

Of Zion and Babylon

THE NATURE OF ZION

All my life I have shied away from these disturbing and highly unpopular—even offensive—themes. But I cannot do so any longer, because in my old age I have taken to reading the scriptures and there have had it forced upon my reluctant attention that, from the time of Adam to the present day, Zion has been pitted against Babylon, and the name of the game has always been money—“power and gain.”

“What Is Zion?” *CWHN* 9:58

Zion is a constant in time and place. It belongs to the order of the eternities. We’re not making Zion here, but we’re preparing the ground to receive it. As the Lord says, “My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom” (D&C 136:31). We must be prepared to receive this glory; we don’t produce it ourselves. We must be ready, so that we won’t die of shock when we get it.

“Our Glory or Our Condemnation,” *CWHN* 9:4

The interest of the Latter-day Saints in the city of Enoch is not simply a literary or even a scientific one. It is historic and prophetic. The city of Enoch is very much our concern. As we read of Enoch’s community, a chorus of persistent questions hums in the background: Just how literally is all this to be taken? How are we to imagine the almost unimaginable events of that far-off time?

We cannot dodge such questions, since we are committed to forming as quickly as possible the closest possible partnership with that society.

“A Strange Thing in the Land,” *CWHN* 2:255

The two words most commonly used to describe Zion are *beauty* and *joy*, and the same two words most often relate to heaven and paradise. Beauty comes first, for beauty is whatever gives joy.

“Our Glory or Our Condemnation,” *CWHN* 9:7

[From an old book of Adam, a Syriac text discovered in 1819, translated in 1856]: Zion is a place “without discord or dissent,” where angels wise and gentle, without malice or deceit, come and go on cheerful assignments. There is

a perfect agreement among the worlds, each having its particular glory, and all the inhabitants share their knowledge freely with each other. The worlds average one million *parasangs* (a *parasang* is about four miles) apart, and through the people's common knowledge and their common God, the Lord, they share a common glory. They are all incorruptible, without death. They do not grow old or wear out. Their nature is unailing. They cannot be numbered, and their number is unchanging.

Each of the worlds is a Zion, though each is different, for, most delightful of all, there is [no] monotony. There is a single universal culture which, as described in our own scriptures, "shall come forth out of all the creations which I have made" (Moses 7:64)—the culture of Zion.

Yet variety (as Brigham Young often noted) was the very keynote to that culture. . . . "Magnificent buildings beside tranquil seas, flowing springs of life-giving water, everything vibrates with joy; the wants of the people are few, they move about through the air by the power of flight." They are not overly concerned with technology because their technological knowledge has taken them far beyond our clumsy contraptions. "They are at home with the firmaments, with the 'Jordans' (a special term referring to ordinances), with groves, with kings, with spirits; their beauty is within them and shines out as if they were pure crystal. Force flows through them from the king as they persevere in prayer and in song." (It was a demanding thing; the celestial spirits had to work at it). "They study and meditate constantly. They exhale a fragrance of divine happiness; each is more remarkable than the other, each more illustrious."

"Comments," 26-27

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Awareness of their heavenly parentage sets Israel apart *culturally* as well as doctrinally.

Their ordinances set them apart too. Every ancient civilization is hierocentric; it is the temple that sets it apart from the rest of the world. . . .

What is the gospel culture composed of? Everything good. Like patriotism, it is more inclusive than exclusive. Its peculiarity . . . is a seal set upon whatever it finds desirable, rendering that thing also peculiar. It is the combination, the structure, that is peculiar, not the separate elements.

Our thirteenth Article of Faith sums it up beautifully; we accept everything we put our stamp on. Can anything be more universally appealing, more desirable for the whole human race, than being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous (that's inner culture acceptable to any society), and in doing good to all men? Moreover, we *seek* after every good thing, we are in the market for everything good.

Articles six (dealing with organization, the same organization as the primitive Church), seven (dealing with the spiritual gifts that get the Mormons apart from the rest of the world at this time), and ten, especially (looking forward to another kind of secular environment), all have very strong cultural implications. "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel [the same thing we have already been referring to] and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory" (Article of Faith 10). We shall see all these things. These are very special things. . . .

Now, not only is there a single, central celestial culture reserved for the Saints, but such culture has also served as the model for the greatest peaks of human civilization as a whole. Those golden ages, all too few and far between, that have illuminated the long night of history have, I believe, all drawn their nourishment from the memories of lost Zions.

“Comments,” 23-24

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When all the accidentals and incidentals are stripped away, what remains that is quintessentially Zion? Buildings, walls, streets, and gates—even of gold and jasper—do not make Zion; neither do throngs in shining robes. Zion is not a Cecil B. DeMille production; the properties do not make the play, no matter how splendid they may be.

What makes Zion? God has given us the perfect definition: Zion is the pure in heart—the pure in heart, not merely the pure in appearance.

It is not a society or religion of forms and observances, of pious gestures and precious mannerisms. It is strictly a condition of the heart. Above all, Zion is pure, which means “not mixed with any impurities, unalloyed.” It is all Zion and nothing else. It is not achieved wherever a heart is pure or where two or three are pure, because it is all pure—it is a society, a community, and an environment into which no unclean thing can enter. . . .

It is not even pure people in a dirty environment, or pure people with a few impure ones among them; it is the perfectly pure in a perfectly pure environment.

“What Is Zion?” *CWHN* 9:26-27

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Babylon and Zion cannot mix in any degree. A Zion that makes concessions is no longer Zion.

“What Is Zion?” *CWHN* 9:30

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The “Mahan principle” is a frank recognition that the world’s economy is based on the exchange of life for property. This is most apparent, of course, in time of war—a Catch-22. Today the biggest business in the world is the selling of deadly weapons by all to all, with the advantage going to the most efficient killing machines. Not long ago it was drugs, but it is all the same in a descending scale of accountability, where none is free from guilt: the hit man, soldier of fortune, weapons dealer, manufacturer, plundering whole species for raw materials, destroying life in both processing them and getting them (by pollution, dangerous work conditions, and so on), and by distributing them (additives, preservatives). The fearful processes of industry shorten and impoverish life at every level, from forced labor to poisonous air and water. This is the world’s economy, for Satan is “the prince of this world.”

“Law of Consecration,” *CWHN* 9:436-37

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In order to reconcile the ways of Babylon with the ways of Zion, it has been necessary to circumvent the inconvenient barriers of scripture and conscience by the use of the tried and true device of *rhetoric*, defined by Plato as the art of making true things seem false and false things seem true by the use of words. This invaluable art has, since the time of Cain, invested the ways of Babylon with an air of high purpose, solid virtue, and impeccable respectability.

“What Is Zion?” CWHN 9:45

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Every rhetorician knows that his most effective weapons by far are *labels*. He can demolish the opposition with simple and devastating labels such as communism, socialism, or atheism, popery, militarism, or Mormonism, or give his clients’ worst crimes a religious glow with noble labels such as integrity, old-fashioned honesty, tough-mindedness, or free competitive enterprise. “You can get away with anything if you just wave the flag,” a business partner of my father once told me. He called that patriotism.

But the label game reaches its all-time peak of skill and effrontery in the Madison Avenue master stroke of pasting the lovely label of *Zion* on all the most typical institutions of Babylon: Zion’s Loans, Zion’s Real Estate, Zion’s Used Cars, Zion’s Jewelry, Zion’s Supermart, Zion’s Auto Wrecking, Zion’s Outdoor Advertising, Zion’s Gunshop, Zion’s Land and Mining, Zion’s Development, Zion’s Securities. All that is quintessentially Babylon now masquerades as Zion.

“What Is Zion?” CWHN 9:53-54

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Longhairs, beards, and necklaces, LSD and rock, Big Sur and Woodstock come and go, but Babylon is always there: rich, respectable, immovable, with its granite walls and steel vaults, its bronze gates, its onyx trimmings and marble floors (all borrowed from ancient temples, for these are our modern temples) and its bullet-proof glass—the awesome symbols of total security. Keeping her orgies decently private, she presents a front of unalterable propriety to all.

“What Is Zion?” CWHN 9:54-55

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Every step in the direction of increasing one’s personal holdings is a step away from Zion.

“What Is Zion?” CWHN 9:37

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God recognizes only one justification for seeking wealth, and that is with the express intent of helping the poor.

“What Is Zion?” CWHN 9:53

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The first rule of economics is that everyone should provide, as far as possible, for himself. The second, which receives vastly more attention in the scriptures, is that man's wants are few. "Having food and raiment," says Paul, "let us therewith be content" (1 Timothy 6:8). . . . To take more than we need is to take what does not belong to us.

"What Is Zion?" CWHN 9:49-50

The treasures of the earth are merely to provide us with room and board while we are here at school. [They are] "made for the comfort of the creature, not for his adoration," [says Brigham Young]. "They are made to sustain and preserve the body while procuring the knowledge and wisdom that pertain to God and his kingdom, in order that we may preserve ourselves, and live forever in his presence."

"Educating the Saints," 233

The Zoramites . . . had many good qualities; they were wonderful people. But they misdirected their virtues, and that made them all the more vicious. Alma found them to be the wickedest people in the world . . . because with all their virtues, they set their hearts upon riches. Alma couldn't stand it. He couldn't look at it anymore. It hurt too much. . . .

"Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold their hearts are set upon them" (Alma 32:28).

"Gifts," CWHN 9:103

Paradoxically, we are learning to live *without* so that we can learn to live *with* things. . . . As long as we go on accumulating stuff in this life, we are playing the devil's game, for "there is no such thing as a man being truly rich until he has power over death, hell, the grave, and him that hath the power of death, which is the devil." We will have a right to do as we please with our own only "when we can speak to the earth—to the native elements in boundless space, and say to them—'Be ye organized, and planted here, or there, and stay until I command you hence.'"

"Brigham Young on the Environment," 15

In Zion you labor, to be sure, but not for money, and not for yourself (2 Nephi 26:31), which is the exact opposite of our present version of the work ethic.

"What Is Zion?" CWHN 9:48

The body serves us best when we are least aware of it, and so with money.

“Gifts,” *CWHN* 9:108

Of course, the man who devotes himself to the tiring routines of business should be rewarded, but should all others be penalized who do not engage in that particular line of work? . . . Our gifts and talents are to be put at the disposal of the human race, not used to put the race at our disposal.

“What Is Zion?” *CWHN* 9:51-52

There are over half a million millionaires in the United States today. How many good artists? How many good poets? How many good musicians and composers? Half a dozen? Maybe two or three. We’d be flattered if there were that many in the country, yet we have millionaires by the hundreds “*They deal with reality.*”

Letters to Smoother, Etc., 112

Money gets quick results, and the effects of newly acquired riches are almost instantaneous. At once the happy recipient of a big promotion is expected to change his lifestyle, move to a better part of town, join different clubs, send his children to different schools, even change his church affiliation for a more fashionable one, or drop an intended bride for one more acceptable to the president’s wife and her exalted circle. The instant pride of the foolish milkmaid in the prospects of a new affluence was the same ambition that made a monster of the noble and generous Macbeth overnight. History, literature, and folklore are full of the fatal gold—the deadly rings, the dragon’s treasure, the golden fleece, etc.—that brings quick and inevitable destruction on those that seek and find it. No, my friends, the Book of Mormon does not exaggerate either the relentless efficiency or the speed with which wealth corrupts all those who set their hearts upon riches and the things of the world.

“Freemen and King-men,” *CWHN* 8:365

Every book I have ever written I have always said, if there is any doubt about it I don’t care if it is never published. There is only one thing they censor anyway. You can say anything you want about anything but you must never, never, never say anything disrespectful about money. Even if it were a verse of scripture, they would cut it right out.

“Nibley Talks about Contemporary Issues,” 14

Samuel the Lamanite sets forth the interesting rule that when the economy becomes the main and engrossing concern of a society—or in the routine Book of Mormon phrase, when “they begin to set their hearts upon their

riches”—the economy will self-destruct. . . . Note well that sequence of folly: first we are well-pleased with ourselves because of our wealth, then comes the game of status and prestige, leading to competitive maneuvers, hatred, dirty tricks, and finally the ultimate solution. Where wealth guarantees respectability, principles melt away as the criminal element rises to the top.

“Freemen and King-men,” *CWHN* 8:349

CONSECRATION

Since as countless hymns inform us, God owns the earth and all that is in it, any payments made by men to him are the purest token payments, given not because he needs them but as a gesture acknowledging his ownership.

“Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” *CWHN* 10:59

[The law of consecration], the consummation of the laws of obedience and sacrifice, is the threshold of the celestial kingdom, the last and hardest requirement made of men in this life. It is much harder to keep than the rules of chastity and sobriety, for those temptations subside with advancing age, while desire for the security and status of wealth only increase and grow through the years.

“How Firm a Foundation!” *CWHN* 9:168

Since World War II, it seems that we have been steadily converging with Babylon, while diverging from some of the old teachings. Latter-day Saint children of the rising generation have never heard of their Guardian Angel, or of the recording of our every deed in a book of heaven; they were never told as we were children that “it is a sin to kill a fly,” and have never heard that satirical little verse which General Authorities used to quote in stake conference: “Money, O Money, thy praises I’ll sing! Thou art my Savior, my God and my King!” That would be quite unthinkable today, a kind of sacrilege. Because some of the old teachings are still preserved in the temple, certain anomalies appear to the younger generation. A bishop told me this month that people coming to renew their recommends when they are asked whether they keep all their covenants frequently answer no, explaining that they do not keep the law of consecration. A General Authority recently told me that the important thing is to observe the law of consecration “spiritually.” Yes indeed, say I, and the law of tithing also—how much better to observe *it* spiritually than in a gross, material way—a great comfort to the rich. And yet the express purpose of both those laws is to test the degree of our attachment to material things, not to provide an exercise in “spiritual” semantics.

“But What Kind of Work?” *CWHN* 9:279-80

There is no point in arguing which other system comes closest to the law of consecration, since I excluded all other systems when I opted for the real thing.

“How Firm a Foundation!” *CWHN* 9:164

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The express purpose of the law of consecration is the building up of Zion; it is God’s plan, and his alone, for doing that. We do not wait until Zion is here to observe it; it is rather the means of bringing us nearer to Zion.

“Breakthroughs I Would Like to See,” *CWHN* 9:390

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Progressive testing takes place along the way in either direction; the same tests in every dispensation and generation mark the progress of the people of God. (1) Do you, first of all, agree to do things *his way* rather than *your way*—to follow the law of God? (2) If so, will you be *obedient* to him, no matter what he asks of you? (3) Will you, specifically, be willing to *sacrifice* anything he asks you for? (4) Will you at all times behave morally and soberly? (5) Finally, if God asks you to part with your worldly possessions by *consecrating* them all to his work, will you give his own back to him to be distributed as he sees fit, not as *you think wise*?

“We Will Still Weep for Zion,” *CWHN* 9:342

PREPARING FOR ZION

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Quite literally, “Heaven is our destination.” This idea is clearly brought forward in our new home evening manual with its theme “A Bit of Heaven.” That is more than a sentimental Irish tag (though we in the Church today do seem to have an incurable appetite for trite and sentimental “kitsch”). It is an invitation actually to model our domestic life on the celestial order, as God commanded the Saints to do from the first: “And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself” (D&C 105:5).

“Our Glory or Our Condemnation,” *CWHN* 9:2

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The Word of Wisdom is necessary for unity and cooperation. It’s a form of common sense and honesty. Drugs, luxuries, self-indulgence, fashions and wealth: they all go together. The Word of Wisdom is simply a warning to beware of the world, and although it is a temporal revelation, the keeping of it will help us to keep the more eternal covenants we have made with our Heavenly Father.

“The Word of Wisdom,” 6

It is always the spirit that counts. The celebrations in which everyone is generous and open-handed in recognition of God's bounty are joyous affairs. Sons, daughters, servants, strangers, orphans, and widows must all come together and rejoice and be happy as one big happy *family*. That is the spirit in which this must be done, and that is the spirit of the law of consecration and the United Order.

"How to Get Rich," *CWHN* 9:192

By a law of natural decline, an entropy from light to dark, birth to death, gods to demons, and heroes to ordinary men, the world has come to its present state. Nevertheless, we are under obligation to realize on earth a copy of that higher order in which all men are brothers.

"The Utopians," *CWHN* 9:492