

## Doctrine & Covenants Lesson 6 Notes: Zion and Babylon

*Say unto this people:  
Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you.*  
*Moses 6:33*

*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory;  
but in lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than themselves.  
Look not every man on his own things,  
but every man also on the things of others.*  
*Philippians 2:3-4*

### ONE OR THE OTHER

The bishop of a single adult ward told of a young man who came to him in sorrow, yet with the determination to “stop trying to ride in two boats. It’s either the world or the gospel. I’m so tired of trying to live in both.” The concept of Zion versus Babylon is a description of this young man’s challenge put into the language of scripture.

Moses was the first one to write down something about these concepts. The Bible has no reference to Zion in the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The first reference to the word *Zion* in the Old Testament is 2 Samuel 5:7, which states, “Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David.” Just after David was made king over Israel, he captured the Jebusite fortress built in the hills that are present day Jerusalem. The Samuel scripture makes it sound as if the place were already called Zion, and so if you look up the meaning of the word Zion on Wikipedia, in a dictionary, or Bible commentary, you are likely to find something like “A hill in Jerusalem, which, after the capture of that city by the Israelites, became the royal residence of David and his successors.”<sup>1</sup> By extension, the word is assumed to have meant “high place or fortress.”

Latter-day Saints have additional light. We know from the Pearl of Great Price that the Lord used this word to refer to his people long before King David fought his Jebusite enemies. The Pearl of Great Price contains revelations given to Joseph Smith that restored lost sections of Moses’ writings. We have eight chapters in the Book of Moses. All the references to Zion are in chapter 7, which contains the story of Enoch, who lived in the seventh generation from Adam. Moses tells of Enoch’s call as a prophet in Moses chapter 6. Mankind had grown wicked and hostile to God. It was a time not dissimilar to our own. The Lord called the reluctant Enoch to preach (“Why...have [I] found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?”(Moses 6:31-33). God reassures Enoch and directs, “Say unto this people: Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you.”

Enoch turns into a powerful prophet of mighty words and deeds. His preaching turned many people back to God. These converted people then leave their various settlements and tribes and gather as a group, much like the early Latter-day Saints gathered out from different nations and religions to join the restored church. We see the word Zion used for the first time in Moses 7:18-19. “And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them. And Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God. And it came to pass in his days, that he built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion.” So it was not the Jebusites, but God himself who began use of the term “Zion.”

Enoch’s message was a ringing call, repeated by the prophet Joshua when Israel reached the Promised Land. “Choose ye this day!” Each person who heard the call was compelled by the powerful message

<sup>1</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/zion> Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.

to decide. Enoch's clear presentation of the two ways meant choosing the world's way or God's way. Those who chose God had to leave the families and towns they had grown up in. They could not be identified with the true and living God unless they left. When they made the decision to leave, God called them Zion and identified them as "his" people. This is the word *Zion's* most basic significance: God's people—those who have consciously chosen to follow God's ways and reject those of the world.<sup>2</sup>

### **BEING SEPARATE**

After Enoch and his people built a city, their enemies attacked; but God was with his people and miraculously protected them. Eventually Enoch's city was taken up into heaven so that God could destroy the wicked by a flood. Similar conditions exist today. We live in a time of widespread wickedness when God's laws are mocked. A parable describes our day as the time of wheat and tares growing together. "Therefore, let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest is fully ripe; then ye shall first gather out the wheat from among the tares, and after the gathering of the wheat, behold and lo, the tares are bound in bundles, and the field remaineth to be burned." (D&C 86:7) In this parable the wheat and the tares are the wicked and the righteous who are mixed together on the earth. A flood destroyed the wicked in Noah's day, and the scriptures testify that a similar destruction of the wicked will come in the last days by fire. God has promised that he will not "burn the field" until the righteous are "gathered out from among the tares." Until the prophet calls us to separate from the neighborhoods and communities in which we live, we are to stay where we are and try to be salt and light in these places, "flavoring and preserving" our society with righteousness and "lighting" the way for others to join with God's people. When the time does come to build a city of Zion in Missouri, it will serve as a refuge from the storm of the last days. Enemies may attack it, but as in Enoch's day, God will fight our battles and they will fail. (D&C 45:68-71)

But we must still answer the general call to "Choose ye this day," as well as the call to "Go ye out of Babylon!" (D&C 133:5,7) As Latter-day saints we want to answer correctly. It is sobering to realize that the current battlefield in this war is inside of us—it is in our hearts and minds. The war is for our souls and the souls of our children. Remember, first the people must be prepared; then the city will be built. The deciding question is "what (or whom) do we love?" We have to choose Zion over Babylon each day, even while we keep house and send our children to school in the suburbs of Babylon. We are not yet called to walk to Missouri. Usually we are not required to leave our jobs. Occasionally converts are forced to choose between the church and their families. But for most of us our choice is whether we love God enough to walk away from the temptations of worldliness that surround us. Because the culture of Babylon is so ubiquitous, we have to make conscious choices to keep it from seeping into our homes and minds. We have to turn off the TV, and say no to the various idols worshipped in our culture.<sup>3</sup>

As women we function as the gatekeepers in our homes. We have great influence on what is read, seen and heard as well as what is worn and eaten on our watch. There really are no "small things" when training children. They learn the big lessons by the small things. Each conscious choice determines whether children grow up in an atmosphere that encourages spirituality or worldliness. Making a Wonder Woman Halloween costume for a granddaughter who would otherwise have been Paris Hilton is huge. As moms, grandmas, aunts, sisters and teachers, our influence can be great on children when they are small. When their hearts are open we can teach them to love the things of God. "Reading" scriptures with a preschooler who doesn't really read yet teaches her to value these special books and to associate them with good things. Saying prayers. Talking with little ones as you look at the stars or pick up leaves or listen to a cricket symphony or watch a spider spin a web teaches faith in our Creator God. Discussing what it means to have higher standards than your peers with a nervous teenager can make a difference. Holding the line when shopping with them for a bathing suit or prom dress may take some courage. They will often put pressure on adults to cave in, but what they really need is a boundary that says "This standard won't

<sup>2</sup> From the website [www.laitman.com](http://www.laitman.com) comes this: "the Land of Israel is also called "Zion," from the word *Yetzia* - "exit" in Hebrew. Any person who exits the limits of our egoistic world and enters the Altruistic World, enters "Zion." This would make the underlying meaning of the word Zion in Hebrew, "those who have exited or left." What more perfect name for people who have left Babylon and come into Zion, where people are of one heart and one mind? <http://www.laitman.com/2008/12/the-kabbalistic-definition-of-zion-and-the-mixed-multitude/>

<sup>3</sup> One of my heroes refuses to pay for her teenager's texting, so they can't. They have to make old-fashioned phone calls. I wish I'd thought of that. You don't *have* to say yes to the culture!

change.” In these and in a hundred other ways, a woman’s influence is profound. If the next generation is going to have the moral courage to “go out of Babylon,” it will be because we have done our jobs.

### **RETURNING TO ISRAEL AFTER THE CAPTIVITY**

Sometimes the temptation to adopt the ways of the world is subtle. There is a great lesson in the Old Testament story of Israel’s captivity in Babylon. Because God’s people had worshipped idols and failed to keep the Sabbath day holy (a great gift from God to help our families stay separate from the surrounding culture), they were punished with seventy years of captivity in the land of Babylon. They were not forced into hard labor or kept in prison. They were encouraged to begin businesses and build farms and homes. In time they settled into life in Babylon and began to enjoy it. Babylon was powerful and made them feel safe. Babylon, the capitol city, was so beautiful it was renowned throughout the world for its massive walls, colorful gates and hanging gardens. In its day it was the repository of the greatest worldly wisdom and technological advances available on earth. Seeing the great city more than one of them must of thought, “Wow. We were nothing but hayseeds back in Israel. This place is really something!” The inevitable happened. When, after 70 years, the Jews were allowed by the Persian king Cyrus to return to the land of Israel, many chose to stay. They knew that returning would mean hardship. Though they had no temple, they had developed what became the synagogue system of worship and were permitted by the Babylonians to worship as they pleased. They rationalized that they were not serving the gods of Babylon so as long as they were still “in the true church,” they didn’t need to make the sacrifice to return.

Those who did return did so in waves, as recorded in the Biblical accounts of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah. But the fact remains, many never left Babylon to make the return trip. This makes God’s plea in our day all the more compelling. He does not want us to make the mistake of the ancient Israelites who stayed in Babylon and tried to “ride in both ships.” His call has always been, “choose ye this day!” If the choice is for God, then you must “Go...out of Babylon.” You cannot have it both ways. To try and be popular with the world and at the same time maintain allegiance to Israel’s god is foreign in its very nature to the true worship of God, which demands that we do not rationalize away any “double-mindedness” but be honest in our loyalties to him. What have you chosen?

### **BE YE CLEAN**

“Be ye clean,” he says, “that bear the vessels of the Lord.” This is a reference to the O.T. priesthood of Israel that served God in the tabernacle. In Israel the priests had to carry, empty, fill and clean the various vessels, or bowls and containers that held such things as incense, shewbread, candles, ashes, blood and water. To serve in God’s house was a great thing and required careful adherence to Mosaic laws of ritual purity and consecration. Specific washings and annointings were required before each period of temple service. When the sons of Moses’ brother, Aaron, took lightly their service in the Tabernacle, not following instructions exactly, God struck them dead. He wanted to clearly establish from the beginning that those who were called to God’s service were called to a higher standard of purity and obedience. God’s ultimate purpose was to develop a whole people who were dedicated to his service. In Exodus we read,

“... And the Lord called unto [Moses] out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt ...thou tell the children of Israel. Ye have seen 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 19:3-6)

In the Old Testament, the role of priest was to act as a go-between between God and man. The priesthood today is the right for men to administrate and carry out the affairs of the kingdom of God including officiating in those ordinances that bring salvation to God’s children. The key for us all is to be actively in God’s service. We are not on this earth so that God might be *our* servant. We are here to serve *him*. If serving him is what is in our hearts, then our lives will naturally order themselves around that central purpose. If we put our selfish wants at the center, we will have no commitment to holiness of purpose.

Every woman who is a teacher, a mother, who is standing for good in our communities, who is a friend ministering to her sisters—is serving in the Kingdom of God. “If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work.” (D&C 4:3) Anyone with such a desire to serve is thereby constrained by God’s command

to purify her life. Thus, “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord,” could also be stated, “Be ye clean, those that serve me.”

But it's better the way the Lord said it: “Be ye clean that *bear the vessels of the Lord.*” We as women know so much about vessels. We cook in them and bring them to each other brimming with soup and love. We mop with our pails and cart laundry in hampers and fold clothes into tubs. We soak stained clothes and tired feet in vessels. We fill vases with flowers for beauty. We are in charge of all the vessels that a home holds. And finally, we *are* the vessels, bearing the souls of men. In our bellies, life grows and becomes a child, the ultimate vessel for us to fill with wisdom and love of God. How great is the contribution of women, one that involves us so deeply in the creation and carrying of life. How clean should we be!

### ZION AND CONSECRATION

In the Old Testament, the word Zion morphed from its original meaning to become a way of referring to the city of Jerusalem and finally a way of referring to all Israel, and later, to the Jewish nation. The term *Zionism* was coined to mean the desire for all Jewish people to once again have a homeland in the place that God had given to them. The word Zion falls out of use in the Christian era of the early church and is not found in the New Testament at all. Zion has a particular meaning in the Doctrine and Covenants that is built upon all the layers of meaning the word has had throughout history.

When the gospel was restored, God revealed startling truths through his young prophet. “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.” (A.o.f.F. #10) You simply will not find such doctrines in any other church. Although there have been others who believed that America had a providentially ordained role in history, none have so specifically defined God's purposes in this land. And no other church teaches that God is trying to develop again a Zion people to do his work on the earth. We learned through Joseph that the city of Enoch, taken up into heaven before the long ago flood of Noah, was going to come back (!), and the ten lost tribes were also coming back (!! ) and that a city of Zion, a New Jerusalem would be built someday (more !!!). We even know where it will be: in the state of Missouri, USA.

You can imagine the excitement of the early saints as they learned about these doctrines and began preparations to move to Missouri and begin the work. But building the people had to come before building the city. It turned out that Zion could not “be redeemed” by the first generation of the church, because their hearts were still set too much upon the principles of the world. In one of the saddest sections of the D&C we learn,

“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. 3 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; 4 And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom; 5 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 105:2-5)

Further in this section we learn that the saints must “wait for a little season” for Zion's redemption. They “[must] be prepared, 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.” (v. 10) They also needed to be “endowed with power from on high,” (v. 11) something that would require the extensive temple building that became such a remarkable feature of Mormonism. The Lord continues to work with us, to get into our hearts those *celestial principles* upon which Zion has to be built, principles which are the polar opposite of the operating principles of the world.

Greed, self-interest and competition are the order of the day in Babylon. “The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life” are her rewards. (1 John 2:16) We will not learn the principles of the celestial kingdom from the world's education system. There have been world governments that *seem* to seek the goals of Zion, i.e., that there should be no rich and poor—we should be equal in earthly things. But because of the fallen nature of man, the people at the top of these systems always misuse their power and act selfishly. The Lord has made clear that Zion can never be established by force or government's

coercion. That is contrary to the very nature of God's plan. Zion must be established by love, freely chosen. When we are a people who love God and love our fellowman as we do ourselves, and when we are willing to observe our "covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command," then we will be a Zion people, "accepted of me." (D&C 97:8) When we have true charity we will have the celestial principles in our hearts that will allow us to build Zion.

Christ taught, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24, Luke 16:13 and 3 Ne. 13:24) Mammon is an Aramaic word meaning *riches*. You can't seek God and at the same time be seeking riches to obtain the "vain things of this world." (Alma 5:53). Those who think they are successfully doing this, are not seeking the Lord with all their hearts, and so will not find him.<sup>4</sup> The world constantly sends the message that happiness can be bought with money and seeking it should be the most important goal in life. But the scriptures say this about money: "Come every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy... Come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted." (2 Nephi 9:50,51) The things of worth, you see, don't cost money.<sup>5</sup> Every good thing the Lord has to give to us is free. Money is not required. Payment is of a different kind: "I, the Lord, require the hearts of the children of men." (D&C 64:22) That is what it means when God tells Israel, "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (Ex. 34:14) He is not willing to share our affections with another "love." He wants our whole heart.

The only motive for seeking wealth that is justifiable in God's eyes is to dedicate your stewardship to the building of God's kingdom and to "seek [riches] for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted."<sup>6</sup> (Jacob 2:19) One of the great challenges for men in the church is to resist the siren song of worldly power and money, of making their careers into a God, and seeking to build a personal kingdom rather than God's kingdom. Some women have also succumbed to careerism, listening to the more radical voices of the Feminist movement that scoff at being defined as someone's mother or wife. But for most of us the temptations of the world are subtler. We live with many pressures to conform our homes and the schedules of our family to the set of expectations we feel from within our communities and from the pages of women's magazines. We must be aware of these pressures and make deliberately conscious choices. When our homes are blessed by the presence and guiding light of the Holy Spirit we will have chosen well.

The Law of Consecration, as the early saints attempted to live it, was given to show us God's highest standards for living, i.e., "the law of the celestial kingdom." God knew, because he knows everything, that it would fail as an economic system for the early saints to live by. He said to the infant church, "Behold, ... for this cause I have sent you—that you might be obedient, and that your hearts might be prepared to bear testimony of the things which are to come; And also that you might be honored in laying the foundation, and in bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand." (D&C 58:6-7) What we need to know is that God has a plan which includes a future (real) city named Zion and that we should prepare ourselves and our families to be part of it. We can see what it takes to be a "Zion people." We know it means rooting out the spirit of selfishness that makes us think about "my" and "mine." We can read about it and measure ourselves by its standards. We can promote a spirit of gratitude and stewardship by asking Paul's question: "What do you have that you have not been given?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

We can see more clearly why Mormon gave the parting advice that he did: "Wherefore, my beloved [brothers and sisters], pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons [and daughters] of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen." (Moroni 7:48)

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 29:13 "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

<sup>5</sup> A fun FHE would be to make a list of wonderful things that DON'T COST MONEY.

<sup>6</sup> Including the naked, hungry captives in our own families!