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Robert L. Millet

The Destiny of the House of Israel

Summary:

Robert Millet defines the terms *Israel*, *Jew*, and *gentile* and recommends avoiding a narrow definition of these terms when reading about Israel and the gentiles in the Book of Mormon. He explains that the Jews are the descendants of those who lived in the kingdom of Judah, and that the remnant of Jacob spoken of in the Book of Mormon is not limited to the Lamanites. Millet further relates that the Book of Mormon plays a role in the gathering of Israel, and that the scattering and gathering of Israel typify the fall and the atonement.

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The Destiny of the House of Israel

Robert L. Millet

This hour I want to discuss the question of the house of Israel. Who in the Book of Mormon are the house of Israel? What is their destiny? I've always had a fascination with this question, this issue, this concept, but my attention is drawn more recently to a question from a student in one of my Book of Mormon classes. We were two-thirds of the way through the second half of the Book of Mormon when a young lady, a very bright young lady, raised her hand and said, "Brother Millet, there's a phrase you keep using; you keep referring to this phrase, and I'm not sure I understand what it means."

I asked her, "What was the question?"

She said, "Well, you keep saying 'the house of Israel.' What does that mean?"

There was a class of about one hundred young freshmen. I asked, "How many of you have the same question?" About eighty hands went up. It seemed to me that we had a problem. Here we were three-fourths of the way through the book, and a very fundamental doctrinal concept was not understood by the majority of the class.

I took a few moments and wrote a few things on the board to try to deal with the immediate problem. She came after class, and we talked. I discovered that she was a lifelong member of the Church, that she had studied the Book of Mormon in seminary, was a four-year seminary graduate, and was very active and involved in the Church. Her question caused me to wonder to what degree the Church, as a whole, is ignorant of the place and role of the house of Israel.

Within a year, I was teaching a returned missionary group of students about the

Book of Mormon. While we were in 3 Nephi, one of the young men raised his hand and raised a similar question. His question had to do with his patriarchal blessing. He wanted to know, what difference did it make whether I was of this tribe or of that tribe? Maybe it's because we live in such an egalitarian day. Maybe it's time—when so much emphasis is placed upon quality, which there certainly should be—that we're prone not to appreciate the value of the fact that God has designated a people to be a chosen people. I've often thought what a great value reading and studying a book of scripture like the Book of Mormon many times is, because the more we study, if we are paying attention, we begin to pick up on central themes that weave their way, like a refrain, through the entire story. Certainly, the message of Christ is a central theme. Another major theme is the destiny of the house of Israel.

I'd like to go to the title page, for example, to note that after Moroni has indicated what the plates represent, in the second paragraph of the title page, we have the following:

An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—Which 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 [And then comes the phrase with which most of us are familiar]—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations.

I think if we stood up any ten Latter-day Saints and asked them what the major purpose of the Book of Mormon is, nine of them, at least, would say to convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ. That's certainly a major purpose. But missed

sometimes is this equally important principle: that the Book of Mormon has been given to allow latter-day Israel to know that the Lord has not forgotten them, nor will he let them go.

I have about seven principles that I would like to dwell on, different points that I found helpful in the teachings of the principles concerning the house of Israel.

Number one, simply stated (we don't need to dwell much on this): The Book of Mormon does not define the house of Israel. Its writers assume that we already understand that concept. There's a sense, then, in which an appreciation for and knowledge of the books of Genesis or Exodus might help one in reading the Book of Mormon, because it's there where the history and development and growth of the house of Israel is given to us in a narrative. The Book of Mormon writers think we already know about that, and so it does not define it.

Second point: The Book of Mormon prophets have a slightly different perspective on Israel than we do. I think if you ask most Latter-day Saints to define the terms *Jew*, *Israel*, *Gentile*, you get a very different concept than you would from reading the Book of Mormon directly. For example, most Mormons might define a *Jew* as someone who is a member of the house of Judah, and that's certainly an appropriate and right definition. But that's not the kind of definition we get in the Book of Mormon. It's a broader idea than that. For example, in 2 Nephi 30, Nephi's coming to the close of his record. In chapter 30, verse 3, we'll read this in context:

And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.

And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews.

In the minds of the Nephites, there were really only two groups of people—Jews and Gentiles. The Lehites, the followers or descendants of Lehi, were a subset of the Jews. Over in chapter 33 of 2 Nephi, verse 8, Nephi writes, “I have charity for the Jew—I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came.” Jews are nationals; they are persons who are from the Holy Land. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in his book *The Millennial Messiah*, gives us a good definition. “Who then are the Jews?” he asks, “What part shall they play in the gathering of Israel and the return of their king?” There’s a maze of fuzzy thinking and shoddy scholarship, both in the world and in the Church, that seeks to identify the Jews, both ancient and modern, and to expound upon what they have believed and do believe.

The term *Jew* is a contraction of the name Judah, but the Jews are not the members of the tribe of Judah, as such. Judah, Simeon, and part of Benjamin comprise the kingdom of Judah. In actual fact and considering blood lineage only, both kingdoms had in them people from all of the tribes. Lehi, who lived in Judah and was a Jew, was of the tribe of Manasseh. The Jews were nationals of the kingdom of Judah without reference to tribal ancestry. Thus, the descendants of Lehi, both the Nephites and Lamanites, were Jews because they came out from Jerusalem and from the kingdom of Judah. The Jews today are those whose origins stem back to the kingdom of their fathers, clearly the dominant tribe, dominant only in the sense of political power; rulership was Judah.

And so it is with the word *Gentiles*. Gentiles are all others, persons from other nations. For example, when Nephi has his great panoramic vision, having inquired of the Lord to receive the same things his father had seen, Nephi, with his guide, sees the nations of the Gentiles—the European nations, this continent, and so forth. So the Gentiles are persons who may be Israelite by descent but are Gentile by culture. Thus, Elder McConkie would say the following from *The Millennial Messiah*: “We have heretofore identified as both the nationals of the kingdom of Judah and as their lineal descendants. All this without reference to tribal affiliation, and we’ve said, without this usage of terms, that all other people are Gentiles including the lost and scattered remnants of the kingdom of Israel, in whose veins the precious blood of him whose name was Israel does, in fact, flow. Thus, Joseph Smith, of the tribe Ephraim, the chief and foremost tribe of Israel itself, was the Gentile by whose hand the Book of Mormon came forth, and the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who have the gospel and who are of Israel by blood descent are the Gentiles who carry salvation to the Lamanites and to the Jews.

Point number three: We must guard against the temptation to use too exclusive application of certain scriptural passages. That is, most passages refer not to one tribe alone, but to the entire house of Israel. Let me indicate what I mean. My colleague Joseph McConkie wrote the following “parable,” if you will, which I think illustrates the point (we’ll come back and look at it in scripture in a second). An essential principle in interpreting Book of Mormon scripture will be announced here. A misunderstanding of scripture results when a prophecy made to all the

house of Israel and then applied to the descendants of Lehi by Book of Mormon prophets is assumed to find its fulfillment only in the activities of the descendants of Lehi. For example, suppose that the bishop of the Far Distant Ward, so named because of its location, attended the general conference of the Church so that he could take the instruction of the Brethren back to the ward. Suppose, also, that among the subjects discussed at the conference were the matters of temple work and the importance of doing ordinance work for the dead, the message of the conference being that neither the Saints nor their ancestors can be saved if that work is not done.

Now, when Bishop Nephi of the Far Distant Ward reported on the message of the conference to the people, he was saying, in effect, "The members of this ward must do ordinance work for the dead. For, unless we do this work, neither we nor our dead can be saved." Suppose that a record of what Bishop Nephi had told his people was made and included in the history in the Book of Mormon Stake, of which the Far Distant Ward was a part. It would be unfortunate, indeed, if subsequent readers of Bishop Nephi's talk, as it was recorded in the records of the stake, concluded that it was the sole responsibility of the members of the Far Distant Ward of the Book of Mormon Stake to do ordinances for the dead and that if the members of that ward did not do those ordinances, no one in the rest of the stake or the Church could be saved.

People tend to get into problems when they provide too exclusive, too narrow of either a definition or an application of the scripture when persons conclude that some things only pertain to the Jews or some things only pertain to the Lamanites. I

suppose there are places where that is the case, but generally speaking, when the prophets speak, they're speaking in a broader way to the entire house of Israel. Let me show you what I mean.

In 1 Nephi 15 (I'm just going to read a verse or two), Nephi is responding essentially to the question that his brothers raised concerning the meaning of their father's teachings. In chapter 15 of 1 Nephi, verse 17: "This is what our father meaneth," Nephi says. "And he meaneth that it will not come to pass until after they are scattered by the Gentiles; and he meaneth that it shall come by way of the Gentiles, that the Lord may show his power unto the Gentiles, for the very cause that he shall be rejected of the Jews, or of the house of Israel."

Rejected of the Jews or of the house of Israel. Turning the page to verse 20: "And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel." Notice how Nephi does that. We find the same principle being taught to explain in 3 Nephi 29:8 and Mormon 5:14. Trying to narrow the scriptures to one group, or to assume that the promises made to the ancient fathers will be realized through one tribe alone, will lead us into more problems than not. President Kimball, on one occasion made an interesting statement, especially for one like Brother Kimball who was so known for his love for the Lamanites. President Kimball said, "The Lamanite is a chosen child of God, but he is not the only chosen one. There are many other good people who are of Ephraim and Manasseh. They, with the Lamanites, are also chosen people, and they are a remnant of Jacob. The Lamanite is not wholly and exclusively the remnant of the Jacob which the Book of Mormon talks about. We are all of Israel, we are of

Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph through Ephraim and Manasseh. We are, all of us, remnants of Jacob.” That’s from *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, pages 600–601.

Point number four: The Book of Mormon plays a vital role in the gathering of Israel. First of all, the Book of Mormon defines the process. The Book of Mormon explains to us what it means to be scattered, what it means to be gathered; we will talk about those concepts in just a few moments. But secondly, the Book of Mormon is the means for the accomplishment of the gathering of Israel. President Benson made a pretty remarkable statement on one occasion. He said:

The responsibility of the seed of Abraham which we are, is to be missionaries to ‘bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations.’ (Abraham 2:9.) Moses bestowed upon Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple the keys to gather Israel.

Now, what is the instrument that God has designed for this gathering? It is the same instrument that is designed to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith is His prophet, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. It is that scripture which is the keystone of our religion.”¹

And so the Book of Mormon plays a key role in that process of gathering. In fact, let me turn to a particular passage in Mormon 3:18–21:

Yea, behold, I write unto all the ends of the earth; yea, unto you, twelve tribes of Israel, who shall be judged according to your works by the twelve whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem.

And I write also unto the remnant of this people, who shall also be judged by the twelve whom Jesus chose in this land; and they shall be judged by the other twelve whom Jesus chose in the land of Jerusalem.

And these things doth the Spirit manifest unto me; therefore I write unto you all. And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam; and ye must

¹ Benson, Ezra Taft. *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988) 35.

stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil;

[And then this interesting verse, verse twenty-one:] And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you; and also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus, whom they slew, was the very Christ and the very God.

So we've established that the Book of Mormon is critical because (1) it defines the process and (2) it becomes the instrument for the process, that is, the means by which the greater part of gathering is to take place.

I have been fascinated, in the last few years, with President Benson's emphasis upon flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon. Well, that phrase *flooding the earth* seems to come from a passage in the Pearl of Great Price, from Moses 7. Let me read a portion of Moses chapter seven, beginning with about verse 60, and notice the role here of the Book of Mormon in the greater drama we know is the gathering of Israel. Remember that this is a vision where Enoch has seen the future, has seen the establishment of righteousness on the earth, and great wickedness, and he has asked hard questions like, When will the Son of Man come? When will the day of the Lord come? When will the earth rest? The Lord begins to answer in verse 60:

And the Lord said unto Enoch: As I live, even so will I come in the last days, in the days of wickedness and vengeance, to fulfill the oath which I have made unto you concerning the children of Noah;

And the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve. (Moses 7:60-61)

Now, notice the language here. This seems, in a way, to be an expansion upon the Eighty-fifth Psalm [verse 11], which talks about righteousness and truth coming down out of the heavens, and out of the earth.

And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth [It seems to be a direct allusion to the Book of Mormon. To do what?], to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; [now, note this:] and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood [and what's it going to do?], 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)

It occurred to me one day, that as we look back fifty or a hundred years from now upon the ministry of President Ezra Taft Benson, we may discover that he moved the Church in a direction that will impact us everlastingly. Inasmuch as the Book of Mormon is yet to accomplish so many great things, not just the conversion of a people and the sanctification of a chosen people, but the establishment of Zion, and the gathering of Israel.

Point number five: The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is described in the Book of Mormon itself as the beginning of the gathering of Israel and in that sense, is one of the signs of the times. I want to turn to 3 Nephi 21. The Savior's teachings in the first seven verses represent one long but important thought. Let's summarize the thought, capsulize it, and then read portions of it. Essentially, we are being told the following: When you see the Book of Mormon coming forth, you will know that the work of the Father—and here we mean the work of the gathering of Israel—has commenced in the last days. Beginning in 3 Nephi 21:1, the Savior says:

And verily I say unto you, I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place—that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion;

And behold, this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign—for verily I say unto you that when these things which I declare unto you, and which I shall declare unto you hereafter of myself, and by the power of the Holy Ghost which shall be given unto you of the Father, shall be made known unto the Gentiles that they may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, and concerning this my people who shall be scattered by them;

Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you; [Now, that's a long way of saying, "When the Book of Mormon comes forth to the Gentile nations and goes from them to the Jews and the Lamanites. . . ."]

For it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel [we're still modifying the verb here];

Therefore, when these works and the works which shall be wrought among you hereafter shall come forth from the Gentiles unto your seed which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity;

For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me and be baptized in my name and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel;

And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things [when the gospel is restored, when the Book of Mormon is brought forth, when latter-day Israel begins to receive the Book of Mormon]—it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 21:1–7)

That's one long sentence but a very critical concept. That same idea is taught later in 3 Nephi 29:1 and in the book of Ether 4:17.

Principle number six: As we indicated, the Book of Mormon defines the processes of scattering and gathering. It's interesting that we're taught in the Pearl of Great Price that all things bear witness of Christ, in heaven, on earth, and so on. I

was reading one day in the ninth chapter of 2 Nephi. We won't turn to that, but let¹² me just comment that the opening verses, verses one and two, seem to deal with the gathering of Israel. We'll read them a little later, but then picking up at about verses three and four and going on for some time is a lengthy discussion of resurrection and atonement. And I thought it an odd thing that we should move so quickly from the destiny of Israel to the matter of atonement, until that scripture in Moses 6:63 began to bear down on me some more: "All things bear witness of him."

It began to occur to me that the scattering and the gathering are symbolic; they represent, in a sense, the Fall and the Atonement. As people fall through disobedience, people are scattered through disobedience. As people repent through the Atonement, people are gathered through accepting the truths of Christ and his gospel, and his church. It began to occur to me then that as we study the gathering—a phenomenon that we generally think of as a physical, geographical thing—what we're really talking about is something very spiritual.

And so the principles began to unfold in my mind that the scattering and the gathering have two components. Someone is scattered, first, spiritually and, second, temporally. Someone is gathered, first, spiritually and, second, temporally. Temporal is important. Geography is important. But more important is one's alienation from and reconciliation with Christ. Let me have us turn to a couple of scriptures in the Book of Mormon and show you what I mean. Second Nephi 6. This is Jacob, Nephi's brother. I'd like to pick up in chapter six with verse eight:

And now I, Jacob, would speak somewhat concerning these words.
[He's been quoting from the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah.] For behold,
the Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from

whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive.

Nevertheless, the Lord the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again. And he also has shown unto me that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the flesh; and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify him, according to the words of the angel who spake it unto me.

[Now notice this language in verse ten:] And after they have hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against the Holy One of Israel, behold, the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them. And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted.

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 6:8–11)

A person is scattered, or a people are scattered when they reject the true Messiah and his gospel. A people are gathered, first, when they accept the true Messiah and his gospel. They are thereafter gathered to either the lands of their inheritance or to the congregations of the saints. The Book of Mormon is a consistent witness in that order—first, spiritual; second, temporal. That was 2 Nephi 6. In 2 Nephi 10, we're still reading from the sermon of Jacob. Jacob says:

Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God, and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God.

For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God.

But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.

Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, pestilences, and bloodshed shall come upon them [and notice the language here]; and they who shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all nations. (2 Nephi 10:3–6)

Now, there's the dilemma. That scattering may come in the form of a geographical movement. Perhaps they are overcome or overrun by a nation and taken away to that nation. They may be scattered geographically. In many cases, people are as scattered in regard to their identity as they are to their geography. So, there's the formula for the scattering—rejecting the true Messiah—and they are scattered. Now, in verse seven of chapter ten:

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.

First, spiritual; secondly, temporal. First Nephi 15 provides an interesting discussion of this same phenomenon. First Nephi 15 is, again, where Nephi is doing some explaining to his brothers who cannot understand, they protest, the words of their father. First Nephi 15. We'll pick up at about verse thirteen:

And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles, is, that in the latter days, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, yea, for the space of many years, and many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed.

There's the reversal of the order in which the gospel is presented: it was presented in the days of Jesus first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles; in the last days, first to the Gentiles, meaning the Gentile nations, then to the Jews. Verse fourteen:

And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know [now, notice the language here:] and come to

the knowledge of their forefathers, and also the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. (1 Nephi 15:13–14)

And so the gathering process is a process of coming to Christ, accepting his gospel, coming to understand and abide by the principles of his doctrine, and then gathering to the lands of their inheritance or to the congregation of the faithful. I'm reminded of a passage we turned to here. Again, in 2 Nephi 9:2, Jacob speaks of being gathered not just to Christ, but to his fold, or his church. In that same spirit, let me just remind us that when we talk about people symbolically being grafted into the tree. We'll talk about the allegory of Zenos in a bit, but that concept of grafting is very significant. In 1 Nephi 10:14 Nephi says:

After the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer

There's our definition, our scriptural definition for grafting: it's coming to the knowledge of the true Messiah. We would add: coming to his doctrine, coming to his church and kingdom. One final passage on this, and then we'll make some comments. Second Nephi 30, beginning in verse one. This is one of the best definitions in all of scripture as to the meaning of a covenant person. What does it mean to be a covenant person? Throughout scripture, it becomes clear that one's lineage, one's ancestry is significant. But perhaps as—or more—significant is the manner in which the person comes unto Christ. Let's read 2 Nephi 30:1–2:

And now behold, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you; for

I, Nephi, would not suffer that ye should suppose that ye are more righteous than the Gentiles shall be. For behold, except ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall all likewise perish; and because of the words which have been spoken ye need not suppose that the Gentiles are utterly destroyed. [And notice this key verse, verse two:]

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 them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel.

The rest of the early part of chapter thirty down through verse eight indicates the same thing we've talked about before: people begin to believe in Christ, accept his gospel, and they, thus, gather spiritually. Now, let's rehearse. Let's remember what we've said. People are scattered when they reject the true Messiah; they are gathered when they accept the true Messiah. Let me just add one little principle to the matter of scattering. There is another sense in which people are scattered, not necessarily because of their wickedness. It's a part of the Abrahamic covenant, the promise that God made with the ancient fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would spread, scatter the posterity of Abraham throughout the earth. And so one principle reason for the scattering is to help to fulfill the promise that Abraham's seed would be found throughout the earth. Maybe our best illustration, as far as the Book of Mormon is concerned, is the fact that the descendants of Lehi—Lehi and his family—are moved to another nation by divine design, not necessarily because of the wickedness of Lehi and his family, but in their case, because of the wickedness of the land where they were living. This is taught in several places in the Book of Mormon. In 1 Nephi 17:36–38 we read:

Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it.

And he raiseth up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked.

And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes.

We can find that same principle taught in 2 Nephi 10:20–22 and in 2 Nephi 1:5.

President Joseph Fielding Smith, as early as 1930, said the following:

In scattering Ephraim, the Lord had two purposes in mind. First, the scattering was to be a punishment to a rebellious people, second it was for the purpose of blessing the people of other nations with the blood of Israel, among whom Ephraim mixed himself. The scattering of other Israelites answered the same purpose. We have very good reason to believe, however, that it was the tribe of Ephraim rebellious, proud and headstrong, which was scattered more than any other among the people of other nations. The chief reason is that it is Ephraim who is now being gathered from among the nations.

Let me summarize this principle by reading a very succinct and valuable statement from President Kimball:

Now we are concerned with the gathering of Israel. This gathering shall continue until the righteous are assembled in the congregations of the saints in the nations of the world. This reminds us of the tenth article of faith wherein the Prophet Joseph Smith said to his inquirer, "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) 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."

President Kimball then said:

Now, the gathering of Israel consists of joining the true Church and their coming to the knowledge of the true God. Any person therefore, who has accepted the restored gospel, and who now seeks to worship the Lord in his own tongue, and with the saints in the nations where he lives, has complied with the law of the gathering of Israel, and is heir to all of the blessings promised the saints in these last days.²

Principle number seven: The greater part of the drama we know as the gathering

² Kimball, Spencer W. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 438–9.

of Israel will not take place until after the return of Christ, and the millennial era has begun. As you know, we have been gathering Israel, essentially through missionary work, since even before the Church was formally organized. That gathering in the form of bringing people into the Church through conversion continued until 1836. At the Kirtland Temple, Moses came to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and formalized the work that had been going on, the work of the gathering of Israel and opened even more doors. But the work of gathering that we are doing now, though terribly significant, is but a drop in the bucket compared to what shall be done in the future, particularly in the days of the Millennium.

I'd like to go to 1 Nephi 22 and pick up at about verse 22. Let me just indicate some background on this chapter. Nephi, drawing to the end of his first book, is saying that the Lord will not allow the righteous to be destroyed in the last days by the wicked, and he will preserve the righteous by his own power, even if it so be, he writes, that "the fulness of his wrath must come" (1 Nephi 22:17), he goes on to say, even if the righteous need to be preserved by fire (referring presumably to the fire associated with the second coming in glory). Picking up with about verse 22 in 1 Nephi 22: "And the righteous need not fear, for they are those who shall not be confounded." Nephi then goes on and talks about those who do need to fear, namely the great and abominable church, that is, those who oppose the Church of the Lamb of God and fight it. By the end of verse 23, he is quoting a prophet, presumably Zenos, in which he says the wicked shall be "consumed as stubble" (the same Prophet Zenos that Malachi must have quoted). By verse 24, he says:

And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as

calves of the stall [that's also a series of words that is used by Malachi, used here in the Book of Mormon by Nephi presumably quoting Zenos], and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory.

So we're talking about the time when Christ comes and reigns on earth, and notice he says:

And he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture. (1 Nephi 22:25)

So, the gathering is taking place during the thousand years. In 2 Nephi 30, toward the end of the book, Nephi wrote a rather lengthy discussion, beginning about verse seven:

And it shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people.

And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall commence his work among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth. [And then comes this interesting language. We're talking here about gathering in all nations, and notice the language that follows:]

And with righteousness shall the Lord God judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. [Again, that's a very millennial sounding verse.]

For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire. [Then he (Nephi) lapses back into quoting Isaiah, presumably, Isaiah. Verse 11]

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

And then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. . . . [and he goes on at some length from Isaiah. Verse 16].

Wherefore, the things of all nations shall be made known; yea, all things shall be made known unto the children of men. [Obviously a

millennial setting.]

There is nothing which is secret save it shall be revealed; there is no work of darkness save it shall be made manifest in the light; and there is nothing which is sealed upon the earth save it shall be loosed.

Wherefore, all things which have been revealed unto the children of men shall at that day be revealed; and Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men no more, for a long time. (2 Nephi 30:7–18)

This is the work of gathering, the work of restoration that goes on throughout the earth in a millennial setting.

One final example of this is from the teachings of the Savior himself. Turn to 3 Nephi 21. We will pick up at about verse 23, speaking of the building of the New Jerusalem:

And they [the Gentiles] shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem. [Now notice the language:]

And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem.

And then shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst. [So, it's the Lord reigning among his people. And then notice the language of verse 26:]

And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day.
(3 Nephi 21:23–26)

There is an interesting manner in which the Lord frequently, in 3 Nephi, says in that day (generally the Millennium) shall the work of the father commence. We say, "Commence? No, the work commenced in 1830, or 1829." No, it will commence in a dramatically big way. The work of gathering that we're doing now, the work of the Father, is important, as we've said, but the work of gathering in the Millennium will be so massive and in such a grand scale that in a sense, it will cause all that preceded it to pale into insignificance.

And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem. [We have an indication when the great day of gathering of the ten tribes will be: at the millennial day.]

Yea, the work shall commence among all the dispersed of my people, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name.

Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance.

And they shall go out from all nations; and they shall not go out in haste, nor go by flight, for I will go before them, saith the Father, and I will be their rear ward. (3 Nephi 21:26–29)

In summary, we're talking about a doctrine that's fundamental and central to the Book of Mormon. It mattered very much to the Nephite prophets and to the Lord Jesus himself that the people understood who they were. It's one thing—and it's important to know—that we're the sons and daughters of God; that's fundamental. It's also terribly important to know that we're the sons and daughters of the ancient fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have a destiny to perform. Being a chosen people does not give us a sense of self-assuredness that would lead to a form of arrogance, but it carries with it the burden, the burden of carrying the message of the gospel to all the world.

President Harold B. Lee was fond of telling the story of a court jester whose job, of course, was to keep everyone in laugh. On one occasion he came (the court jester) to the throne of his king only to find, during a party, his king lying at the base of his throne in a drunken stupor. The court jester shook his head and said, "O king, be loyal to the royal within you." The message of the Book of Mormon is the message

that Mormon sounds in what must be among his last messages. He says, "Know ye²² that ye are of the house of Israel" (Mormon 7:2). The Savior himself, speaking to the Nephites, gave a message that's just as applicable to you and me when he said:

Verily I say unto you, yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me.

And behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. (3 Nephi 20:24-25)

I testify as to the significance of the fact that we are sons and daughters of God, and through his chosen servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we are entitled to rich and rewarding blessings. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.