

“Any nation comprised of responsible and moral citizens is a nation of joy and peace.”

In today’s world of uncertainty and challenge there is great need throughout the world for outstanding citizens. ((I recognize that this article may have an international readership and that some of these statements may seem to be more particularly aimed towards citizens of the United States of America. Since the Church had its foundations in the United States and because the Church has its headquarters in the United States it is natural that statements have been made from a United States perspective. However, the principles of civility and citizenship apply to all people in all nations under God’s watchful eye.)) What does the Lord have to say about being a citizen of an earthly kingdom? Are there examples we can follow? There are answers to these questions found throughout the revelations in the Doctrine & Covenants and pronounced by modern day prophets. We can also look at the lives of early saints who grappled with the desire to be worthy of God’s eternal kingdom, yet lived in a temporal kingdom. We will first review the Lord’s society and law of Zion and refresh our memory of the experience of those who participated in the founding of Zion. We will end our discussion with a review of statements made by prophets over the last century.

The Lord’s Society and the Lord’s Law—The Establishment of Zion

Not many months after the Gospel had been restored to the earth Joseph Smith began to receive instructions from the Lord concerning Zion. In December of 1830 portions of the book of Moses were revealed to Joseph Smith which he then shared with the earnest saints. One revelation in particular, Moses 7, described the society that Enoch established, a society of righteousness and peace, even ZION. The saints eagerly anticipated the time when the Lord would reveal the location of Zion and the laws that would govern the Holy City. Their faith was soon answered.

From June 3 to June 6, 1831 ((This conference had been convened based on revelation given to Joseph Smith in February 1831 and is now found in Section 44 of the Doctrine & Covenants.)) the fourth conference of the Church was held in a log schoolhouse on the property of Isaac Morely in Kirtland, Ohio. Right after this conference Joseph Smith received a revelation ((This revelation is found in Section 52 of the Doctrine & Covenants.)) to send forth missionaries throughout the Western States (what was then the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri) preaching the gospel and building up congregations unto the Lord. The elders were assigned to labor in pairs as they journeyed to “the borders of the Lamanites” on the western end of Missouri. ((The land of Missouri marked the furthest western border of the United States at that time. What lay beyond was the Indian Territory which had been the site of the first organized mission of the Church during the winter of 1831. Parley P Pratt, Ziba Peterson, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer were the four missionaries so designated by revelation (D&C 30 & 32) to preach the gospel among the Lamanites. For a fascinating account of their journey and success see *The Autobiography of Parley P Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition*, edited by Scot Facer Proctor & Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), chapters 6-8.)) By revelation, the Lord indicated that the elders were to hold a conference once they arrived in the land of Missouri.

In addition to the missionaries many members of the Church departed from Kirtland, Ohio to make the 800 mile journey because the Lord had promised them that “the land of Missouri...is the land of your inheritance” (D&C 52:42). The main body of these members consisted of saints who had recently immigrated from Colesville, New York ((Colesville is located in the south central region of New York State, not many miles from Harmony, Pennsylvania.)) to the Kirtland area in February of 1831. These faithful saints had heeded the call to gather and build the kingdom of God as the prophet Joseph had directed. Joseph Smith together with Sidney Rigdon, a recent convert of seven months from the Campbellite faith, also took up missionary labors and went to the land of Missouri.

After arriving to Jackson County, Missouri Joseph Smith received Doctrine and Covenants 57 on July

20, 1831. The Lord revealed, “this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion” (D&C 57:2). This statement was in fulfillment of a declaration from the Lord made on February 9, 1831 promising to reveal the location of Zion (see D&C 42:9).

Soon after revealing the location of Zion the Lord began to reveal the laws that would govern the city of Zion. On August 1, 1831 Joseph Smith received D&C 58 that laid the foundation for the laws of Zion:

Hearken, O ye elders of my church, and give ear to my word, and learn of me what I will concerning you, and also concerning this land unto which I have sent you. For verily I say unto you, blessed is he that keepeth my commandments, whether in life or in death; and he that is faithful in tribulation, the reward of the same is greater in the kingdom of heaven. 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. Behold, verily I say unto you, 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...For verily I say unto you, my law shall be kept on this land. Let no man think he is ruler; but let God rule him that judgeth, according to the counsel of his own will, or, in other words, him that counseleth or sitteth upon the judgment seat. Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land. Wherefore, be subject to the powers that be, until he reigns whose right it is to reign, and subdues all enemies under his feet. Behold, the laws which ye have received from my hand are the laws of the church, and in this light ye shall hold them forth. Behold, here is wisdom. (D&C 58:1-7, 19-23)

The saints of God were citizens of his kingdom. However, this revelation served as a gentle reminder that the saints were also citizens of an earthly kingdom. It is fitting then, that as the saints looked forward to the great day of the Lord when he would receive his people who were citizens of Zion that he reminded the saints not to forget their civil duties. God most powerfully clarified how a pilgrim (citizen) of this world could be a good citizen of an earthly kingdom and a heavenly kingdom when he declared, “Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land” (D&C 58:21). The saints need not feel that they had dual loyalties or that they served two masters. The Lord had raised up wise men to establish the constitutional laws of the United States, which would protect religious freedom and be the fertile ground for nurturing his people in righteousness. This truth was canonized four years later when the Doctrine & Covenants was presented to the Church for acceptance as scripture. ((In History of the Church, Vol. 2, Ch. 18, p. 243 it says, “A general assembly of the Church of Latter-day Saints was held at Kirtland on the 17th of August, 1835, to take into consideration the labors of a committee appointed by a general assembly of the Church on the 24th of September, 1834, for the purpose of arranging the items of the doctrine of Jesus Christ for the government of the Church. The names of the committee were: Joseph Smith, Jun., Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery and Frederick G. Williams, who, having finished said book according to the instructions given them, deem it necessary to call a general assembly of the Church to see whether the book be approved or not by the authorities of the Church: that it may, if approved, become a law and a rule of faith and practice to the Church.”)) At this same meeting “President Oliver Cowdery then read the following article on ‘Governments and

Laws in General,’ which was accepted and adopted and ordered to be printed in [the Doctrine & Covenants], by a unanimous vote.” ((History of the Church, Vol. 2, Ch.18, p. 247.)) This article is now known as D&C 134.

Zion Purified through Suffering

Two years after the Lord revealed the laws of Zion, the saints in Zion (Missouri) were enduring severe difficulties (August 1833). Persecution surrounded them and the natural inclinations to retaliate festered. But the Lord cautioned his people to humility and faith. He reminded them of the liberating laws of their country. He urged his saints to obey those laws and to use the law to protect themselves and redress any grievances that they suffered.

VERILY I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks; Waiting patiently on the Lord, for your prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and are recorded with this seal and testament—the Lord hath sworn and decreed that they shall be granted. Therefore, he giveth this promise unto you, with an immutable covenant that they shall be fulfilled; and all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good, and to my name’s glory, saith the Lord. And now, verily I say unto you concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them. And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me. Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land; And as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil. I, the Lord God, make you free, therefore ye are free indeed; and the law also maketh you free. Nevertheless, when the wicked rule the people mourn. Wherefore, honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil. And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God. For he will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith. And whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name’s sake, shall find it again, even life eternal. Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy. For if ye will not abide in my covenant ye are not worthy of me. Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children; And again, the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews; lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me. Let not your hearts be troubled; for in my Father’s house are many mansions, and I have prepared a place for you; and where my Father and I am, there ye shall be also. (D&C 98:1-18)

We may think that during times of crisis or persecution that we are absolved of our duty to be good citizens. Yet the Lord teaches us otherwise, which ultimately leads to the purification of our souls and the fulfillment of the covenants of God unto us. The Lord reminds us to be lawful in all of our dealings and to let the law make us free. The Lord taught the early saints that if they turned to the law that the covenants he made with them would not be forgotten or lost and that they would be made free by the power of the laws of the land. To turn to the laws of a country that would allow its

citizens to be persecuted for religious beliefs tested the very foundation of the early saints' faith. Nevertheless, they exercised their humility and sought to keep the laws of God and man despite the difficult circumstances.

Modern Day Prophets Speak

We can praise the good works of those that have gone on before us, but now is the time of our life and we must experience the lessons learned by those of old. What a blessing it is that the words of the Lord concerning civility and citizenship are still with us today, both in written format (scriptures) as well as in the living waters of revelation spoken by prophets. Let us review and reflect upon their words concerning civility and citizenship.

Joseph F. Smith

“I am bound not only by allegiance to the government of the United States but by the actual command of God Almighty, to observe and obey every constitutional law of the land... The Lord Almighty requires this people to observe the laws of the land, to be subject to “the powers that be,” so far as they abide by the fundamental principles of good government.” ((Joseph F. Smith. *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith Sixth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. (Salt Lake City, 1919), p. 406.))

Heber J. Grant

“When any law is enacted and becomes a constitutional law, no man who spends his money to help men break that law can truthfully say that he is a loyal citizen.” ((Conference Report, October, 1927:5.))

David O. McKay

“My thought is that we should put forth every effort to supplant the aristocracy of wealth with the aristocracy of character and awaken in the minds of the youth a realization that to be honest, to be dependable, to be a loyal citizen of the country, to be true to the standards of the gospel are the noblest ideals of life. The important problem is how to instill these lofty principles into the minds of young people, and thereby make them worthy citizens.” ((Conference Report, October 1930, pp. 9-10.))

“It is the duty of every law-abiding citizen to see to it that our children have a wholesome community environment in which to live during their tender and impressive years.” ((Conference Report, October 1948, p. 121.))

Joseph Fielding Smith

“BE SUBJECT TO THE POWERS THAT BE. Any member of this Church who will not sustain the established laws of the land is not only disloyal as a citizen of the government, but he is disloyal to his Church and disloyal to God. We should understand it, and above all else we should be law-abiding and live in righteousness with each other,

with our neighbors, and worship the living God in the spirit of truth and righteousness and at the same time have loyal hearts to the nations which bear rule and will bear rule until he comes whose right it is to reign.” ((Doctrines of Salvation, Volume II1: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), p. 361.))

Spencer W. Kimball

“The law-abiding citizen does not fear the policeman, does not hide at the sound of a siren. The righteous need have no fear of death. He who follows strictly the Lord’s commands, keeping himself unspotted from the sins of the world, lies down at night in calm tranquillity; his dreams are sweet, his conscience at rest. A great peace settles over him as he sleeps or wakes. Strength is given him to meet difficulties, fortitude in the face of adversity, calmness in the wake of misfortune and in his life total peace which knoweth no understanding. Life with religion is life with real purpose.” ((*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Edited by Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), p. 157.))

Ezra Taft Benson

“This nation came into being only through freedom of choice, sacrifice, labor, and struggle. Brave Americans gave their lives in the settlement of this nation—and in its preservation. Let us remember our heritage and recognize that the day of courage, labor, and sacrifice is never done. For the welfare of America, each citizen must develop a keener sense of responsibility for the solution of public questions—all public questions.” ((Ezra Taft Benson. *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), p. 579.))

Gordon B. Hinckley

“The building of public sentiment begins with a few earnest voices. I am not one to advocate shouting defiantly or shaking fists and issuing threats in the faces of legislators. But I am one who believes that we should earnestly and sincerely and positively express our convictions to those given the heavy responsibility of making and enforcing our laws. The sad fact is that the minority who call for greater liberalization, who peddle and devour pornography, who encourage and feed on licentious display make their voices heard until those in our legislatures may come to believe that what they say represents the will of the majority. We are not likely to get that which we do not speak up for.

Let our voices be heard. I hope they will not be shrill voices, but I hope we shall speak with such conviction that those to whom we speak shall know of the strength of our feeling and the sincerity of our effort. (“Opposing Evil,” *Ensign*, November 1975, p. 39.)

Let us not forget that we believe in being benevolent and in doing good to all men. I am convinced that we can teach our children effectively enough that we need not fear that they will lose their faith while being friendly and considerate with those who do not

subscribe to the doctrine of this Church. Let us reach out to those in our community who are not of our faith. Let us be good neighbors, kind and generous and gracious. Let us be involved in good community causes. There may be situations where, with serious moral issues involved, we cannot bend on matters of principle. But in such instances we can politely disagree without being disagreeable. We can acknowledge the sincerity of those whose positions we cannot accept. We can speak of principles rather than personalities.

In those causes which enhance the environment of the community, and which are designed for the blessing of all of its citizens, let us step forward and be helpful. An attitude of self-righteousness is unbecoming a Latter-day Saint.

Brethren, teach those for whom you are responsible the importance of good civic manners. Encourage them to become involved, remembering in public deliberations that the quiet voice of substantive reasoning is more persuasive than the noisy, screaming voice of protest. In accepting such responsibilities our people will bless their communities, their families, and the Church. (Regional Representatives Seminar, April 1, 1988.)” ((Gordon B. Hinckley. *The Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), pp. 130-131.))

Let Us Remember

For all of us striving to be worthy citizens of the kingdom of God as well as worthy citizens of the nation in which we reside, let us remember the words of our Lord, “Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land” (D&C 58:19).