given to each of us according to the merits of our conduct before we came here?4

It thus appears that the declaration of lineage by patriarchs is as much a statement about who and what we were as it is about who we are now and what we may become. There are those, of course, who believe otherwise, those who propose that premortality has little or nothing to do with mortality, that there is no tie between faithfulness there and lineage and station here; to believe in any other way, they contend, is racist, sexist, and exclusivistic. Despite the cleverness of the posture and the egalitarian-sounding nature of such a perspective, it is my firm belief that such views are doctrinally defenseless and even potentially hazardous. If there is no relationship between the first estate and the second, why, as President Lee might ask, should I believe that there is any relationship between what I do here and what I will receive hereafter? Our task as parents and teachers and students of the gospel is not simply to win friends and influence people through avoiding, watering down, or in some cases even denying what are "hard sayings" or difficult doctrines. Truth is not established by consensus or by popularity. Who are we, then? President Lee answered:

You are all the sons and daughters of God. Your spirits were created and lived as organized intelligences before the world was. You have been blessed to have a physical body because of your obedience to certain commandments in that premortal state. You are now born into a family to which you have come, into the nations through which you have come, as a reward for the kind of lives you lived before you came here and at a time in the world's history, as the Apostle Paul taught the men of Athens and as the Lord revealed to Moses, determined by the faithfulness of each of those who lived before this world was created.5

And yet coming to earth through a peculiar lineage involves much more than boasting of a blessing; it entails bearing a burden. "Once we know who we are," Elder Russell M. Nelson said, "and the royal lineage of which we
are a part, our actions and directions in life will be more appropriate to our inheritance." Years ago a wise man wrote of the burdens of chosenness and of why God had selected a particular people as his own: "A man will rise and demand, 'By what right does God choose one race or people above another?' I like that form of the question. It is much better than asking by what right God degrades one people beneath another, although that is implied. 'God's grading is always upward. If He raises up a nation, it is that other nations may be raised up through its ministry. If He exalts a great man, an apostle of liberty or science or faith, it is that He might raise a degraded people to a better condition. The divine selection is not [alone] a prize, a compliment paid to the man or the race—it is a burden imposed. To appoint a Chosen people is not a pandering to the racial vanity of a 'superior people,' it is a yoke bound upon the necks of those who are chosen for a special service. . . .

"... [In short,] the Lord hath made [Israel] great for what He is going to make [Israel] do."7

Israel in Mortality: the Scattering and the Gathering

Those of Israel who follow the Light of Christ in this life will be led to the higher light of the Holy Ghost and will come to know the Lord and come unto Him. In time they come to know of their noble heritage and of the royal blood which flows through their veins. They come to earth with a predisposition to receive the truth, with an inner attraction to the message of the gospel. "My sheep hear my voice," the Master said, "and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27.) Those chosen to come to the earth through the favored lineage "are especially endowed at birth with spiritual talents. It is easier for them to believe the gospel than it is for the generality of mankind. Every living soul comes into this world with sufficient talent to believe and be saved, but the Lord's sheep, as a reward for their devotion when they dwell in His presence, enjoy greater spiritual endowments than their fellows."8 "The blood of Israel has flowed in the veins of the children of men," Wilford Woodruff declared, "mixed among the Gentile nations, and when they have heard the sound of the Gospel of Christ it has been like vivid lightning to them; it has opened their understandings, enlarged their minds, and enabled them to see the things of God. They have been born of the Spirit, and then they could behold the kingdom of God."9

And yet chosenness implies a succession of choices. Those who became Israel before the world was, those who were called in that premortal existence, must exercise wisdom and prudence and discernment in this life, before they become truly chosen to enjoy the privilege of ruling and reigning in the house of Israel forever. It was of such that Alma spoke when he declared that many were foreordained to receive transcendent privileges but who do not enjoy "as great privilege as their brethren" because in mortality they choose to "reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds."(Alma 13:4). The scriptures thus teach that "there are many called, but few are chosen." (D&C 121:34.) "This suggests," President Lee explained, "that even though we have our free agency here, there are many who were foreordained before the world was, to a greater state than they have prepared themselves for here. Even though they might have been among the noble and great, from among whom the Father declared He would make His chosen leaders, they may fail of that calling here in mortality."10

And so the vivid and harsh reality is that lineage and ancestry alone do not qualify one for a divine family inheritance. To use Paul's language, "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children." (Rom. 9:6-7.) In fact, as Nephi reminded us, only those who receive the gospel and commit themselves by obedience and continued faithfulness to the Mediator of that covenant are really covenant people. "As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord," he said; "and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel." (2 Ne. 30:2.)

Both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon—and it is particularly in the latter volume that we see the pattern clearly—set forth in consistent detail the reasons why over the generations Israel has been scattered and how it is they are to be gathered. Speaking on behalf of Jehovah, Moses warned ancient Israel that if they should reject their God they would be scattered among the nations, dispersed among the Gentiles: "If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God," he said, "to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day . . . [you will be] removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. . . . And ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known." (Deut. 28:15, 25, 63-64.) The Lord spoke in a similar vein through Jeremiah more than half a millennium later: Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the Lord, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshiped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; and ye have done worse than your fathers; . . . therefore I will cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, . . . where I will not shew you favor." (Jer. 16:11-13.) The people of God became scattered—alienated from Jehovah and the ways of righteousness, lost as to their identity as covenant representatives, and displaced from the lands set aside for their inheritance—because they forsook the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and partook of the worship and ways of unholy men.

Though Israel is generally scattered because of her apostasy, we should also point out that the Lord scatters certain branches of his chosen people to the nethermost parts of the earth in order to accomplish his purposes—to spread the blood and influence of Abraham throughout the globe. Through this means all the families of the earth will be blessed eventually, either through being of the blood of Abraham themselves or through being ministered unto by the blood of Abraham—with the right to the gospel, the priesthood, and eternal life. (See Abr. 2:8-11.)
On the other hand, the gathering of Israel is accomplished through repentance and turning to the Lord. Individuals were gathered in ancient days when they aligned themselves with the people of God, with those who practiced the religion of Jehovah and received the ordinances of salvation. They were gathered when they gained a sense of tribal identity, when they came to know who they were and whose they were. They were gathered when they congregated with the former-day Saints, when they settled on those lands that were designated as promised lands—lands set apart as sacred sites for people of promise. The hope of the chosen people from Adam to Isaac, and the longing of the house of Israel from Joseph to Malachi, was to be reunited with their God and to enjoy fellowship with those of the household of faith. "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob," Isaiah recorded, "and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

"For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour. . . . "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. "Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; "I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." ( Isa. 43:1-6.)

"Ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel" ( Isa. 27:12), Isaiah declared. The call to the dispersed of Israel has been and ever will be the same: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord," through Jeremiah; "for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." ( Jer. 3:14.) That is to say, gathering is accomplished through individual conversion, through faith and repentance and baptism and confirmation, through the receipt of and obedience to the ordinances of the holy temple.

Indeed, the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon prophets longed for the day when the scattered remnants of Israel—those lost to their identity and lost to their relationship with the true Messiah and his church and kingdom—would be a part of a work that would cause all former gatherings to pale into insignificance. "Therefore, behold," Jeremiah recorded, "the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them." And how is such a phenomenal gathering to be accomplished? Jehovah answers: "Behold, I will send for manyfishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks." ( Jer. 16:14-16.) That is, through the great missionary work of the Church, the elders and sisters—the Lord's legal administrators in the great proselyting program—seek and teach and baptize and thereby gather the strangers home.

And so people are gathered into the fold of God through learning the doctrine of Christ and subscribing to the principles and ordinances of his gospel. They learn through scripture and through patriarchal and prophetic pronouncement of their kinship with, or in some instances today, of their adoption into the house of Israel. The crowning tie to Israel, however, comes only by the worthy reception of the blessings of the temple, through being endowed and sealed into the holy order of God. (See D&C 131:1-4.) "What was the [ultimate] object," Joseph Smith asked, "of gathering the Jews, or the people of God, in any age of the world?" He then answered: "The main object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation; for there are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose."11 "Missionary work," Elder Russell M. Nelson observed, "is only the beginning" to the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "The fulfillment, the consummation, of those blessings comes as those who have entered the waters of baptism perfect their lives to the point that they may enter the holy temple. Receiving an endowment there seals members of the Church to the Abrahamic Covenant."12

Joseph Smith, a Modern Abraham

In September 1823 the angel Moroni appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. "This messenger proclaimed himself," Joseph wrote to John Wentworth, to be an angel of God, sent to bring the joyful tidings that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled, that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the Gospel in all its fulness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be prepared for the Millennial reign. I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of His purposes in this glorious dispensation.13

Joseph of old prophesied of his latter-day namesake that he would be a "choice seer," one who would be raised up by God to bring the people of the last days to the knowledge of the covenants which God had made with the ancient fathers. (See 2 Ne. 3:7; 1 Ne. 13:26.) The name Joseph is a blessed and significant name. Whether the name is taken from the Hebrew word Yasaf, which means "to add," or from the word Asaph, meaning "to gather," one senses that the latter-day seer was destined to perform a monumental labor in regard to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in the final dispensation.

Joseph Smith was a descendant of Abraham. By lineage he had a right to the priesthood, the gospel, and eternal life. (See Abr. 2:8-11.) In a revelation received on 6 December 1832, the Savior said: "Thus saith the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers—for ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God—therefore your life and the priesthood have remained,
and a wonder has the Lord wrought by thy hand, even that Smith, Sr., blessed his son as follows: "A marvelous work and a wonder has the Lord wrought by thy hand, even that

Gentiles." (D &C 113:10.)

God upon her," her "scattered condition among the Lord is that he will speak to them, or give them revelation." In so doing, Israel rides herself of "the curses of God upon her," her "scattered condition among the Gentiles." (D&C 113:10.)

Joseph Smith became a "father of the faithful" to those of this dispensation, the means by which the chosen lineage could be identified, gathered, organized as family units, and sealed forevermore into the house of Israel to their God. The Patriarch in the days of the early Church, Joseph Smith, Sr., blessed his son as follows: "A marvelous work and a wonder has the Lord wrought by thy hand, even that which shall prepare the way for the remnants of his people to come in among the Gentiles, with their fulness, as the tribes of Israel are restored. I bless thee with the blessings of thy Fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and even the blessings of thy father Joseph, the son of Jacob. Behold, he looked after his posterity in the last days, when they should be scattered and driven by the Gentiles."16

On 3 April 1836 Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared in the Kirtland Temple and restored priesthood keys of inestimable worth, keys that formalized much of the labor that had been under way since the organization of the Church. (See D&C 110.) Moses restored the keys of the gathering of Israel, including the right of presidency and directing powers needed to gather the ten lost tribes. Elias committed unto Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, making it possible that through those first elders all generations after them would be blessed. That is, Elias restored the keys necessary to organize eternal family units in the patriarchal order through the new and everlasting covenant of marriage. Elijah restored the keys necessary to bind and seal those family units for eternity as well as the power to legitimize all priesthood ordinances and give them efficacy, virtue, and force in and after the resurrection.17 Thus through the coming of Elijah and his prophetic colleagues in Kirtland, the promises made to the fathers—the promises of the gospel, the priesthood, and the possibility of eternal life granted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are planted in our hearts, the hearts of the children. (See D&C 2.) More specifically, because of what took place through Joseph Smith in Kirtland in 1836, the desire of our hearts to have all the blessings enjoyed by the ancients can be realized. And because of the spirit of Elijah, which moves upon the faithful, there comes also a desire to make those same blessings available for our more immediate fathers through family history and vicarious temple ordinances.

Through Joseph Smith the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are available to all who will join the Church and prove worthy of the blessings of the temple. Jehovah's plea through Isaiah that the people of the covenant become a light to the nations, that they might be his "salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6), is thus realized through the restoration of the gospel. Thereby, as the Prophet himself declared, "the election of the promised seed still continues, and in the last day, they shall have the priesthood restored unto them, and they shall be 'saviors on Mount Zion.' "18 Because Joseph Smith was the head of this dispensation and its modern Abraham, Brigham Young could appropriately say of his predecessor: "Joseph is a father to Ephraim and to all Israel in these last days."19 In a revelation given to President John Taylor on 22 June 1882, the Lord spoke of the Prophet Joseph:

Behold, I raised up my servant Joseph Smith to introduce my Gospel, and to build up my Church and establish my Kingdom on the earth. . . . He was called and ordained to this office before the world was. He was called by me, and empowered by me, and sustained by me to introduce and establish my Church and Kingdom upon the earth; and to be a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to my Church and Kingdom; and to be a King and Ruler over Israel.20

The Lord has repeatedly affirmed the special status of the
Latter-day Saint Prophet-leader: "As I said unto Abraham concerning the kindreds of the earth, even so I say unto my servant Joseph: In thee and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed." (D&C 124:58.) Further:

Abraham received promises concerning his seed, and of the fruit of his loins—from whose loins ye are, namely, my servant Joseph—which were to continue so long as they were in the world; and as touching Abraham and his seed, out of the world they should continue; both in the world and out of the world should they continue as innumerable as the stars; or, if ye were to count the sand upon the seashore ye could not number them. This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham." (D&C 132:30-31)

The Millennial Gathering of Israel

Both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon attest that a significant part of the drama we know as the gathering of Israel will be millennial, that is, that it will be brought to pass after the second coming of Jesus Christ. Between now and then we shall see marvelous things on the earth in regard to the people of Israel coming unto their Lord and King and thereafter unto the lands of their inheritance. We have witnessed already the phenomenal gathering of many thousands of the seed of Lehi (of the tribe of Joseph) into the Church, and this is but the beginning. We have stood in awe as descendants of Jacob around the globe have been found, identified, taught, and converted to the faith of their fathers, and yet we have seen but the tip of the iceberg. Our missionaries shall soon enter into lands wherein pockets of Israelites will be baptized and confirmed and where patriarchs shall declare lineage through such tribes as Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali.

A major conversion of the Jews will take place near the time of the coming of the Lord in glory. "And it shall come to pass in that day," Jehovah said through Zechariah,

that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. . . . And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." (Zech. 12:9-10; 13:6)

A modern revelation provides a more detailed description of this poignant moment in our Lord's dealings with his own. Having set his foot on the Mount of Olives and the mountain having cleaved in twain, the Lord prophesies,

Then shall the Jews look upon me and say: What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet? Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God. And then shall they weep because of their iniquities; then shall they lament because they persecuted their king. (D&C 45:48-53)

Before this time Jews from around the globe will already have investigated the message of the Restoration, entered into the covenant gospel, and come home to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They will not only have come to acknowledge Jesus as an honorable prophet-teacher but will confess him as Lord and God, as Messiah. Their garments will have been "washed in the blood of the Lamb." (Ether 13:11.) But at the time the Master appears at Olivet, the conversion of a nation will begin.

That is to say, the Jews 'shall begin to believe in Christ' (2 Ne. 30:7) before he comes the second time. Some of them will accept the gospel and forsake the traditions of their fathers; a few will find in Jesus the fulfillment of their ancient Messianic hopes; but their nation as a whole, their people as the distinct body that they now are in all nations, the Jews as a unit shall not, at that time, accept the word of truth. But a beginning will be made; a foundation will be laid; and then Christ will come and usher in the millennial year of his redeemed."

In 721 b.c. the Assyrians under Shalmanezer took the ten northern tribes captive. According to tradition, these Israelites escaped as they were being taken northward and scattered themselves throughout different parts of the earth. They were never again heard of and came thereafter to be known as the "lost tribes." Nephi explained to his brothers early in the Book of Mormon story that "the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations. And behold, there are many [note that he is here making reference to the ten northern tribes] who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea; and whither they are none of us knoweth, save that we know that they have been led away." (1 Ne. 22:3-4.) Nephi’s use of the word lost is most interesting. The tribes are lost "from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem."

Let me here refer to a statement by President George Q. Cannon made in 1890. After having quoted at length from 2 Nephi 30 regarding the final gathering of Israel from among the nations, President Cannon said:

This prediction plainly foreshadows that which is now taking place, and which has been taking place for some years. "As many of the Gentiles as will repent," the prophet says, "are the covenant people of the Lord." By virtue of this promise which God has made, we are His covenant people. Though of Gentile descent, and numbered among the Gentile nations, by and through our obedience to the Gospel of the Son of God we become incorporated, so to speak, among His covenant people and are numbered with them. We say frequently that we are descendants of the house of Israel. This is undoubtedly true. . . . Our ancestors were of the house of Israel but they mingled with the Gentiles and became lost, that is, they became lost so far as being recognized as of the house of Israel, and the blood of our forefathers was mingled with the blood of the Gentile nations. We have been gathered out from those nations by the preaching of the gospel of the Son of God. The Lord has made precious promises unto us, that every blessing, and every gift, and every power necessary for salvation and for exaltation to His Kingdom shall be given unto us in common with those who are more particularly known as the covenant people of the Lord."

Mormon teaches that in the last days all of the twelve tribes will come to Christ through accepting the Book of
Mormon and the restored gospel. (See Mormon 3:17-22.) Will such persons gather into the true Church from the north? Yes. And they shall also come, as the scriptures attest, from the south and the east and the west. (See Isa. 43:5-6; 3 Ne. 20:13.) In fact, it just may be that the idea of gathering from "the lands of the north" may simply be a reference to a return from all parts of the earth. For example, Jehovah, speaking through Zechariah, called forth to his chosen but scattered people: "Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north, declares the Lord, for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven." (New International Version, Zech. 2:6.)

As we have indicated, the work of the Father—the work of gathering Israel into the fold—though begun in the early nineteenth century, will continue into and through the Millennium. That is to say, the missionary effort begun in our time will accelerate at a pace that we cannot now comprehend. This is why the Book of Mormon speaks of the work of the Father "commencing" during the Millennium. In the millennial day "shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst," the resurrected Lord stated.

And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem." (3 Ne. 21:26; see also 2 Ne. 30:7-15)

We tend to speak of there being no death during the thousand years. Let us be more precise. The Saints shall live to the age of a tree, the age of one hundred (Isa. 65:20; D&C 43:32; 63:51; 101:30-31) before they are changed in the twinkling of an eye, from mortality to resurrected immortality. On the other hand, and presumably in speaking of terrestrial persons, Joseph Smith said:

> There will be wicked men on the earth during the thousand years. The heathen nations who will not come up to worship will be visited with the judgments of God, and must eventually be destroyed from the earth.\(^{23}\)

"There will be need for the preaching of the gospel, after the millennium is brought in," President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, "until all men are either converted or pass away. In the course of the thousand years all men will either come into the Church, or kingdom of God, or they will die and pass away."\(^{24}\) Or, as Elder McConkie has described this process:

> There will be many churches on earth when the Millennium begins. False worship will continue among those whose desires are good, 'who are honorable men of the earth,' but who have been 'blinded by the craftiness of men.' (D&C 76:75.) Plagues will rest upon them until they repent and believe the gospel or are destroyed, as the Prophet said. It follows that missionary work will continue into the Millennium until all who remain are converted. Then 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.' (Isa. 11:9.) Then every living soul on earth will belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.\(^{25}\)

In that glorious era of peace and righteousness, the dispersed of Israel shall receive the message of the Restoration, read and believe the Book of Mormon, traverse the "highway of righteousness" (Isa. 35:8) into the true Church, and take their place beside their kinsmen in the household of faith. The revelation declares that "their enemies shall become a prey unto them." (D&C 133:28.) That is, the enemies of Israel—the wicked and carnal elements of a fallen world—will have been destroyed by the glory and power of the Second Coming. "For the time speedily cometh," Nephi prophesied, "that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire." (2 Ne. 30:10; see also 1 Ne. 22:17.) There will have been "an entire separation of the righteous and the wicked"; the enemies of the chosen people will be no more, because the Lord will have sent forth his angels "to pluck out the wicked and cast them into unquenchable fire." (D&C 63:54.) Truly, "such of the gathering of Israel as has come to pass so far is but the gleam of a star that soon will be hidden by the splendor of the sun in full blaze; truly, the magnitude and grandeur and glory of the gathering is yet to be."\(^{26}\)

One of the most graphic prophetical statements about Israel in the Millennium is contained in the writings of Zenos, one of the prophets of the brass plates. In speaking of what appears to be the millennial day, Zenos taught:

> And there began to be the natural fruit again in the vineyard; and the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly; and the wild branches began to be plucked off and to be cast away; and they did keep the root and the top thereof equal, according to the strength thereof. And thus they labored, with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard, even until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard, and the Lord had preserved unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; and they became like unto one body; and the fruits were equal; and the Lord of the vineyard had preserved unto himself the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning. (Jacob 5:73-74.)

In that glorious day, the promise of God to his chosen seed will be well on the way to fulfillment. Paul's words, spoken in the meridian of time, will then have particular application and fulfillment. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ," he observed, "have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:27-29.) All those who come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, shall, under Christ, rule and reign in the house of Israel forever. In the millennial day the Lord Jehovah will reign personally upon the earth. (Articles of Faith 1:10.) More specifically, "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."\(^{27}\) In that day he shall preside as King of Kings and Lord of Lords: Israel's Good Shepherd shall be with them and minister to them in everlasting splendor.

The blossoming and ultimate fulfillment of the everlasting covenant restored through Joseph Smith shall be millennial. The principles and ordinances of the gospel, the "articles of adoption"\(^{28}\) by which men and women are received into the
royal family and given a rightful place in the house of Israel, shall continue during the thousand years. "During the Millennium," a modern Apostle has written, children will be named and blessed by the elders of the kingdom. When those of the rising generation arrive at the years of accountability, they will be baptized in water and of the Spirit by legal administrators appointed so to act. Priesthood will be conferred upon young and old, and they will be ordained to offices therein as the needs of the ministry and their own salvation require. At the appropriate time each person will receive his patriarchal blessing, we suppose from the natural patriarch who presides in his family, as it was in Adamic days and as it was when Jacob blessed his sons. The saints will receive their endowments in the temples of the Lord, and they will receive the blessings of celestial marriage at their holy altars. And all the faithful will have their callings and elections made sure and will be sealed up unto that eternal life which will come to them when they reach the age of a tree.29

"Behold," Jeremiah wrote, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer. 31:31-34.)

"How is this to be done?" Joseph Smith asked. "It is to be done by this sealing power, and the other Comforter spoken of, which will be manifest by revelation."30

**Conclusion**

"When the Lord shall come," a modern revelation explains, "he shall reveal all things-things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof-things most precious, things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven." (D&C 101:32-34.) When the Lion of the tribe of Judah finally unseals the scrolls which contain "the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God," even "the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence" (D&C 77:6; see also Rev. 5:1), surely we shall one and all come to know of his peculiar dealings with Israel, of the strange but masterful manner in which he has moved upon and through his covenant people in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

In 1882 Elder Erastus Snow delivered one of the most penetrating discourses on the role and mission of Israel that I know of. In speaking of those who come to the earth as descendants of Abraham, he said:

The Lord has sent those noble spirits into the world to perform a special work, and appointed their times; and they have always fulfilled the mission given them, and their future glory and exaltation is secured unto them; and that is what I understand by the doctrine of election spoken of by the Apostle Paul and other sacred writers.

Such persons, Elder Snow continued, were called and chosen and elected of God to perform a certain work at a certain time in the world's history and in due time he fitted them for that work. . . .

Their blood has permeated European society, and it coursed in the veins of the early colonists of America. And when the books shall be opened and the lineage of all men is known, it will be found that they have been first and foremost in everything noble among men in the various nations in breaking off the shackles of kingscraft and priesthoodcraft and oppression of every kind, and the foremost among men in upholding and maintaining the principles of liberty and freedom upon this continent and establishing a representative government, and thus preparing the way for the coming forth of the fullness of the everlasting Gospel. And it is the foremost of those spirits whom the Lord has prepared to receive the Gospel when it was presented to them, and who did not wait for the Elders to hunt them from the hills and corners of the earth, but they were hunting for the Elders, impelled by a spirit which then they could not understand; and for this reason were they among the first Elders of the Church; they and the fathers having been watched over from the days that God promised those blessings upon Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Ephraim. And these are they that will be found in the front ranks of all that is noble and good in their day and time, and who will be found among those whose efforts are directed in establishing upon the earth those heaven-born principles which tend directly to blessing and salvation, to ameliorating the condition of their fellow-men, and elevating them in the scale of their being; and among those also who receive the fullness of the Everlasting Gospel, and the keys of Priesthood in the last days, through whom God determined to gather up again unto himself a peculiar people, a holy nation, a pure seed that shall stand upon Mount Zion as saviors."31

And so, we say in summary, as Mormon said to the latter-day descendants of Lehi: "Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel." (Mormon 7:2.) Or as Jesus explained to the Nephites: "Ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." (3 Ne. 20:25.) Our patriarchal blessings specify literal blood descent and–and because of our connection to father Abraham and through the call and ministry of a modern Abraham and the keys and powers delivered to him–ours is the right to the gospel, the priesthood, and the glories of eternal life. We need not misunderstand this matter and should not confuse ancestry with adoption.32

Nor should those who are not directly descended from Israel who join the Church feel in any way less than chosen. Chosenness is a status based upon the choice to follow the Lord and associate with his people, and entrance into the true Church qualifies one for the blessings of Ephraim, as though he or she had been born a child of Abraham. Our duty is to walk with fidelity and humility and be worthy of the name and lineage that is ours. By so doing we shall help to
bring to pass the foreordained purposes of God for us and our families. It can then be said of us as it was of Abraham: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." (Gen. 18:19.) I am reminded," President Harold B. Lee said in his last address to Brigham Young University students, "of the old court jester who was supposed to entertain his king with interesting stories and antics. He looked at the king who was lolling on his throne, a drunken, filthy rascal; [he] doffed his cap and bells, and said with a mock gesture of obeisance, 'O king, be loyal to the royal within you.' Such is our opportunity and our great challenge, our glory or our condemnation.

NOTES

27. Smith, Teachings, p. 268.
30. Smith, Teachings, p. 149.
In proclaiming the truths of the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, God’s church on earth today is fulfilling the ancient prophecy, “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.” Isaiah 27:6. The followers of Jesus, in co-operation with heavenly intelligences, are rapidly occupying the waste places of the earth; and, as the result of their labors, an abundant fruitage of precious souls is developing. “The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel” through Malachi was that the lessons of the past be not forgotten and that the covenant made by Jehovah with the house of Israel be kept with fidelity. Only by heartfelt repentance could the blessing of God be realized. “I pray you,” the prophet pleaded, “beseech God that He will be gracious unto us.” Malachi 1:1, 9. The whole house of Israel, known and segregated out from their fellows, was inclined toward spiritual things. Perhaps the greatest foreordination, based on premortal faithfulness, is foreordination to lineage and family: certain individuals come to earth through a designated channel, through a lineage that entitles them to remarkable blessings but also a lineage which carries with it burdens and responsibilities. Those of Israel who follow the Light of Christ in this life will be led to the higher light of the Holy Ghost and will come to know the Lord and come unto him. In time they come to know of their noble heritage and of the royal blood which flows through their veins. They come to earth with a predisposition to receive the truth, with an inner attraction to the message of the gospel. This was to be an everlasting covenant with YEHOVAH being the true God to Abraham and to Abraham’s physical seed after him. THIS was the covenant and the faith that the New Testament Church of YEHOVAH was established and built upon! This fact is clearly shown by many New Testament scriptures. The ten northern tribes were called the “House of Israel” and the two southern tribes the “House of Judah.” I Kings 11:30-31 explains that ten “pieces” (tribes) were taken from Solomon and given to Jeroboam. These ten tribes made up the northern nation which was called the House of Israel. King Solomon kept the two southern tribes which were called the House of Judah: “Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. Contemporary English Version LORD God of Israel, you deserve to be praised forever and ever. Let everyone say, “Amen! Shout praises to the LORD!” Douay-Rheims Bible Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say: “Amen.” Praise ye the LORD. English Revised Version Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD. World English Bible Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting! Let all the people say, “Amen.” Praise Yah! 6. From Everlasting to Everlasting. A bus trip through modern Israel will transport you back more than four thousand years and give you a glimpse of an unusual ancient phenomenon—the black goatskin tents of Arab desert dwellers known as Bedouins. Except for a periodic pickup truck, tractor, or television antenna, what you see has remained largely unchanged through the centuries. It is the same basic lifestyle as that of a godly old nomad named Abraham. Uprooted from his ancestral home in Ur near the shores of the Persian Gulf, he wandered from one place to another, dwelling in tents, facing on