The Things of God Greater Than Man's Conception of Them

Discourse by Elder B. H. Roberts, in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, Sunday, September 12, 1909.

(Reported by F. W. Otterstrom.)

I SHOULD face this tabernacle congregation without a very great amount of misgiving on my part, which amounts to an inward fear and trembling. I presume it arises from the fact that such a position brings home to one the weight of responsibility that rests upon him who undertakes to be a public teacher; and, sometimes, I have felt, for my own part, that I would be happier if these occasional duties did not devolve upon me. However, we can't help but remember that in the discharge of this duty the Lord has sometimes done good to us and blest us with a measure of success, and some truth, or portion of truth, has been presented in a manner to be understood by the saints. This gives one encouragement and faith to try again, and perhaps, my friends, on this occasion, if we can acceptably approach the Lord, our meeting together may result in blessing. I most fervently pray that such may be the outcome of our meeting this afternoon.

I have not been able to fix upon any text which would foreshadow the train that I would like to present on this occasion. I have no text, but I have a theme in mind, that has taken more or less of definite form—a theme which may be illustrated by many texts, and certainly by many historical experiences of the people of God in various ages of the world. If through your faith and God's blessing I can lead you to reflect upon that theme, I shall be very happy. My thought may be stated in these terms: No matter what your conceptions of divine things may be—however wide or high—the divine things themselves, be assured, are much greater than your conceptions of them. I pray you, think about that a while, and get it well in mind; No matter how great or comprehensive your conceptions may be of divine things, the divine things themselves are always greater than your conceptions of them. It must have been some such thought as this that led our Prophet Joseph Smith to make the following remark: "The things of God are of deep import, and time and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the board expanse of eternity—Thou must commune with God!"

DIVINE THINGS MISJUDGED.

Associated with this theme that we have here announced is another, namely, that in consequence of man's failure to comprehend fully the things of God, there is great danger that he may misapprehend divine things—God's messages and God's purposes. The experience of God's people abundantly demonstrate this second truth. For example, suppose you think upon the misapprehension that the Jews had concerning the promised Messiah. Their prophets and even their patriarchs, in their writings and prophecies, had foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah—the Redeemer, not only of Israel but of the world. Yet, when he came, the Jews altogether misapprehended him, and so they misunderstood him and his mission that they rejected him. Israel's national existence had been a very precarious and trying one. They had been subdued again and again by nations surrounding them. For many generations their petty kingdom had been but a shuttle-cock between the battle-doors of Assyrian and Persian, of Persian and Egyptian; and at the time of the advent of the Messiah, they had been reduced to the condition of a Roman province and were under the iron hand of Roman rule. Their eyes looked back, frequently, to the glorious days of David and Solomon, when Israel could well be proud of her national existence. They longed, again, for a king, and national independence; and hence they regarded the promises of the Messiah as the coming of a king to bring redemption to Israel and to establish them as a nation in the earth. But, instead of a king, there came a peasant; instead of a conqueror, there came a teacher; and they did not recognize, in His character, and mission, the elements that would exalt Him far above all earthly kings and give to Him an empire over the children of men that should far exceed in glory anything that could come to earthly potentate or monarch. They wholly misapprehended the mission of the Messiah; and yet, when you take into account the position of the Christ today, in the world although we have but a partial development of His truths, although the glory of His kingdom has been somewhat arrested by reason of the departure of men from that divine system of truth which He established, notwithstanding we have but a lame and halting Christianity, yet, to what heights has it lifted the Messiah of the Jews in mighty influence among the nations of the earth! We get the principle with which we started our discourse illustrated most beautifully in these circumstances: First the misapprehension of men of the things of God; and yet the truth that however great the conceptions of men may be of divine things, the divine things themselves far outrun in glory, and largeness, and power, men's conceptions of them; for the Jews never attributed even to the Messiah of their prophecies the glory that has already come to the Christ. He reigns, with more or less supremacy in the hearts of at least more than one-third of the inhabitants of the earth, and is accepted as prophet, as priest, and, in some sense or other, as the Redeemer of all men. And that, I believe, far outstrips the conceptions that the Jews had of the glory of their Messiah.

Take another illustration of our principle. The early Christians, as well as the Jews, failed to apprehend the mission of the Christ. There was fixed in the minds of those early converts to the Christian faith the thought that salvation was of the Jews: (John 4:22); and it seems to me they added to the words of Christ the idea that God only, was salvation of Israel, but salvation, in their minds, was merely for Israel. Those early Christian converts had no idea that their Messiah was to become the Messiah and Savior of all men; and it required special revelation to the chief apostle, Peter, to get even him to understand that the coverage of the Christ was for the gentile as well as for the Jew. You will remember, when the Lord had inspired a certain gentile, of the name of Cornelius, to inquire of the Lord what he ought to do in order to be accepted of God, how by special revelation unto Peter, as the messengers from this devout gentile approached his dwelling place, he was given a vision, the import of which was that whosoever God should recognize as clean, Peter must not call unholy or unclean. Three times was this lesson taught to the chief apostle, when, lo, the messengers from Cornelius were knocking at his doors. He met the messengers from Cornelius, he brought word that God had visited this devout gentile, and bid him send for the chief apostle of the Christ. Peter went down to the house of Cornelius and taught him the truths of the gospel, and, lo, as he spake the Holy Ghost rested upon the gentiles present as it had upon the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Then Peter saw the interpretation of his vision; and he said: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" By this means the Lord led this man, Peter, to have a wider view of the mission of the Christ, but it was extremely difficult to get the rest of the Christians, in that day, to accept this thought. So it was when Paul came forward, being raised up of the Lord to carry His message to the gentiles; it was his chief offense, so thought the Christian Jews, that he taught this broader application of the Gospel of the Christ to the children of God; and those early fanatical Christians stoutly accused him of blasphemy and of bringing those who were unclean into the temple of God. It required all the revelations that God gave to Peter; it required all the inspiration that God gave to Paul—all his energy ,all his learning, all his inspired eloquence—to make it known to the world that salvation was not only for the Jew but for the gentile also; and the first congregations of the Christians in Judea seem, in sullen mood to have rejected the greater revelations accepted by the apostles, and the great tide of the Gospel swept by them and left them in their obscurity; while Paul and his associates ran to and fro, through the mighty Roman empire, and planted the standard of the Gospel in many gentile cities, and made the world ring with the message of the Messiah. These people, the first Christians, many of them good and pure minded people, no doubt, filled to rightly apprehend the great mission of the Messiah, and so that mission swept on by them and left them in their obscurity. We may say in closing this branch of our reflections that the prophecy of the Messiah respecting the Jews who rejected him; and in a manner also the Jews who accepted him, but failed to apprehend the largeness of his mission, the universality of the salvation he brought into the world—the prophecy of the Messiah, I say,was fulfilled—"The Kingdom of God shall be taken from among you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." And Paul—"It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo! we turn to the gentiles."

Now I am wondering if you will bear with me while I point out the fact that we too, in this dispensation of the fulness of times, are in the same danger of failing to apprehend the greatness of the things of God restored to us. We, too, are human; we, too, fail to grasp the full import of the truth which is the center around which our houghts is moving. We fail to realize that great as our conceptions may be of divine things, yet those divine things are infinitely greater than our conceptions of them.

MARVELOUS WORK AND WONDER

Take here this book of Doctrine and Covenants. In some half score of the early revelations, you find this statement made, "A great and marvelous work is about to come forth unto the children of men." How many of the early converts of the Church appreciated the meaning of that solemn announcement? They stood in the presence of certain facts then developing, that were truly marvelous and great in their eyes. In an age when the orthodox churches were teaching that God would no more speak from heaven to give further revelation; in an age when all Christendom taught that the visitation of angels had ceased; in an age when it was orthodox to regard the volume of Scripture as completed and forever closed—these early converts had heard the wonderful announcement of God's witness, that the heavens had been reopened; that God had once more revealed himself to man upon the earth; that angels had come with messages from God; that there had been brought forth a whole volume of Scripture that was a witness for God, the Book of Mormon that spoke of the ancient inhabitants of this western world, giving an account of the migration of their fathers to this land from the old world; that gave an account of the rise and fall of nations and empires in this western hemisphere; that testified of the goodness of God to them, and revealing Himself to them, and sending the risen Messiah to them to make known the Gospel of the Son of God, and proclaim the means of their salvation. The early converts to the Church had witnessed that volume of Scripture brought forth. They had seen a church organized under the direction and inspiration of God. They had seen a renewal of those spiritual powers and graces that characterized the primitive church of the Christ. Contrary to the expectations and teaching of modern Christendom, the sick were healed; the lame were made to walk; in some cases the eyes of the blind were opened. Men felt once more that they stood in the immediate presence of the living, throbbing power of God in the world, and especially in the Church of Christ. These things were indeed "great and marvelous" to them; but how very far short of the full glory of the latter-day work do these few first steps now seem to us! The saints in those early days did not dream that there was to be an unfolding of doctrine and Church organization such as we now behold. They did not understand in those early days that there would again be a quorum of apostles, endowed with the same powers and gifts and authority that characterized the first apostolate of the Church of Christ. They did not know then that there were to be called into existence thousands and tens of thousands of assistant apostles, the seventies, who would be commissioned to go into all the world under the direction of the twelve, to preach the gospel to all nations and gather Israel. They had no idea that scores and even hundreds of bishops would be called into official existence to preside in the midst of the people of God. They did not understand that the keys for the redemption of the dead would be restored, so that the gospel could be proclaimed in the spirit world and men brought to a knowledge of the truth, that they might "live according to God in the spirit," and, ultimately, be judged as men are judged in the flesh. They did not know that temples were to be erected, in which this work for both living and dead could be performed. They could not then understand that in this dispensation of the fulness of times all the ends of the earth were to meet; and "all things in Christ be gathered together in one, even in Him," until all the families of the earth that would receive the truth might in every way be bound in chains of love at the feet of the living Christ. The early converts to the Church had no such vision of the work of God, as this. It is not a reproach to them that they did notfully comprehend these things, or anticipate the marvelous history that the people of God would make. They were just like the children of men in all generations, and like ourselves. No matter how wonderful to them divine things were, no matter how great their conceptions of them, the divine things themselves were infinitely greater than they conceived them to be.

THE NEW JERUSALEM.

Take another illustration of my theme. In the Book of Mormon this truth was revealed, that in this western world a holy city would finally be builded by the people of God. A city called Zion, the "New Jerusalem." When the saints saw that fact revealed in the Book of Mormon, they, very naturally, desired to know the place where the city would stand; and the Lord finally revealed the place where the city of Zion will be located. The place of that city is in the central portion of the land of Zion. Independence, Jackson county, Missouri, was designated as the place where the holy city is to be founded. No sooner was this known than straightway the gathering of the people to that point commenced. Some few hundreds of the saints gathered to that land and essayed to lay the foundations of the city, the glory of which was described in the Nephite Scriptures. In the course of time, however, the saints were expelled from Jackson county by the cruelty of their neighbors, who rejected their religion and rose up against the people of God. When the saints were compelled to leave Jackson county, they looked upon themselves as exiles from Zion, and it was rather with heavy hearts and with sinking hopes that they went to building other cities elsewhere in Missouri. Finally the entire state of Missouri rose against the people of God—and unjustly and by the violation of every principle of constitutional government, expelled some 12,000 of the saints from that state. As you know, the saints located themselves on the Illinois side of the Mississippi river and founded the city of Nauvoo. They still counted themselves as exiles from Zion, and they thought that the cause of God—that is, many of them—thought that the cause of God was losing, that His purposes were being thwarted; they were exiles from the land of promise; the City of Zion was as a dream that was fast fading from their consciousness. Then the prophet began to instruct them more fully concerning this matter of Zion. He called their attention to the fact that the whole of America, both north continent and south continent—was the land of Zion; that the promise of God concerning Zion related to this western hemisphere; that these great continents were consecrated chiefly unto the seed of Joseph, the patriarch in Israel, son of Jacob and that this whole land was given to him as his inheritance. That is how it is that both Moses and also Jacob, in their blessings upon the head of Joseph declare that his blessings had prevailed above the blessings of his progenitors; and that his lands extended to the "utmost bounds of the everlasting hills." He was given the birthright in Israel, to stand at the head of Israel (I Chronicles, 5: 1-2. Reuben "was the first born; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel; and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright"—i. e, of Reuben. "For Judah prevailed above his brethren and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's"); and hence the Scriptures frequently declare that God is a Father unto Israel, and Ephraim is His first born, (Jeremiah, 31: 9). This was a larger view of the subject of Zion than the saints had entertained. Can you see in this illustration, confirmation of our theme, viz., that no matter how great your conceptions may be of divine things, the divine things themselves are infinitely greater than you conceive them to be?

RESTORATION OF ISRAEL.

Still another illustration. It is a prominent principle of the faith of the Latter-day Saints that the great promises which God has made unto Israel, to the effect that they shall be gathered in from their dispersion, shall be fulfilled in this dispensation of the fulness of times. Of course you know, being familiar with the history of Israel, that they have been scattered among all the nations of the earth. This is true with reference to all the tribes of Israel. "I will sift the house of Israel among all nations" is what Amos represents the Lord as saying. (Amos 9: 8, 9.) Of course you are aware of the fact that after the reign of Solomon, Israel divided into two kingdoms—the northern kingdom composed of the ten tribes, the southern kingdom, Judah, composed of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. After a national existence of some two hundred years, the Assyrians overcame the northern kingdom and took the people captive into Assyria; but while in captivity there, we are informed by tradition, that the people resolved to leave the heathen nation by whom they had been led into captivity, and go into a land never before inhabited by man, and there they resolved that they would keep the statutes and the judgments of God even better than they had done in the land of their fathers. The historian who tells us of these circumstances (Esdras) also says that they performed something like a year and a half journey to the northward, up through the narrow pass of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and thence northward, and inhabited the land; and since those days they have been known as "the lost tribes of Israel." The kingdom of Judah maintained but a precarious existence; he was first subject to one nation and then to another, until finally, toward the close of the first century of the Christian era, the nation was completely subjugated by the Roman power; her people were taken captive and sold into slavery, or scattered as exiles among the nations of the gentiles. Ever since then, until now, Judah has been a hiss and byword, a broken, scattered people. But over and above all these historical events rings out clear and strong the promise of God, as spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah, saying:

"Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he (ch. xxxi: 10, 11). Behold I will bring them [the children of Israel] from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first born." (ch. xxxi; verses, 8, 9).

The Jewish Scriptures are full of this promise. It is iterated and reiterated; and it is well known that the tradition lives in Israel that though now scattered abroad, yet will they at some time be called to resume the thread of their national existence, and Israel shall yet be known among the nations of the earth. As broad as the scattering has been, so broad also shall be the gathering. This message of ours, the gospel of Jesus Christ, has always been accompanied by proclamation of this doctrine of the gathering of Israel. The prophet Amos tells us that God had "sifted" Israel among the nations, and now unto the servants of God in this dispensation is given the commission to cry aloud unto Israel, "Come out of her, my people; that ye partake not of her sins, and receive not of her plagues," speaking of Babylon. God, I say, has repeatedly promised that there shall be a gathering together of Israel, and those who were led away into the "north countries," we are told shall be brought again to the land of their fathers; their prophets shall hear the voice of God, and shall not stay themselves, but they shall come forth in the power of God and bring their people unto Zion, where they shall receive blessings at the hands of the children of Ephraim, the first born, who holds the patriarchal right to bless and seal in the house of Israel. This is the faith of the Latter-day Saints respecting Israel.

FOUR ROMNEY GENERATIONS.

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LOST TRIBES IN THE NORTH.

Permit me to make a little divergence at this point. I have observed some criticisms in our local press in relation to the views entertained by the Latter-day Saints about the return of the lost tribes of Israel from the land of the north. We have recently had the north pole discovered—well, discovered twice, if reports be true. And it is claimed by the aforesaid local press that the Church entertains the view that somewhere, either in or beyond this frozen region of the pole these lost tribes have lived, and that it has been the hope of the Latter-day Saints that from the north pole region these lost tribes would return to supplement them in numbers and power and influence here in this land of our Zion. There is more or less of merriment indulged in because, now that the north pole has been discovered, lo, there is no people there and no place for a people. Ice fields, ice mountains, ice floes, with accompanying desolation—an absolute loneliness out there at the poles! Well, I think men for some time have been sufficiently close to the pole to lead any thoughtful person to the conclusion that such conditions must exist there, rather than any continent of salubrious climate and fertile soils, where a great people could be located. Let me offer this suggestion: If those of us who believe in the messages from God are likely because of inability to assess these messages at their full value—if we are likely to have misapprehensions of the messages and the purposes of God, certainly those who have no sympathy with them, and who do not believe in them are apt to have still wider misapprehensions of the messages and purposes of God. That being true, it is possible that our local newspaper critics have formed misconceptions concerning the existence of the ten tribes somewhere in polar regions. I don't know how many Latter-day Saints may have entertained the view that about the polar regions were located the lost tribes of Israel. I don't know how many even of our students—the students of the gospel of this dispensation of the fulness of times—may have entertained the same view. There is the statement of Esdras that there was a year and a half journey northward from Assyria, by the ten tribes; and there is the promise repeated frequently in Jewish Scriptures, that the Lord would lead back from the north the tribes of Israel. From these statements, some of our people may have concluded that necessarily these lost tribes must be established in the extreme northern portions of the earth, hence the region of the north pole. There may be something in our literature to that effect—I can not say positively, because I have not had the opportunity, recently, to examine our literature with reference to that particular view. But of this I am positive; that in none of the revelations of God is there any expression that would lead one to believe that God had located the ten tribes about the north pole. The revelations of the Lord do not necessarily lead us to any such conclusion. When the Savior was in the western hemisphere, ministering among the Nephites, He called their attention to the announcement that He had made to His disciples in Judea, when He said, "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold; they, too, must hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." (John 10:16.) When ministering to the Nephites, I say, the Messiah explained to them that they, were the "other sheep" He had in mind. Some of the disciples, He explained, believed that He had in mind the gentiles, not appreciating the fact that His manifestation of Himself and of His truth to the gentiles should be through the manifestations of the Holy Ghost, rather than by personal ministration and manifestation of Himself personally to them. The disciples in Judea then had a misapprehension of this matter, though Jesus Himself had said that He was not sent (personally) but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Matt. 15:24. Here, then, in this western world, were the "other sheep," that the Christ had in mind in this remarkable statement that He made to His disciples in Judea. The Messiah also informed the Nephites that He had not only fulfilled this Scripture but now there was still another mission that had been given Him, namely to visit the lost tribes of the house of Israel, and manifest Himself to them, for though these tribes were lost unto the children of men they were not lost unto the Father. He knew their location, and had given commission to His Son to minister unto them. (See III Nephi, chaps. 15, 16, 17.) But there is nothing in the statement of the Messiah to the Nephites that would compel us to believe that these lost tribes were located about the north pole; but merely expressions in the Scriptures that would lead one to conclude that they were located in northern lands. Then again, in the matter of this return of the "lost tribes of Israel," there are those I believe, who, seeing that there was small hope of a location for them about the north pole, have held that perhaps the said lost tribes were located upon some detached portion of the earth. As to that, I have no opinion to express; but this I believe, for myself, that within the known regions of the earth, where the children of men are located, it is quite possible for God to fulfill all His predictions in relation to the return of Israel. It would have been quite possible for God to scatter, or to use the language of the prophet Amos—"sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve," and "yet not the least grain fall upon the earth"—i. e. be lost to the knowledge of God, though now lost to men. And as it was possible to loose these tribes of Israel among the nations of the earth, so is it possible for God to recover them from their scattered condition from among these nations, with a display of the divine power. And with reference to this display of divine power, let me say that something must always be allowed to the character of prophetic language. You must remember that seers and prophets do not speak the cold, calculating language of philosophy, where every word is weighed in the exact scales of thought. Prophets do not follow the precision in their language that is required of the scientists. These men, prophets and seers, commune with God. Their finite life touches, for a moment, the infinite life of God. Their limited wisdom touches for a moment the supreme wisdom of the infinite. For an instant they see things large; and infused and inspired with the fire they have received from this contact with the divine, lo! they come with their message and speak it in the words of spiritual passion. Of course, to them, in this mood, the mountains will sink; the valleys will rise. Of course, the prophets, if in the north, will hear the voice of God, and the mountains of ice will flow down at their presence; the hills will rejoice and the mountains shout for joy! When men come with this inspiration upon them they see and feel things large, and they speak of them in that spirit; and when we come to reduce what they thus bring to us, from the heart of God, to our petty conceptions, we of course must be prepared to take into account the figurative language they speak. It is possible that if we fail to do this, we shall misapprehend, in part, some material fact of their message. Especially should one be on one's guard in such highly picturesque matters as the return of the lost tribes from their long dispersion—from the lands of the north. In such an event not only will "mountains of ice flow down" at the presence of their prophets, but highways will be cast up in the midst of the great deep—their enemies will become a prey unto them—in barren deserts shall come forth pools of living water—the parched ground shall no longer be a thirsty land—the "boundaries of the everlasting hills shall tremble at their presence!" (Doc. and Cov., sec. 133.)

We must make some allowance, I repeat, for the hyperbole of that language in which the message of these prophets is delivered—remember, it is vibrant with the great things of God; and it makes some effort to encompass these great things.

ISRAEL NOW GATHERING.

But, coming to a closer consideration of this "gathering of Israel"—Israel is gathering all right; perhaps not after our conception of it, not after our ideas as to how Israel should or would be gathered. Nevertheless, Israel, I say, is gathering to the land of Zion. You Latter-day Saints—whence came you? From the British isles, from Germany, from the Scandinavian countries, from the islands of the sea. Who are you? Israelites, gathered by the gospel message, which includes the word of God to you to gather together on this land of Zion. You are chiefly of Ephraim, according to the inspired utterances of the patriarchs who pronounce blessings upon your heads. Well, if you—gathered from a multitude of nations—are of Israel, may not Israel, by hundreds of thousands and millions, be in the lands whence you came, which was chiefly from the northern lands of Europe? for our mission has had little success among the Latin races of southern Europe. You have been gathered by the proclamation of the gospel and are of Israel, and not only are you who have received the gospel gathered, but your kindred Germans, your kindred Scandinavians, your kindred Britishers, have also been coming to the land of Zion. Indeed, it seems that America is an asylum for all people, and seven races that we fain would close our gates against, in spite of all the wisdom and caution and legislation of our national legislators and the administrative officers of our government, they, too, come to the land of Zion, and who shall say that these races have not inheritance in Zion? This western hemisphere is not only granted to the descendants of Joseph in Israel, not only to it will come those of the lost tribes of Israel, but the gentile races also have promise of an inheritance in this land; and here shall they receive the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ; receiving it at the hands of the children of Ephraim, upon whom commission has been bestowed and divine authority given to preach the gospel and administer in its ordinances. So Israel is being gathered in these last days to the land of Zion, and here gentile races are also assembling. Here in the United States alone we can reach more Germans than we can preach to in Germany, because of the limitations of religious liberty in Germany. Here we may preach to more English people than in England. Here we may preach to more Scandinavians than we can preach to in Scandinavia. Here we have opportunity to teach the truth unto gathered Israel in this blest land of Zion, and here and among the other known nations of the earth is full scope and opportunity for the accomplishment of all those things that have been predicted by the servants of God in all ages of the world respecting Israel, without going into the north polar regions or to detached portions of the earth somewhere in illimitable space.

PURPOSES OF GOD FAIL NOT.

The purposes of God are not failing. God is imminent in this world, and is fashioning it according to his own divine purposes. There will be no failure in Jehovah's plans. The only thing is, Can we so enlarge our thought, can we lift ourselves from the narrow limits of our thinking in which we are so contented to walk—can we take broader views in relation to God's purposes and messages to the children of men? That is the only question. The Lord Almighty, I repeat, is accomplishing his designs in relation to the land of Zion; in relation to the gathering of Israel and the return of the ten tribes; just as he will accomplish his purposes with reference to the re-establishment of Judah upon the promised land of Canaan, and the redemption of Jerusalem. All this will come about in its time and seasons. The word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem, and the law will go forth from Zion—nay, in my view, it is now going forth in large measure from Zion—in a manner to reach the inhabitants of the earth, and bring to them the blessings that God has decreed for the children of men.

My brethren and sisters, I rejoice in the large, as of this work of God—this dispensation of the fulness of times. I love it, in part, because of its greatness—in its very bigness there is inspiration. I love to contemplate the purposes of God in their far-reaching possibilities. I rejoice to feel that today the children of men are moving up to a higher and truer conception of the things of God. We talk about, and we sometimes even dare to dope for, the coming of the millennium! I wonder what our sensations will be if some morning we wake up to a realization that the millennium is already on its way, and has been on its way for some time—nay, is far advanced! When I think of the mighty progress that has been made in these modern days, and especially since God opened the heavens and revealed himself unto his servant Joseph Smith; when I take that circumstance as a starting point and contrast conditions as they are today with conditions as they were when that first revelation was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, it seems to me that the prediction that old things shall pass away and all things shall become new is on the way to a very rapid fulfilment. At that time—the third decade of the nineteenth century—not a single foot of railroad existed anywhere in the world; today, all civilized nations are a network of railroads and railroad systems. We have moved all the way from the ox-cart and stage-coach to the mighty express train that thunders with lightning speed throughout the land. Distance is discounted—well nigh annihilated, in comparison with former times. In ocean navigation we have come from the rude vessel that could only be driven by the wind, to the mighty ocean greyhounds that speed across the oceans like express trains; and the oceans, once a dreaded mystery, are now but the convenient highways between the continents, the highways of commerce! Man, within the period we are considering, has not only mastered transportation upon the earth and upon the ocean; but we have recent demonstrations that man has mastered also the element of air; and may navigate the air with as great speed and ease as the land or the water. Within the period named—1820-1909—we have come all the way from the tallow dip to the electric light. In communication we have come from the pony express to the telegraph, and to the wireless telegraph, and the telephone; so that now we are in instant communication with all portions of the earth. No event of any moment may happen tonight that will not be spread upon the pages of tomorrow morning's press, which will await us upon our breakfast tables! Then in the way of advancements that give promise of peace—so mighty have become the engines of destruction; so revolutionary the promises of this recent mastery of the air, that it would seem that war must be an impossibility in the near future; and it becomes imperative that men devise—statesmen must devise, philanthropists must devise, patriots must devise—some means by which the international questions that arise may be settled without allowing nations to go to the dreadful arbitrament of war for a settlement. The time when swords shall be beaten into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks seems not far distant, even the time when nations shall learn war no more—the vision of the prophets! These are the conditions in the midst of which we live: A time when property is more secure than it ever was before in the world; a time when personal liberty is more secure than ever it was before in the world; a time when the comforts of life among the masses of mankind well nigh equal conditions that only kings could enjoy in ages that are past! When I see all these blessings, and realize that year by year they are increasing with accelerated speed—when I see the sentiment of universal brotherhood enlarging—when I see great and mighty intellects pushing far out upon the frontier of Christian thought, grasping the truths of God and weaving them into systems of practical philosophy, tending to make ready the inhabitants of the earth for that fulness of truth that God, through His prophets, has decreed should be poured out upon the nations of the earth in the last days—when I see these evidences of man's progress within the last three-quarters of a century, since God spoke from heaven to Joseph Smith, I can not help but believe that there is some connection between the re-opening of the heavens to restore the gospel, and this wider diffusion of knowledge by which the comfort and enlightenment of men as to material things has been brought to pass—the golden age that prophets dreamed of, that prophets sang about—the golden age—the millennium—has at last dawned upon the earth! And right here, in the midst of it all, God has established His Church. He has given to it the knowledge of the means of salvation. He has given to the Church divine authority to administer in the ordinances of the gospel, and the coming forth of this work is the herald of the modern world's awakening! For when the Book of Mormon came forth, by that token Israel might know, and the world might know, that God had set His hand to fulfil and accomplish the things that He had decreed concerning the gathering of Israel, and concerning all the inhabitants of the earth—their happiness and peace and glory and security. (II Nephi, 30, and III Nephi 21). This is our part of the work: to make proclamation of these things; to exemplify the law of God and the excellence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to proclaim to the children of men that God is not a God afar off—One who transcends the world; but God imminent in the world, and that men may connect their lives with the life of God; and feel the inspiration of His life pouring into their lives, uplifting, purifying, exalting—until man, the individual, and communities of men, nations—may walk with God in this great age now dawning on the world! And yet, great as our conceptions may be of the things of God—divine things—be assured that the divine things themselves are infinitely greater than our conceptions of them can be—then how great indeed they must be! The prophet spoke truly when he said of God: "His thoughts are not as your thoughts; His ways are not as your ways; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts above your thoughts, and his ways above your ways." But while we are under the necessity of conceding the truth of that, may we not share in and enjoy in some measure a knowledge of divine things and therein rejoice, as I feel we do this day by this brief glimpse of some of the things of God? I thank God for His goodness, and I pray that this service may help and bless you, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

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