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Scripture Note: Doctrine and Covenants 125

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On 19 Jan uary 1841, the Lord gave a revelation to Joseph Smith rega rdi ng the building of the Nauvoo Temple and issued a call for the faithful Saints to gather to assist in the building of this sacred edifice (see D&C 124:25-55). With the emphasis on the gathering to Nau•voo and the building of the tem ple, the Iowa Saints on the eastern banks of the Mississippi were wondering if they should move across the river to Nauvoo. Therefore, in March 1841, the Prophet Joseph Smith posed the question, "What is the will of the Lord concerning the saints i n the Territmy of Iowa r" (D&C 125:1). The Lord responded, "Let them build up a city unto my na me upon the land opposite the city of Na u voo, and let the name of Zarahemla be tumed upon i t" (D&C 125:3). This response stirs the question of why the Lord specifically asked the Iowa Saints to build a city named Zarahemla.

The Lord, who kt1ows all things as they are continually present before His eyes (see D&C 38:2), appears to have deliberately used the name *Zarahemla* and then left His covenant people to ponder over the mea ni ng of the word. A linguistic and historical investigation suggests an interesting possibility. Hebrew lex.icons reveal that d1e noun *zera* may be translated "seed, offspring, or descendant ." These sources explain that the root *&-m-l* i n d1e Hebrew language may be translated as meaning to "have compassion on" or "to spare." A nou n form from d1e root *&-m-l (&emlah)* is used in the Hebrew Bible and may be translated as "sparing," "compassion," or "mercy."' Thus, the com bination of words may be translated as "seed of mercy" or perhaps "seed of the spared."

The proposed meaning of *Zarahernla* as a city of the "seed of the spared" recalls the imagery of ancient: covenant: peoples. Even if the etymology of the word is hidden, the historical background of the place Zarahemla provides clues to the Lord's usage of the word. For example, when Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar slew the sons of Zedekiah, he killed all except Mulek, a Jew, who escaped to America (see 2 Kings 25:7; Hela man 8:21). Mulek had a descendant named Zarahemla (see Mosiah 25:2). Mosiah was warned to flee the land of Nephi and go to the land of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12-15), where the seed of Mulek and Zarahemla dwelt-or, in other words, the "seed of the spared." Furthermore, there the Nephites met not only the Jewish Mulekites but also the last survivor of the Jaredi ties, Coriantumr, who had been spared for this meeting (see Omni 1:21).

Perhaps this divinely appoin ted name was given as a reminder to the Saints in Iowa tha t they had been spared from the hand of exter-mination in Missouri and also from the grip of death through priesthood miracles that were perform ed in Montrose, Iowa (Zara-hemla region), in the 1839 summer of sickness.[2] **liD**

Notes

1. See usages of this root in Genesis 19:16 and Isaiah 63:9 in the Hebrew Bible. See also Francis D. Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebre111 anrl English Lexicon of the Old Tcstammt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 328; William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrc JJJ anrl Ammaic Lexicon of the Old Tcstament (Grand* Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 108; Ludwig Koehler and vValter Baumgartner, *The H eb1·eJ1J and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, CD-ROM Edition,* trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden , The Netherlands: Brill, 1994-2000).

2. . For an overview of the miraculous display of healing in Montrose, Iowa, see *Church History in the Fnlness of Times: The Hist01'J' of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Sn , 1989), 217-19.