



Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

Volume 11 | Number 1

Article 6

4-1-2010

The Gathering of Israel

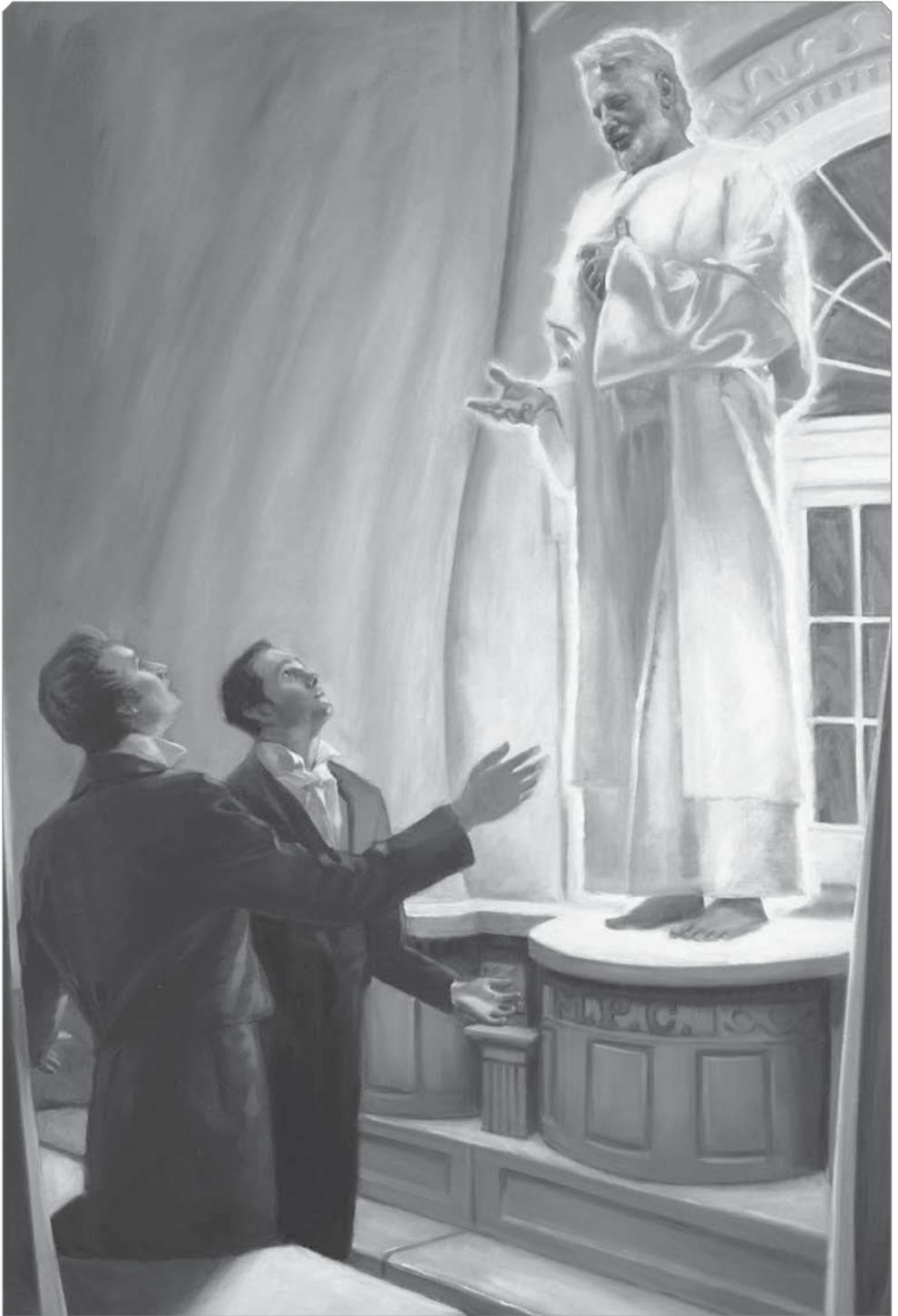
Joseph Fielding McConkie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

McConkie, Joseph F. "The Gathering of Israel." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 11, no. 1 (2010). <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol11/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



On Sunday, April 3, 1836, Elijah restored priesthood keys for the gathering of Israel.

The Gathering of Israel

JOSEPH FIELDING MCCONKIE

Joseph Fielding McConkie is a professor emeritus of ancient scripture at BYU.

.....
Adapted from a presentation at Campus Education Week on August 18, 2008.

An understanding of the doctrine of the gathering of Israel is essential to a sound understanding of the gospel. Of the gathering, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “It is a principle I esteem to be of the greatest importance to those who are looking for salvation in this generation.”¹

The doctrine of the gathering stands at the very heart of the message of the restored gospel. We do not really understand who we are as a people, the covenants God has made with us, or the destiny that is ours until we gain a meaningful understanding of this doctrine.

On Sunday, April 3, 1836, a week after Joseph Smith dedicated the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet recorded that after he administered the Lord’s Supper, “I retired to the pulpit, the veils being dropped, and bowed myself, with Oliver Cowdery, in solemn and silent prayer. After rising from prayer, the following vision was opened to both of us” (D&C 110, section heading). This vision is recounted in section 110 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It begins with a description of the Savior, who appeared to Joseph and Oliver

to accept the dedication of the temple. At his departure, three other angelic ministrants appeared. First came Moses, then came a prophet bearing the title Elias, and then came Elijah. Each of these heavenly ministrants laid their hands on Joseph and Oliver's heads and bestowed upon them the particular keys each had held during their mortal ministries.

"Moses," the Prophet said, "appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north" (D&C 110:11). Then Elias appeared. He committed the keys of the dispensation of Abraham, which means that he restored that power and authority that is unique to Abraham's dispensation. He said "that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed" (v. 12). Elijah then appeared, as Malachi said he would, to restore the keys by which the hearts of the fathers would be turned to their children and the children to their fathers, lest the whole earth be "smitten with a curse" (v. 15, see also Malachi 4:5-6).

The appearance of these men plays an important part in the story we are about to tell. Indeed, our story would not be complete without our coming to understand the particular blessings restored by each of these men, why they were chosen to restore them, and how these events relate to the gathering of Israel.

As we proceed with this discussion, let us do so in the form of a conversation. You ask the questions, as it were, and I, with the aid of the scriptures and the words of prophets, will attempt to answer them. We begin:

Question: Who is included in the term *Israel*?

Answer: The term *Israel* refers to the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The greatest promise the Lord can give to a righteous man, beyond the promise of his own salvation, is that of a righteous posterity. This promise, along with a host of attendant promises, God made to Abraham. He made the promise anew to Abraham's son Isaac and made it yet again to Isaac's son Jacob.

Question: Why was Abraham chosen to receive this covenant?

Answer: The covenant had come down from the beginning through the fathers to Abraham (see Abraham 1:3). Abraham, in what constituted a new dispensation, sought for the blessings of this covenant, and the Lord chose to renew it again through him (see Abraham 2:9-11).

Question: Why was Moses the one chosen to restore the authority to hold the keys of the gathering of Israel?

Answer: After four hundred years of bondage in Egypt, the Lord sent Moses to the children of Israel. Having turned them to Christ, Moses was to liberate them from their enslavement and bring them as a nation to Mount Sinai. Here the Lord intended to sanctify them and renew with them the covenant he had made with their father Abraham. Having been so empowered, they were to return to the land the Lord had promised the seed of Abraham and there build a temple to their God.

Question: The Old Testament tells us that “an angel of the Lord” appeared to Moses on Sinai. Are we to understand the “angel” was Christ?

Answer: Yes. The Book of Mormon makes this very clear. When Christ came to announce the fulfillment of the law of Moses to those in the Americas, he said, “I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:4–5).

Stephen testified that Christ sent Moses to deliver the children of Israel (see Acts 7:20–37). Paul tells us that Moses regarded the reproach of Christ to be of greater value than the treasures of Egypt (see Hebrews 11:26–27). Peter said that all the holy prophets since the world began testified of Christ (see Acts 3:21).

Question: Does scripture foretell that Moses would come to restore Israel to the covenants made with their fathers?

Answer: Yes. The Lord promised Joseph of Egypt “that he would preserve his seed forever, saying, I will raise up Moses, and a rod shall be in his hand, and he shall gather together my people, and he shall lead them as a flock, and he shall smite the waters of the Red Sea with his rod” (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:34).

And again in Moses 1, we find the Lord speaking to Moses, saying, “I, the Almighty, have chosen thee, and thou shalt be made stronger than many waters; for they shall obey thy command as if thou wert God. And lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days; for thou shalt deliver my people from bondage, even Israel my chosen” (Moses 1:25–26).

Question: Why was it so important that Moses take the children of Israel to Sinai first?

Answer: Sinai was the holy mount. It was the place where the children of Israel were to meet their God. It was the place where they were to enter into covenants with him. For all intent and purpose, Sinai would be Israel’s first temple. To gather Israel was to lead them back to true temple worship. This event would in subsequent dispensations be the type for the gathering

of Israel. As the story unfolds, we see that the tabernacle in the wilderness, Solomon's Temple, and Herod's Temple were all constructed after the same pattern. They were the physical embodiment of Mount Sinai.

When they arrived at Sinai, Moses was instructed to establish bounds around the holy mount beyond which the children of Israel were not to go. None were to go up to the mount or even touch the border of it. Any doing so, be they man or beast, were to be killed (see Exodus 19:12–13).

The glory of the Lord would occupy the top of the mountain; Moses alone, Israel's high priest, would be allowed to part the veil and enter here. Later, Aaron and the seventy were permitted to advance partway up the mountain, where Christ appeared to them, while the people were only permitted to come up to the base of the mountain (see Exodus 24:9–11). These bounds were a type for the order of the tabernacle, which would be divided into three parts; the outer court, unto which the people could enter but go no further; the Holy Place, into which the priests could enter; and the Holy of Holies, into which only the high priest could enter. This in turn became the pattern for the temples which would be built in Jerusalem.

Question: Am I to understand that at the time of Moses, the reason the children of Israel were “gathered,” meaning freed from their Egyptian bondage and taken to Sinai, was to covenant with God to be his people?

Answer: Yes, exactly. God sought to renew with Israel the covenant he had made with their fathers. In Exodus 19, Moses led Israel to the base of Mount Sinai, where they camped. Then Moses ascended the mountain to speak with God. “Ye have seen,” God said to Moses, “what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:4–6).

Moses reported this to his people, and they said, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord” (Exodus 19:8). Moses was then directed to sanctify his people preparatory to God's appearing to them. The word *sanctify* means to be “separated” or “set apart.” It involved an ordinance of washing wherein the children of Israel were to be made clean that they might stand in the presence of God. If we add to the story what we learn from the revelations of the Restoration, it means that they were to be consecrated to God and that he was going to endow them with power from on high before they commenced their journey to their land of promise.

Again we see the type: In Joseph Smith's day, those liberated from the bondage of false religions were to gather with the Saints at Nauvoo. Here they built their Sinai, or temple, and here they were endowed prior to their journey to the promised land in which they would build a temple to their God. In like manner, today all the children of Israel are invited to come to the house of the Lord where they will be sanctified and endowed with power from on high prior to making their journey through life.

Moses sought to gather Israel and restore to them that which they had lost. They had broken their covenants and lost their land of inheritance and the knowledge of how they were to worship their God. Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated the matter succinctly: Israel was scattered "because they forsook the Abrahamic covenant."²

Question: So Israel is scattered when she breaks her covenants and gathered when she returns to them?

Answer: Yes. Lands of inheritance are only a symbol of that covenant. They are a physical representation of the promise of an eternal inheritance given to those who keep their covenants.

The pattern common to all dispensations includes the Lord sending messengers to teach the gospel. Those who embrace the gospel are then required to sacrifice whatever is necessary to come to the Lord's temple. There the Lord grants them the fulness of gospel blessings. It is the temple and the blessings associated with it that made the Holy Land holy. Isaiah gives us a perfect example of what is involved in his description of the great events of the last days:

And 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.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2-3)

Here, Isaiah is saying that after the gospel has come to you, you must go to the temple. It is there that you will be taught in the ways of the God of Jacob. It is there that the promises of the covenant are given.

Question: So you are saying that to be gathered means to be baptized and then to go to the temple to receive the same promises that were made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Answer: Exactly. Now, consider Joseph Smith’s testimony alongside that of Isaiah: “What was the object of gathering the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world? . . . 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.”³

In the context of a revelation dealing with the building of the temple in Nauvoo, the Lord said:

How shall your washings be acceptable unto me, except ye perform them in a house which you have built to my name?

For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was.

Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipals, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name. (D&C 124:37–39)

Doctrine and Covenants 84 gives us the best understanding of what was involved at the time of Moses. It tells us that without the ordinances and authority of the priesthood, no man could see God. Remember that Moses had to be translated to enter his presence. Our text reads thus:

For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fullness of his glory.

Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;

And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel. (D&C 84:22–26)

Question: So if I understand these texts correctly, they are telling us that what was to take place at Sinai prior to the children of Israel making their epic journey to their holy land was the same thing that took place in the early history of the Church in this dispensation?

Answer: It is the same story all over again. The one story is but the type and shadow of the other. Thus to those of our day, the Lord says,

Behold, I say unto you, the redemption of Zion must needs come by power;

Therefore, I will raise up unto my people a man, who shall lead them like as Moses led the children of Israel.

For ye are the children of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham, and ye must needs be led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched-out arm.

And as your fathers were led at the first, even so shall the redemption of Zion be. (D&C 103:16–18)

Question: I thought the gathering of Israel centered in her rightful descendants being given the lands that had been promised to their progenitors. You are telling me that the gathering centers in their returning to the covenants of salvation?

Answer: Yes; let me show you how the revelations of the Restoration teach this doctrine. In Doctrine and Covenants 39, we have an account of the Lord speaking to a Baptist minister by the name of James Covill. The Lord tells him that he needs to be baptized. “And if thou do this, I have prepared thee for a greater work. Thou shalt preach the fulness of my gospel, which I have sent forth in these last days, *the covenant which I have sent forth to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel*” (D&C 39:11; emphasis added). The point here is that to gather Israel is to baptize Israel, wherein they turn to Christ, taking his name upon them.

In Doctrine and Covenants 137 we find a revelation in which Joseph Smith saw Father Adam, Abraham, his own parents, and his brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom. Joseph understood that the vision foretold what could be, for both his father and mother were still living. Nevertheless, Joseph was surprised to see Alvin in the celestial kingdom because he had died before John the Baptist had come to restore the authority to baptize, and thus Alvin had not participated in that ordinance. It is in this revelation that Joseph learns that those who died without hearing the gospel in this life can hear it taught in the world of the spirits. Note the language Joseph uses to express his surprise on seeing Alvin in this vision: “[I] marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had *set his hand to gather Israel the second time*, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins” (D&C 137:6, emphasis added).

Question: So you are saying that to be gathered is to return to covenants, to return to Christ, and only then to return to lands of inheritance?

Answer: You have just summarized the testimony of prophets in the Book of Mormon. Nephi expressed the principle thus: “For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; 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 Nephi 30:2).

Question: So who has claim to the lands promised to Abraham’s seed?

Answer: I will answer your question with the words of Abraham himself: “But I, Abraham, and Lot, my brother’s son, prayed unto the Lord, and the Lord appeared unto me, and said unto me: Arise, and take Lot with thee; for I have purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name in a strange land which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession, *when they hearken to my voice*” (Abraham 2:6; emphasis added). Only those who hearken to the voice of the Lord and keep the covenants we have referenced ever had or ever will have any claim from God to a land of inheritance.

Question: So what is the doctrine of the scattering of Israel?

Answer: In ancient times, when Israel turned from Christ and broke her covenants, she lost the right to a land of inheritance, it being a seal or token of the covenant; she was then scattered among the nations of the earth. Prophecy repeatedly foretold that Israel would be scattered among all the nations of the earth, and that scattering continues to this day.

We as a Church have been commissioned to gather scattered Israel, which we do by sending out missionaries to declare Christ and to invite all who believe to be baptized. When appropriate, those baptized are invited to gather with the Saints as they did in Kirtland, Nauvoo, and the Rocky Mountains during pioneer days. This is so that they can receive the full blessings of the temple. Now that the Church is in a position to take temples to the ends of the earth, members of the Church in foreign lands are asked to stay in their homelands and build up Zion there.

Question: Does this apply in the same way to the lost tribes?

Answer: Yes. The plan of salvation is the same for all alike.

Question: This seems to suggest that the lost tribes are lost *spiritually* rather than *physically*. Would that be correct?

Answer: Yes. They are lost in the same sense that the children of Israel were lost when Moses went to them—not in the sense that they have no knowledge of their longitude and latitude, that they cannot find themselves

on a map, or that they cannot find a road that will lead them back to civilization. They are lost in the sense that they do not know what promises were made to their fathers. They do not know the saving truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they do not know where the truth is to be found.

Question: What were the promises that were made to their fathers?

Answer: We know these promises as the Abrahamic covenant. This is what was restored by the Elias from Abraham's day to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple. It is the power and authority to perform eternal marriage. When a couple is married in the temple, they, like Abraham, receive the promise that they will have seed that is as countless as the sands of the sea or the stars of the heaven. This is the promise of the continuation of the family unit throughout the endless expanses of eternity.

Abraham was promised that his seed would hold the priesthood and be the missionaries that would take the gospel to all other nations. This is why Joseph and Oliver were told that in their seed all generations after them would be blessed. This promise is extended to all who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who wrote more on this subject than perhaps any of our latter-day leaders, said: "The crowning blessings of the gospel are received in temples, in holy sanctuaries apart from the world, in the places where only the faithful assemble. It is in temples—whether they be the portable tabernacle of testimony used by Moses, or the magnificent wonder of the world built by Solomon, or the temples of the latter days—that the saints receive the mysteries of godliness. It is in these holy houses that faithful couples enter into the ordinance of celestial marriage through which they become parties to the Abrahamic covenant, the covenant of eternal increase, the covenant that in them and in their seed all generations shall be blessed."⁴

Question: What is the sealing power restored by Elijah?

Answer: Elijah restored the authority by which all gospel ordinances—including baptism, the endowment, and eternal marriage—are made valid and binding on earth and in heaven. This is the authority which enables us to seal both the living and the dead.

Question: So how would you summarize the message that we have been commissioned as a people to take to the ends of the earth relative to the gathering?

Answer: In Enoch's great panoramic vision of the future history of the earth, the Lord described the great events of our dispensation in a single

sentence. It is the story of the gathering of Israel: “And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem” (Moses 7:62). The idea of righteousness coming down out of heaven certainly embraces the First Vision and the Restoration of the gospel at the hands of angels. Truth coming forth out of the earth is the Book of Mormon. These events testify of Christ and his Resurrection and the Resurrection of all men. These, then, appear to be the great doctrines destined to gather Israel.

Surely Jeremiah referred to these same events when he penned these words:

O Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.

Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods?

Therefore, behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The Lord. (Jeremiah 16:19–21)

Once again people will hear of a God who speaks, of a God of miracles; they will discover the God of heaven in contrast to a god concocted in the councils of men.

The Book of Mormon is the stick of Joseph, written by Lehi and prophets who descended from him. It was written to gather their posterity back to Christ and the covenants of salvation. In the preface of the Book of Mormon, Moroni states that the purpose of the book is “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.” Missionaries take the book to the posterity of these ancient prophets, and from it their descendents learn who they are and of the promises the Lord made to their fathers. Thus those who were “lost” to the truth and system of salvation are found.

Nephi describes the matter thus: “And the Lord will set his hand again the second time to restore his people from their *lost and fallen* state. Wherefore,

he will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men” (2 Nephi 25:17; emphasis added). To describe someone as being in a “lost and fallen state” does not convey the idea that they are hiding under the polar ice cap. What it does convey is that they have lost the knowledge of the covenants God made with their fathers and the knowledge of salvation as found in Christ, who is the Messenger of the Covenant and the Holy One of Israel.

Question: So what does the Book of Mormon tell us about the latter-day gathering?

Answer: Nephi’s younger brother Jacob, having been instructed by an angel of the Lord, taught much on this subject. He tells us that after the time of Christ, Israel would be scattered again because of their rejection of Christ but gathered when they returned to him in the last days. “Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 6:11). And again he said, “But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:7).

Here is the testimony of Nephi:

And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things. (2 Nephi 25:16)

Question: So the Book of Mormon prophets make it clear that scattered Israel, even in her scattered state, still has claim to the promises made by the Father. Do the Book of Mormon prophets specifically say that they must join the Church to obtain such promises?

Answer: Yes. Jacob said, “And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel—That he has spoken unto the Jews, by

the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be *restored to the true church* and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise” (2 Nephi 9:1–2; emphasis added).

Christ talked at length about this doctrine at the temple in Bountiful. His remarks centered on the necessity of those who were lost repenting and hearing his words. “But if they will repent and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will *establish my church* among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance” (3 Nephi 21:22; emphasis added).

Speaking of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, Christ said, “Therefore it shall come to pass that whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, which the Father shall cause him [meaning Joseph Smith] to bring forth unto the Gentiles, and shall give unto him power that he shall bring them forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said) they shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant” (3 Nephi 21:11). Here Christ is saying that those in the last days who reject his words found in the Book of Mormon and thus deny the testimony of Joseph Smith, the great revelator of Christ for this dispensation, will not, as Moses prophesied, be numbered among those who have rightful claim to the blessings of the covenant.

The Lord told Jeremiah, “I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might” (Jeremiah 16:21). Those who reject this message—that God is a God of miracles, a God who speaks, a God who sends angels to the earth, and who has restored his ancient covenant—will not find themselves in the house of the Lord, and they will thereby be cut off from among the people of the covenant.

Question: There certainly seems to be a lot of confusion about the return of the ten tribes. Is the gathering of Israel and the return of the ten tribes one event or two?

Answer: “The gathering of Israel is one thing,” stated Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “the return of the Ten Tribes to a specified place is another; and Moses gave to men in our day the keys and power to perform both labors.”⁵

Question: Relative to the return of the ten tribes, what are we to understand about the promise that their prophets will lead them?

Answer: Again, Elder McConkie has responded:

Their prophets! Who are they? Are they to be holy men called from some unknown place and people? Are they prophets unbeknown to the presiding officers of “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth”? (D&C 1:30.) Perish the thought! The President of the Church, who holds the keys to lead the Ten Tribes from the nations of the north wherein they now reside, holds also the keys of salvation for all men. There are not two true churches on earth, only one; there are not two gospels or two plans of salvation, only one; there are not two competing organizations, both having divine approval, only one. “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:13.) God forbid. Their prophets are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They are stake presidents and bishops and quorum presidents who are appointed to guide and direct the destinies of their stakes and wards and quorums.⁶

Question: Do we know anything about the highway that is spoken of as being “cast up” in the great deep upon which the ten tribes are to return?

Answer: The language comes from Isaiah; we will let him respond:

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there;

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighings shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:8–10)

Isaiah was speaking of the straight and narrow path, not a physical highway built of asphalt or cement.

Question: Does this text indicate why the tribes will return?

Answer: It appears that they will come to receive the blessings of the temple. Consider this language: “And there shall they fall down and be crowned with glory, even in Zion, by the hands of the servants of the Lord, even the children of Ephraim. And they shall be filled with songs of everlasting joy” (D&C 133:32–33).

Question: Have the ten tribes been scattered throughout all the nations of the earth or have they remained together as a people?

Answer: We have a host of scriptural texts that tell us that all twelve of the tribes of Israel have been scattered among all the nations of the earth. Mormon stated the matter thus:

And as surely as the Lord liveth, will he gather in from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob, who are scattered abroad upon all the face of the earth.

And as he hath covenanted with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them.

And then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and then shall they be gathered in from the four quarters of the earth unto their own lands, from whence they have been dispersed; yea, as the Lord liveth so shall it be. Amen. (3 Nephi 5:24–26)

Scriptural language cannot be more emphatic than this. As both an introduction and a conclusion, Mormon states that if God lives, what he has said must be true. He tells us that all the tribes have been scattered among all nations and that they are to come to a knowledge of the covenant that God made with their fathers and to a knowledge of Christ before they can be returned to their lands of inheritance. It appears that the ten tribes were together in various groups and were visited by Christ after he visited the Nephites; but like the Nephites, they became “a lost and fallen people” and were scattered.

To capture and summarize the primary message of the Book of Mormon, Moroni paraphrases a charge given by Isaiah to the scattered remnants of Israel in the last days: “Awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled” (Moroni 10:31).

Having so said, Moroni then invites Israel in her lost and fallen state to return to the Church. He says:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, *which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins*, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32–33; emphasis added)

Isaiah said, “Put on thy strength, O Zion” (Isaiah 52:1). In a revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants, the question is asked, “What is meant by the command in Isaiah, 52d chapter, 1st verse, which saith: Put on thy Strength, O Zion—and to what people had Isaiah reference to?” (D&C 113:7). The stated answer is that “he had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage; also to return to that power which she had lost” (D&C 113:8). This clearly places the whole story of the gathering of Israel in the context of an event that is to take place under the direction of the priesthood. The birthright to the priesthood, it also notes, still rests with the scattered remnant of Abraham’s seed.

So it is that we return to the events that took place April 3, 1836, in the Kirtland Temple as recorded in D&C 110. Following the appearance of Christ to accept that edifice as his holy house came Moses, Elias, and Elijah, each to restore his distinctive priesthood keys. The order of their coming is a type—it represents perfectly the history of the house of Israel. First came Moses to restore the keys by which the great message of the Restoration would be declared to Israel, lost and scattered to the ends of the earth. She was to be gathered again to the covenant of her fathers, specifically and particularly the Abrahamic covenant. Then came an Elias from Abraham’s day to restore the authority by which a man and a woman are sealed together for time and all eternity and are granted all the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then came Elijah, with the keys by which all gospel ordinances are sealed. The order is perfect, the doctrine sweet, and the way sure.

Question: If this covenant embraces the blessings of salvation, the salvation is a family affair. After the days of Abraham, no one could be saved in the kingdom of God unless they held a place in his family. Is this the case?

Answer: It most certainly is. Salvation *is* a family affair. We cannot, as those of the sectarian world would suppose, obtain it separately and singly. Salvation, meaning exaltation, requires the eternal union in marriage of a man and a woman (see D&C 131). That marriage must be performed by the sealing power restored to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836 (see D&C 110:14–16).

It should also be noted that Joseph Smith taught that those not naturally of Abraham would be adopted as his seed when they received the gift of the Holy Ghost after baptism.⁷ Elder McConkie summarizes the whole matter thus:

What, then, is involved in the gathering of Israel? The gathering of Israel consists in believing and accepting and living in harmony with all that the Lord once offered his ancient chosen people. It consists of having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of repenting, of being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and of keeping the commandments of God. It consists of believing the gospel, joining the Church and coming into the kingdom. It consists of receiving the holy priesthood, being endowed in holy places with power from on high, and receiving all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the ordinance of celestial marriage. And it may also consist of assembling to an appointed place or land of worship.⁸

I conclude with an extract from the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple. The Prophet importuned the heavens, pleading, “May all the scattered remnants of Israel, who have been driven to the ends of the earth, come to a knowledge of the truth, believe in the Messiah, and be redeemed from oppression, and rejoice before thee” (D&C 109:67). To this we would but say, “Amen,” with the appended plea that we might play our rightful part in this the greatest drama of earth’s history. **RE**

Notes

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 83.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 515.
3. *Teachings*, 307–8.
4. McConkie, *New Witness*, 539.
5. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 322.
6. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 325–26.
7. See *Teachings*, 149–50; see also Abraham 2:10.
8. McConkie, *New Witness*, 515.