

D&C LESSON #27

# “THEY MUST NEEDS BE CHASTENED AND TRIED, EVEN AS ABRAHAM”

By Ted L. Gibbons

**INTRODUCTION:** Zion is a place, but it is much more than that. The truth is that Zion is a place only because things must be located someplace. Unless it is filled with Zion people, it is something else. Contemplate the following comment:

. . . the redemption of Zion is more than the purchase or recovery of lands, the building of cities, or even the founding of nations. It is the conquest of the heart, the subjugation of the soul, the sanctifying of the flesh, the purifying and ennobling of the passions. Greater is he who subdues himself, who captures and maintains the citadel of his own soul, than he who, misnamed conqueror, fills the world with the roar of drums, the thunder of cannon, the lightning of swords and bayonets, overturns and sets up kingdoms, lives and reigns a king, yet wears to the grave the fetters of unbridled lust, and dies the slave of sin. (Orson F. Whitney: *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 1945, pp. 65, 66)

As we consider the efforts of the Latter-day Saints to establish Zion in Missouri, and the attendant problems and apparent failures, and as we consider the implications of those failures as they relate to our own desires to create and inhabit a Zion society, remember these profound insights from Elder Whitney.

## **1. THE SAINTS SETTLE IN JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI, AND ARE LATER DRIVEN OUT.**

Monday morning, August 1, 1831, Joseph Smith received a revelation in Missouri. The Lord had called several elders to journey to Missouri and had

promised that if they were faithful, he would reveal the location of the land of their inheritance (D&C 52:5). They had also been promised that they would be honored in laying the foundation of and bearing record of the land where the Zion of God would be erected (D&C 58:7). In D&C 57, the Lord affirmed that Missouri was “the land which I have appointed for the gathering of the saints.” (D&C 57:1) It was the “land of promise” and it was also the “place for the city of Zion.” (D&C 52:2) Independence was the “center place” and, not far away far away from the courthouse was “a spot for the temple.” (D&C 57:3)

Twelve days after he designated the center place and the spot for the temple, the Lord, in his goodness, gave a warning about the future, a declaration that things would not proceed in the way that church members might then be expecting. His words implied that the Land of Zion must be built up in the Lord’s time and in the Lord’s way, and by people prepared to live the laws of a Zion society. Even though most of those assembled in Jackson County that morning had traveled hundreds of miles at great sacrifice in obedience to the Lord’s command, and with the hope of Zion burning in their hearts, the Lord cautioned them that tribulations would come before the dream of Zion became a reality.

Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation. For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand. Remember this, which I tell you before, that you may lay it to heart, and receive that which is to follow. (D&C 58:3-5)

“Much tribulation “ seems an apt description of the next seven years of church history. That tribulation in Missouri began with conflict in and expulsion from Jackson County. But in the beginning it must have been a delight for church members to realize that they were standing on sacred ground—a place for a city of Zion and the erection of the New Jerusalem. With appropriate care and great excitement, members began to gather in Missouri. By the end of 1832 there were over 800 Saints located in five branches in Jackson County. The land was fertile, and inexpensive.

Joseph appointed seven high priests to preside over the land, and during the years of 1831-1838 there were two centers of church government and population: Kirtland and Missouri.

But problems soon appeared. One Missouri publication described events in this way:

In the spring of 1833, the Mormons numbered fifteen hundred in Jackson County. They had nearly taken possession of Independence, and were rapidly extending their settlements. They grew bolder as they grew stronger, and daily proclaimed to the older settlers that the Lord had given them the whole land of Missouri; that bloody wars would extirpate all other sects from the country; that it would be "*one gore of blood from the Mississippi to the border,*" and that the few who were left unslain would be the servants of the saints, who would own all the property in the country.

At the same time they fell into equal extravagance regarding the spiritual things, and declared themselves "*kings and priests of the Most High God,*" and all the other religious sects as reprobates, the creation of the devil designed to speedy destruction, and that all but themselves were doomed, cast-away Gentiles, worse than the heathen and not fit to live. They notified all "*Gentiles*" who were building new houses and opening new farms that it was needless, that the Lord would never allow them to enjoy the fruits of their labor and that in a few months the "*Gentiles*" would have neither name nor place in Missouri. (*History of Jackson County, Missouri*, Union Historical Co., Kansas City, 1831, p. 206ff)

Certainly this quote contains unconscionable exaggerations, but there must be enough truth in it to offer some idea of the concerns of the Missourians about the influx of Saints into the county. And these were not the only problems impeding the creation of Zion:

"Petty jealousies, covetousness, light mindedness, unbelief, and general neglect in keeping the commandments came to the

attention of the Prophet. Some people in Zion even charged Joseph Smith with 'seeking after monarchial power and authority' and said he was purposely putting off settling in Zion (see *History of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 318, 319)

In a letter written to saints in Zion, Joseph warned, "if Zion will not purify herself, [God] will seek another people . . . Repent, repent is the voice of God to Zion." (*History of the Church*, Vol 1, p. 316)

Protestant ministers in Jackson resented the Mormons who had what they perceived to be fanatical zeal and emphasis on spiritual gifts. Also, the interest of the church in the Indians as brothers and potential converts caused mistrust among the Missourians who seemed to fear and mistrust the red men across the river in the Indian Territory. In addition, fervent differences existed over the matter of slavery.

In July of 1833, the various problems coalesced into open confrontation. A gathering of 400 or 500 men challenged church leaders with a list of demands. When church members asked for three months to consider the requirements, they were given them fifteen minutes. Failure to obtain compliance with those demands turned the gathering into a mob. William Phelps' home—which was also the printing establishment—was destroyed along with most of the copies of the Book of Commandments. Edward Partridge and Charles Allen were tarred and feathered. Three days later the hostilities resumed and Church officers finally agreed to depart from Jackson county, the leaders by January and others by April of 1834.

But patience was not the dominant characteristic of the old settlers of Jackson, and between July and November, depredations abounded as persecutions increased. Finally, in November, more than 1000 Mormons were forced from their homes and to the banks of the Missouri where they awaited ferry transportation to cross into Clay County in search of safety.

Parley P. Pratt wrote this description of the scene:

*Thursday, November 7.* The shore began to be lined on both sides of the ferry with men, women and children; goods, wagons, boxes, provisions, etc., while the ferry was constantly employed; and when

night again closed upon us the cottonwood bottom had much the appearance of a camp meeting. Hundreds of people were seen in every direction, some in tents and some in the open air around their fires, while the rain descended in torrents. Husbands were inquiring for their wives, wives for their husbands; parents for children, and children for parents. Some had the good fortune to escape with their families, household goods, and some provisions; while others knew not the fate of their friends, and had lost all their goods. The scene was indescribable, and, I am sure, would have melted the hearts of any people on the earth, except our blind oppressors, and a blind and ignorant community. (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, p. 82)

## **2. THE LORD INSTRUCTS THE SAINTS WHO WERE DRIVEN FROM JACKSON COUNTY.**

When Joseph (in Kirtland) received word of the distress of his people in Missouri, he took the matter to the Lord. D&C 101 is a revelation he received in response to his petition.

The Lord gave the following reasons for the difficulties in Missouri:

- (101:2) Transgression
- (101:4,5) Saints needed to be tried and chastened even as Abraham
- (101:6) Jarrings, contentions, envying, strifes, lustful and covetous desires among them caused them to pollute their inheritance
- (101:7,8) They were slow to hearken to the Lord when things were going well, and he was slow to hearken to them in the day of their distress.

The Lord also made the following promises concerning Zion:

- (101:9) He had great compassion for his people in Missouri
- (101:9) He would not utterly cast them off but would remember mercy
- (101:10,11) The sword of his indignation would one day fall in behalf of his people
- (101:13) The scattered would be gathered
- (101:14) Mourners would be comforted
- (101:15) Martyrs would be crowned

- (101:17,20) Zion (the place) would not be moved
- (101:18) A people pure in heart would return in inherit the land

Compare the promises of the following verses with the quote in the introduction to this lesson:

And all they who suffer persecution for my name, and endure in faith, though they are called to lay down their lives for my sake yet shall they partake of all this glory.

Wherefore, fear not even unto death; for in this world your joy is not full, but in me your joy is full.

Therefore, care not for the body, neither the life of the body; but care for the soul, and for the life of the soul.

And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life (D&C 101:35-38)

The Lord here makes it clear once again that the most important matter in building Zion is not the condition of the place nor the property nor the structures, but the condition of the heart.

### **3. ZION'S CAMP IS ORGANIZED AND MARCHES TO MISSOURI.**

The Saints petitioned Gov. Dunklin of Missouri to assist them in regaining their lands, and he agreed to help if they would provide a force sufficient to protect the Saints once they were resettled in Jackson County. Joseph received word of this offer in February of 1834 and received instructions from the Lord concerning this matter:

The Lord had already alluded to the action that should be taken. In D&C 101:55, in a parable regarding the land of Missouri and the attack of enemies, the “lord of the vineyard” commanded

Go and gather together the residue of my servants, and take all the strength of mine house, which are my warriors, my young men, and they that are of middle age also among all my servants, who are

the strength of mine house, save those only whom I have appointed to tarry; And go ye straightway unto the land of my vineyard, and redeem my vineyard; for it is mine . . . (D&C 101:55)

In D&C 103 the Lord dispensed with figurative language and commanded:

Therefore let my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., say unto the strength of my house, my young men and the middle aged—Gather yourselves together unto the land of Zion, upon the land which I have bought with money that has been consecrated unto me. (D&C 103:22)

The Lord instructed Joseph to gather not more than 500 and not less than 100 for this event (see 103:30-33), and to march with them to Jackson County. This call to arms—to sacrifice and service—required the priesthood of the Church to be prepared and willing to offer the ultimate sacrifice.

Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again. And whoso is not willing to lay down his life for my sake is not my disciple. (103:27,28)

The proposed march would cover about 1000 miles in each direction. It would be a great test of faith for farmers to leave their homes and families in the middle of the summer and to comply with this command of God, knowing that they might never return.

The accounts of that journey are among the most educational in all of church history. However, what participants expected to happen and what in fact did happen were probably not identical.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the Lord had other purposes in the organization of this “army” of priesthood. In D&C 105:19, he said, “I have heard their prayers, and will accept their offering; and it is expedient in me that they should be brought thus far for a trial of their faith.” This march was to be a trial of faith, and an important one. From the ranks of Zion’s Camp the Lord selected almost every member of the Quorum of the Twelve and the Seventy in February of 1835. Of this the Prophet said:

“Brethren, some of you are angry with me, because you did not fight in Missouri; but let me tell you, God did not want you to fight. He could not organize His kingdom with twelve men to open the Gospel door to the nations of the earth, and with seventy men under their direction to follow in their tracks, unless He took them from a body of men who had offered their lives, and who had made as great a sacrifice as did Abraham. Now the Lord has got His Twelve and His Seventy” (Joseph Young, “History of the Organization of the Seventies,” quoted in HC 2:182).

Other than a test of faith and the calling of leaders, there were at least two other blessings that arose from this experience.

*One)* 204 men, along with a few women and children, were privileged to spend nearly two months with the Prophet—to see him interact and react, to hear him teach, to watch him deal with rebellion and righteousness, not from a distance, but from the next tent.

*Two)* Church leaders received invaluable knowledge in leading people on a long overland journey. Who can calculate the worth of this experience when Joseph Smith was unavailable and it was necessary to lead the Saints from Missouri to Illinois and from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City.

#### **4. THE LORD REVEALS THAT HIS PEOPLE MUST “WAIT FOR A LITTLE SEASON FOR THE REDEMPTION OF ZION.”**

Zion’s Camp marched to Clay County, Missouri and then was disbanded. There were some lessons that needed to be learned before Zion could be established in Missouri. In D&C 105 the Lord explained:

Behold, I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now.

But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the



poor and afflicted among them;

And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom;

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.

And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer. . . .  
. (D&C 105:2-6)

Therefore, in consequence of the transgressions of my people, it is expedient in me that mine elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion—

That they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience, and know more perfectly concerning their duty, and the things which I require at their hands. (D&C 105:9,10)

There is a lesson here for us. To learn it, remember the experiences of the Children of Israel as they received the report of the spies sent by Moses into the promised land of Canaan. The spies, terrified by what they had seen, convinced the people that they could not conquer the land the Lord had promised them. The people revolted and spoke of returning to Egypt. The Lord then sent them back into the wilderness for 40 years to wander and die. He would wait for a generation which would obey him with more faithfulness, and they would inherit the land (see Numbers 14).

This same thing seems to have happened to us. The Lord refused to allow those early Saints to retain the land of Zion. He sent them off into the wilderness of Utah and Nevada and Arizona and Idaho, to prepare to be a Zion people . . .

**CONCLUSION:** Once again reflect on this wonderful quote with which we began this discussion:

. . . the redemption of Zion is more than the purchase or recovery of lands, the building of cities, or even the founding of nations. It is the conquest of the heart, the subjugation of the soul, the sanctifying of the flesh, the purifying and ennobling of the passions. Greater is he who subdues himself, who captures and maintains the citadel of his own soul, than he who, misnamed conqueror, fills the world with the roar of drums, the thunder of cannon, the lightning of swords and bayonets, overturns and sets up kingdoms, lives and reigns a king, yet wears to the grave the fetters of unbridled lust, and dies the slave of sin. (Orson F. Whitney: *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 1945, pp. 65, 66)

The content of this paragraph suggests what we must be about here and now. But we must not despair because we are not living in Zion communities. There are Zion-like people (“the pure in heart” D&C 97:21, also D&C 101:18) all around us, and in addition:

This promised Zion always seems to be a little beyond our reach. We need to understand that as much virtue can be gained in progressing toward Zion as in dwelling there. It is a process as well as a destination. We approach or withdraw from Zion through the manner in which we conduct our daily dealings, how we live within our families, whether we pay an honest tithe and generous fast offering, how we seize opportunities to serve and do so diligently. Many are perfected upon the road to Zion who will never see the city in mortality. (Elder Robert D. Hales, C.R., April 1986, p. 38)

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