

DISCOURSE

By ELI ORSON PRATT, De-
livered in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake
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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

THE speaker who addressed you this forenoon, referred to another book, that is called the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. I will select a few words from that book this afternoon—a part of the 8th paragraph, of the 21st section, being a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in September 1831. The word of the Lord to the Prophet reads thus: "For behold, I say unto you that Zion shall flourish, and the glory of the Lord shall be upon her, and she shall be an ensign unto the people, and there shall come unto her out of every nation under heaven. And the day shall come when the nations of the earth shall tremble because of her, and shall fear because of her terrible ones. The Lord hath spoken it. Amen."

Much has been said since the rise of this church in regard to the Zion of the Latter days, and much more might be said, for after we have said all that we can say, as far as God has revealed, I presume that we shall not be able to portray scarcely anything compared with the glory and the greatness and the excellency and the beauty of that people and of that city that are called Zion, to be built up on the earth in the latter times.

The first question that naturally presents itself to the mind in regard to Zion is this: What is Zion? What are we to understand by its term? Is it a city? Is it a people? Is it a good people or a bad people? What may we understand by the term as used in the Scriptures? There are a great many ideas among the children of men in reference to this term, especially among all Christian denominations. I presume there is not a people on the whole face of the earth who profess to be Christian but what have their definition of the term Zion. If we go to the Catholics they tell us that they are Zion—that they are the only people whom the Lord acknowledges as Zion. If we go to the Greek church, that has existed contemporary with the Catholics for many centuries, and inquire of them what their understanding is concerning Zion, they will tell us that it is the Greek church. You go to all the Protestant denominations that have dissented from the Catholics and from the Greek church and inquire of them what Zion is, and the answer of the greater portion of them will be: It is the various Christian denominations, such as the Lutherans, the Church of England, the Methodists, the various orders of Baptists, and the various Christian denominations that have arisen during the last three or four centuries. Go to the Latter-day Saints and inquire of them what Zion is, and they will tell you it is the church of the living God wherever it can be found. Consequently in order to ascertain what Zion is it is necessary for us to understand what the church of the living God is, and try to distinguish between that church and all other churches. I shall endeavor, in a very few words, to mark out some of the distinguishing features between the true church of the living God and churches built up by human wisdom; and when we have ascertained what the true church is we shall then have learned what the true Zion is.

I will begin with some of the first principles which God has revealed, and which it is necessary for mankind to obey before they can constitute a part and portion of Zion. Before Zion, or the church of the living God, can have any existence on the earth it is very important and necessary that there should be divine administrators. What I mean by this is, men having a divine mission, a divine call—being called of the Lord by the spirit of revelation to build up Zion on the earth. And when I speak of men having a divine call I do not mean those who have merely an impression, as a great many ministers among all religious denominations say they are called of God because they have an impression that God has sent them, and they go forth and teach their peculiar doctrines, as a mission which they have to deliver to the people. One man who says he is sent of God preaches baptism by sprinkling; another man sent by the same God, or who professes to be, teaches baptism by pouring water on people. A third man, who says he is sent of God, and has an impression to preach, preaches that baptism by immersion is the only true mode, and is to be administered to those who have experienced religion, and have obtained forgiveness of sins. A fourth man comes forth and says he is called of God, and has a divine mission, and the way that God has taught him is to baptize by immersion for the remission of sins.

Now we must not undertake to suppose that God is the author of all these different methods, and that he sent all these different ministers. If he sent any one man to baptize by sprinkling, then those who baptize by immersion are false teachers, running of their own accord. If he sent any one man to pour water on those who are candidates to be baptized, he has never sent any persons to sprinkle, neither to baptize by immersion; and if we can ascertain who it is that is sent, and what the form of ordinances is that are to be administered, then we

shall understand something towards the first principles of the building up of Zion on the earth, or, to come more directly to the point, concerning these divinely authorized messengers. How should true messengers of heaven be sent? In what way has God always sent them? By divine revelation. Now there never was a dispensation since God made man on the earth wherein a message was sent forth to the human family unless there was revelation connected with that message, unless the ministers who bore that message forth to the human family were divinely called by revelation, new revelation I mean. I need not go back and trace the callings and the gifts of God unto the patriarchs before the flood, nor those who lived immediately after the flood, nor in the days of Moses, nor in the days of the prophets who followed Moses; nor in the days of Jesus, nor in the days of the Apostles. All these are before the people, the callings and the gifts that were manifested in those days among the various dispensations which God has introduced among the human family. In all these various dispensations God has directly spoken from the heavens; he has communicated his will to the human family. He has raised up revelators and inspired them; he has filled his servants with the spirit of prophecy, that they should foretell the future. He has inspired them to write revelations, and hence in all these different dispensations the God of heaven has thus authorized the children of men to build up his Zion on the earth, and without these no such thing as Zion can be built up among the children of men.

Those persons were not only called by revelation, but they also were guided after they were called by the spirit of revelation in all their travels. Sometimes when they, of their own accord, would have a disposition to visit a certain city, town, neighborhood or nation, the Spirit would speak unto them and say: "Not so, that is not the place for you;" and they would be constrained by the Holy Ghost not to travel in that direction, but to go to some other city that that same Spirit should designate and point out to them. Thus they were guided and directed where they should go, what they should preach, what form of doctrine to deliver to the people, what kind of ordinance to administer to them: every particular was given by revelation from the Most High.

Let us stop right here and inquire, Have there been any Christian denominations for the last seventeen centuries that have enjoyed this spirit of divine revelation? If there have been, then Zion existed on the earth during the period this spirit of revelation was enjoyed. When this spirit of revelation ceased Zion ceased; when people ceased to be called by direct revelation, and the Scriptures ceased to receive any additional books, then Zion ceased among the children of men. When mankind came to the conclusion that their own wisdom was all-sufficient independent of any more revelation, Zion ceased from off the earth.

How long is it since Zion ceased? For everybody will admit, among all Christian denominations, that there has been no revelation for some seventeen hundred years,—among all the protestants of the present day, among all the Catholics that lived before them and that now live, and among all the different peoples and nations and tongues that have received the doctrines of the Catholics, or of the Greek church. They all admit that they all testify and acknowledge that God has had no inspired men on the earth since the days of the Apostles, consequently he has had no church on the earth, for whenever the church of God exists there exist prophets and men who are capable of writing scripture; there exist men who have communion and fellowship with God; there exist men to whom the Lord communicates his will by the ministration of holy angels and by his own voice. Therefore when these things ceased, and men ceased to be inspired to write scripture, and the Scripture was pronounced full and complete, sealed up as it were, that moment the people called Zion are banished from the face of the earth; or in other words the church of the living God has no existence thereon.

There was a Zion on the earth in the first century of the Christian era. They were Christians; they believed in Christ; they worshipped Christ; they received his ordinances; they were filled with the spirit of revelation; they had their inspired prophets and revelators; they had their heavenly visions; they had the ministration of angels; they could hear the voice of God; they could behold in heavenly vision the face of the Lord Jesus Christ after he had ascended to his father and was glorified at his right hand. They bore testimony that they had seen him, that he had conversed with them and that he had communicated his will unto them. These were Christians; that was the Christian church; that may be pronounced Zion.

What existed after this? The Apostles were put to death; they were hunted from nation to nation; they wandered about in sheepskins and goat skins in the dens and caves of the earth, of whom the world was unworthy. Their followers were put to death by hundreds, by thousands, by tens of thousands; and after a while there sprang up a people that pretended to be Christians—followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, having no apostles, no inspired men, no revelation, no ministration of angels, none of the characteristics, except a few forms, of the Christian church as it existed in the first century of the Christian era. This

class of men, calling themselves Christian, uniting with the various forms of the pagan religion, adopting many of their ceremonies, and institutions, became very popular, and finally some of the pagans embraced Christianity and were placed, as it were, upon the throne, and what they termed Christianity became very popular indeed. How long has this order of things existed, this dreadful apostasy, this class of people that pronounced themselves Zion, or Christians, without any of the characteristics of Zion? It has existed for some sixteen or seventeen centuries. It has spread itself and grown and gone into the four quarters of the earth. It is the great ecclesiastical power that is spoken of by the revelator John, and called by him the most corrupt and most wicked of all the powers of the earth, under the name of spiritual Babylon, or in other words Babel, which signifies confusion. This great and corrupt power is also represented by John as presenting a golden cup to the nations, full of all manner of filthiness and abominations.

She is termed, in other places, by the same prophet, "The whore of all the earth," making the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Some three centuries ago there came out some excellent men, named Martin Luther, John Calvin and many others that might be mentioned, who protested against the wickedness and abominations of the church wherein they had been educated, and of which they had been members. Because of their protestations against the mother church they were called protestants. They pronounced her the whore of all the earth; they declared that she had no authority, that she had none of the blessings and gifts which characterized the ancient Christians. They came out and established other churches. The Lutheran church prevailed in Germany and various portions of northern Europe. The Calvinist church or Presbyterian church was also established. Henry the Eighth established and became head of the English church. Wesley, at a later period, established a church which has grown to great numbers at the present day. But among all these churches where are the characteristics of Zion? We hunt for them, in vain. Go to all these 666 different protestant denominations that have come out from the mother church, and inquire of them, Have you living inspired men among you? and their united voice is that God speaks no more in our day; no other message is given from Heaven, no voice is heard from the eternal worlds; no angels are sent in these days; no inspired apostles are raised up to establish the church and the Kingdom of God; no men are filled with the spirit of prophecy to portray the events of the future, or to accomplish and perform the work of God in our day. We enquire, "What have you?" "Oh we have 666 different denominations and we have surnamed ourselves Christians. We are Bible Christians." How mistaken they are! Bible Christians were those who believed in having apostles and inspired prophets among them. Bible Christians could receive more revelation and add new books to the Bible; Bible Christians could converse with the Lord, and oftentimes beheld the face of Jesus; they could commune with holy angels; they had authority from God to lay hands upon those whom they baptized, for the reception or baptism of the Holy Ghost. This was what constituted ancient Zion; but inquire for these characteristics among these 666 different Christian denominations and they will tell you they are all gone, they have not any of them amongst them. Now suppose we take their word for it! I do, I really believe them. I think they tell the truth when they say they have no inspired men. I believe them when they say they have neither prophets nor apostles among them. Why do I believe them? Because they have received no new books in addition to the Bible, and whenever God had a people on the earth they were constantly giving new books, inspired from on high, and when that ceases we draw the conclusion that inspiration has ceased.

Under these circumstances what is to be done? If the world has thus apostatized, and there has been no church of the living God, no Zion among the nations for the long period I have named, what are we to expect? Is the world always to remain in this condition? Has God spoken for the last time? Were the few favored Christians who lived in the first century of our era the last ones who were to be favored with a message from heaven? I think not, the Bible tells us a different story altogether. That book tells us that there is to be one of the greatest dispensations ushered in upon the face of the earth that ever has been since the creation of man, and I profess to believe the Bible. When I read the words of the Apostle Paul about the new dispensation that should take place after his day, I believe it. You will find in the first chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he shall gather together in one all things that are in Christ, whether they be in heaven, or here on the earth. A dispensation of gathering, a dispensation called the dispensation of the fullness of times, a dispensation in which the very heavens, and all the spirits of men that are behind the veil are to be gathered in one; all things that are in Christ to be gathered in one, preparatory to the great resurrection that will take place in that dispensation.

The dispensation that was introduced in the days of the apostles was not a dispensation of gathering. When the apostles went forth to build up the church of Christ at Corinth or at Ephesus, in Galatia or any other part of the earth, the Christians all remained where they received the gospel, except those who were driven into the mountains by the persecutions of their enemies. But in the last dispensation there is to be one feature characterizing it that did not characterize the dispensation established by the ancient apostles, namely the gathering together of the people—all that are in Christ from the ends of the earth. When that dispensation is introduced Zion will be introduced again, the Lord will bring again Zion.

Many of you who are Bible believers have read a great many prophecies about the Zion of the latter days and how the Lord should bring again Zion, which seems to intimate that Zion was once on the earth, that it was lost from the earth for a certain period of time, and that the Lord was going to restore it once more. Let us hear what Isaiah has said on this subject: "Thy watchmen shall lift up their voice, with the voice together shall they sing, for they will see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion." But perhaps strangers may inquire, How are we to know the period or age of the world when the Lord shall bring again Zion, or in other words restore his church to the earth? What are the signs of that day, that we may discern the signs of the times? I will tell you how you may know the period. If you will go to the 102nd psalm of David you will find a clue to the period. I think I will read a little of that psalm for the benefit of strangers. "When the Lord shall build up Zion he shall appear in his glory." I think this gives a clue to the period, for every one will admit that the Lord has not yet appeared in his glory. We are looking for him. The Christians of all denominations expect that he will appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The Latter-day Saints expect this in common with all other Christians. But before he appears in his glory he is going to build up Zion, that is, Zion must again be built up on the earth; and if there is not a Zion built up on the earth before he comes, or in other words, if there never is to be another Zion built up on the earth, then he never will come. But when we see the day arrive that the Lord begins to establish his church on the earth once more, characterized by apostles and prophets, and introduces a dispensation of gathering, wherein all in Christ shall be gathered together in one; when the period of time shall come that the watchmen in that Zion shall see eye to eye and with the voice together sing, we may know that the Lord is coming in his glory, and is near at hand.

We will read a few other passages in the same psalm. "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favor her, yea the set time has come." The Lord has a set time for a great many of his purposes. A set time for the scattering of Israel; a set time for Jerusalem to be trodden down by the Gentiles until their times are fulfilled; a set time for the stone out of the mountain to be cut out without hands and the kingdom of God to be organized on the earth; a set time for the coming of the angel with the everlasting gospel to be preached to all people, nations, kindreds and tongues; a set time for the Lord to favor Zion, as is here declared. "For thy servants take pleasure in her stones and favor the dust thereof; so the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth thy glory."

Now do not mistake, any of you strangers, and think that this was fulfilled in the days of David. It was written for a period long after his day. This shall be written for the generations to come. "And the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord." That is, future generations of the earth—those who live at that peculiar period of time when the Lord should again build up Zion on the earth. For "he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary, from heaven did the Lord behold the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that were appointed to death, to declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem." But says one "That means the first time that he came." Let us read the next verse and see if it really means that period. "When the people are gathered together and the kingdoms to serve the Lord." Now, were the people gathered together in the days of the first coming of Jesus? No. Were the kingdoms then assembled to serve the Lord? No. Recollect that Paul predicted that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, all things in Christ are to be gathered together in one. Then the heathen nations and the kingdoms of the earth shall be gathered. What for? To be taught in his ways, and instructed to walk in his paths.

We will now quote another passage that has reference to the same great event. It is contained in the 2nd chapter of Isaiah the prophet. "And it shall come to pass in the last days"—recollect now it is a work of the latter time—"It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it." When was this fulfilled? Every person with any reflection whatever, that has the least particle of faith in this prophecy, knows that it never has been fulfilled. The Zion that was built up in the days of David and that he dwelt in, the Zion that