

Second Coming of Christ—Preparatory Work Thereto

Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, delivered in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, December 18, 1870.

I will read a few passages of Scripture, which will be found in the 50th Psalm—

“The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof.

“Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.

“Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

“He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.

“Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”

This congregation, the members of which are generally speaking Bible believers, have no doubt in their minds but the ancient servants of God were inspired by the gift of the Holy Ghost to utter many things concerning the future, to deliver many predictions concerning events which should take place among mankind down to the latest generations. David, in a peculiar manner, was inspired, and composed his psalms by the spirit of prophecy; he foresaw, by that spirit that knows all things, some of the grand events of the future, pertaining to the inhabitants of this world, and the purposes of God in relation to this creation. These passages which I have read have reference to some of these great events, a portion of which have already, in a measure, been fulfilled; but the greater portion remains yet to be accomplished. “The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken,” has literally been fulfilled so far as this present generation is concerned. It has been fulfilled also in relation to past generations; but it is very evident from the meaning of the context, that the speaking of the Lord here referred to was a work of latter times when God should again speak to the inhabitants of the earth; when he should again call upon all people, far and near, “from the rising of the sun,” as he expresses here, “to the going down thereof.” To show more fully that this was a latter-day work, he speaks or predicts that the “Lord our God shall come and not keep silence.” This had no reference to his first coming; for though he did then come and utter forth his doctrine and did not keep silence, yet you will see by reading a little further, that the Psalmist had reference to another coming of the Son of God, very different in its character from his first advent. “Our God shall come and shall not keep silence.” Now mark, in an especial manner, the following sentence, and you will see that it has no reference to his first coming—“A fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.” This was not a characteristic of his first coming; there was nothing specially connected with that event that would excite the attention of mankind generally. He came in a very meek and humble manner; his birth and advent into this world were in the most humble position. Born, as it were, in a stable, laid down in a manger. Not born in king’s palace—not born among the great and noble, but in a very obscure manner. He grew up from infancy to manhood engaged in the carpenter’s business. Some thirty years of his life were spent at home with his reputed father, and with his mother Mary, dwelling comparatively in obscurity, occasionally breaking forth and arguing with the wise and the great. Nothing characterizing him as the Great Creator of this world, or as its Redeemer, only to those who were well acquainted with the predictions of the Prophets. But this last coming, or the coming here spoken of by the Psalmist, represents him as coming with power—“A fire shall devour before him and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above,” says the next passage, “and to the earth from beneath.” What object had he in view, in calling upon the heavens above and upon the earth beneath? What end had he in view in again speaking and breaking the silence of ages, and in giving a revelation to the heavens and then to the earth? It was in order to bring about a preparatory work before the face of his coming the second time, when he should come in flaming fire. A preparation was needed, and this preparation is mentioned in part in the last verse which I read, which declares that he should call to the heavens from above and to the earth from beneath.

He gives us some insight into the nature of that call. His call to his servants was, “Gather ye my Saints together

unto me, they that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”

This seems, then, to be a work preparatory to the coming of the Lord in flaming fire. The nature of the fire that will be exhibited at his second coming in the clouds of heaven will be such that it will consume the wicked and ungodly, and those who repent not and who do not sanctify themselves before the Lord. Our God in that day will be a consuming fire; the intensity of this fire will be so great that the very hills, the Psalmist David informs us in another place, “will melt like wax before his presence.” The Prophet Isaiah, in speaking of the fire or heat that would accompany the second advent of the Son of God, declares that the mountains shall flow down at his presence. The elements that now constitute these rugged mountains which we see here on this continent and in all parts of the earth where we travel will melt with fervent heat, and will flow down before the presence of the Lord. The brightness of this fire will be greater than that of the sun in its glory. I mean our temporal, literal sun, from which we receive light and heat, as you will find recorded in the last verse of the 24th chapter of Isaiah, which says that “when the Lord of Hosts shall come to reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously, the sun shall hide his face in shame and the moon shall be confounded.” With all the brightness of that luminary which lights this creation it will hide its face in shame; and the bright luminaries of heaven will be confounded as it were, so great will be the glory of his presence—a fire devouring before him, and all nature feeling the power of the Almighty, which will be exerted on that grand occasion.

Will the wicked be able to endure this intense heat and not be consumed? I now have reference to their physical tabernacles, their temporal bodies. Hear what prophecy has declared in relation to this. Read the last chapter contained in the Old Testament; that will answer the question.

“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”

Notice, now, how completely it will sweep the proud and those who do wickedly from the face of this creation. The fire that proceeds forth from the presence of God at his second coming shall burn as an oven, and shall not only affect the mountains and the elements so as to melt them, but it will also consume the proud and them that do wickedly from the face of the globe. What effect will this intense heat have upon the righteous? No more than the heated furnace of Nebuchadnezzar had upon the Hebrews who were cast therein; and though it was heated seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated and slew those who cast their fellows into it, yet they who were thrown into it received no harm, not even the smell of fire on their garments. They were protected by a miracle, and the fire that slew their enemies was their preservation. So likewise when the Son of God shall burn up the wicked and consume their bodies to ashes, both root and branch, leaving no remnants of them among all people, nations and tongues, the righteous will be prepared to enter into the midst of this flaming fire without receiving any harm; indeed they will be caught up into the very presence of God, and they will be surrounded with a pillar of fire as Moses was when he came down from Mount Sinai, only to a far greater extent; but it will have no power over them, in fact it will be their protection and salvation, their glory, happiness and joy.

To prepare the people for that great day it is necessary that the Saints should be gathered together, as predicted in the 5th verse, when he should give this great and grand revelation in the last days, when the mighty God, even the Lord, shall speak. He will call to the heavens to assist in the great latter-day work; and all the angels and the heavenly hosts, who do his bidding, will go forth as swift messengers to execute his decrees and fulfil his purposes in bringing about this grand gathering of his elect from the four quarters of the earth. Who will they be? Those who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice. What kind of a sacrifice? The sacrifice of every earthly thing required, their native countries, their fathers and mothers, for in many instances these who obey the Gospel are compelled to sever the nearest earthly ties—parents from their children, children from their parents and kindred from their kin, in order that they may come forth and be gathered into one grand body preparatory to the coming of the Son of God in flaming fire.

There are many people who have believed that the coming of our Lord was near at hand. We might refer to many

persons by name who have even set times for his coming—certain particular days, months and years in which the Lord would be revealed from heaven. But they have entirely overlooked the prophecies of the great preparatory work for his coming. If they had read closely, and instead of studying for dates had carefully looked for the great purposes to be fulfilled before he comes they would have known that their predictions were false. There is to be a grand gathering of all his people from the four quarters of the earth into one body, one family as it were; one people consolidated in one region of country, before he shall come.

Let me refer to this great gathering of the Saints from every land and nation; we find it predicted in various portions of the prophetic writings. I will first refer you to the prediction recorded, if I recollect aright, in the 43rd chapter of Isaiah. There is a prediction that before the great day of rest the Lord will again speak and will say to the north give up, to the south keep not back! Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—the same thing that David has reference to.

This is not a work to be accomplished by the wisdom of man or by a combination of the wisest men that are uninspired, among the nations; but the *Lord* is to speak, and will say to the north give up. A new revelation is to be given: he will say to the south keep not back, and he will command that his sons and his daughters be brought from the ends of the earth.

Has any such thing happened in our days? Has the mighty God, even the Lord, spoken in our days? Yes, and connected with this proclamation we are informed that the elect of God are to be gathered from the four winds of heaven; and we have been called upon to perform this work. How much have we accomplished during the forty years that have intervened since the Lord spoke? In the year 1827, '28, '29 and '30 the Lord spoke and gave many revelations, among which was this record called the Book of Mormon, unfolding to us not only the everlasting Gospel in all its plainness, simplicity and ancient purity, as it was taught to the inhabitants of this continent eighteen hundred years ago; but also many sacred predictions relating to the great work which God would accomplish when he should bring this record forth in the latter days. This book was translated by a mighty Prophet who was inspired of God for the purpose; and since it came forth—in the short space of forty years—it has been published in many of the languages of the earth. It has gone forth in the German, Italian, French, Welsh and Scandinavian languages, and also in the tongue spoken by the Sandwich Islanders; and it has been proclaimed, as it were, on the housetops, in the streets and highways, upon the hills and mountains and in all public places, so far as the Missionaries and Elders of this Church could find access and liberty to proclaim it; and wherever the people have repented and turned from their sins and have desired to receive the everlasting Gospel, they have continued to gather together in one. This gathering has been going on for nearly forty years, until the effects can now be seen in this Territory, by any person who will travel through it in the towns and cities which have been built, the settlements which have been formed, the meetinghouses and schoolhouses and public halls that have been erected; and in the fencing of farms, and the opening of water canals and ditches for irrigating the soil. I say those who will travel through this Territory may see some of the effects of the gathering out of the Saints who have made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice. If we had gathered together into a country that was well timbered, where we could go out and get a load of fence poles or firewood before breakfast; if we had settled in a country that was not, comparatively a desert, and that was blessed with the rains of heaven, we could no doubt have accomplished far more than we now see. But the Lord purposely led us into this desert to fulfil prophecy. A great many people, perhaps, reflect upon and wonder at our coming into a sterile, barren district of country, inhabited by hostile savages, and which, to all natural appearance, would not sustain a farming or agricultural population. But the Lord brought us into a country of this description in order that he might fulfil prophecies that must come to pass before “our God shall come in flaming fire.”

In proof of this let me refer you to the nature of the country, the redemption of the desert and so forth, that is to take place before the Lord comes. I will refer you now to some of the sayings of the Prophet Isaiah. In the last two verses of his 34th chapter he says:

“Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.

"And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line: they shall possess it forever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein."

In the 35th chapter, first and second verses, you will find these words:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

"It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God."

Notice now that the Lord, by his Spirit, is to have a great gathering in the latter days of his people, and we are advised to seek out of the book of the Lord and learn of this gathering, and how his Saints should inhabit the land. It should be divided unto them by lot, the same as many people received their inheritances when they came into this desert. They cast lots, and drew their lots and inheritances. "And the wilderness and the solitary places shall be glad for them." If you can find a country that answers better the description here given anywhere in the four quarters of the earth, I should like to know it. When we came here, the country to all natural appearance was so barren that it seemed impossible to locate a people upon it. But you see what we have accomplished. Not by our own wisdom nor by our own strength, but by being gathered by the voice of the Lord and by his commandment, and being guided and directed by the spirit of inspiration.

After we are gathered, the desert is to rejoice and blossom as the rose. How often I have thought of this in the spring time, when all of this city, covering some four, or perhaps five square miles with orchards and gardens, is in bloom! Then is the time to realize how literally this prophecy has been fulfilled. Everyone knows that fruitful as it now is, when we came here it was called a desert. If you do not believe me, go to the old maps, and you will find this section of the country laid down as "The Great American Desert." That is the name that was given to it then. People, when banded together in a numerous company, and well armed would hardly venture to pass through this desert country, it was so unpropitious and forbidding, the rains of heaven never having been, apparently, shed forth upon it. When we came we could dig down some eighteen inches or two feet, and in other places there was no moisture at all, and it looked as though there never had been any rain here. But "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad for them, and the desert shall blossom abundantly, ever with joy and singing."

"But," says one, "perhaps this had reference to some other period and not to the preparatory work for the coming of the Lord." Let us read a few verses further in this 35th chapter of Isaiah's prophecies. The third and fourth verses read:

"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

"Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *even* God *with* a recompense; he will come and save you."

Now notice, this is not the first coming. He did not come with vengeance then; he came to be spit upon, to be meek and lowly, to be ridiculed by the mob if they felt disposed, and finally to be lifted up upon the cross and crucified for the sins of the world. But the people who are to be gathered together, and for whom the desert is to rejoice, are called upon not to fear—"Don't be fainthearted, don't be discouraged." Says the Prophet, "Be strong, fear not, for behold your God will come with vengeance; he will come with a recompense and he will save you," that is, you who are in the desert. Then there will be splendid miracles wrought again, as in ancient days. Then the eyes of the blind are to be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then "shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, for in the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert."

Latter-day Saints, and what I ask of you I might ask of the whole people of the Territory, have you seen a fulfilment of this saying of the Prophet Isaiah since you have been located here in the desert? Has there been any such things as springs breaking out in the wilderness and rivulets of water in the desert? Yes, not in one or two isolated instances, but in almost every settlement throughout this Territory. Many places in which, in early days, there was

not water enough for a settlement, of twenty individuals, now support their hundreds. In what way? By the great increase of water. How was Salt Lake when we first came here? We, that is, a few of the Pioneers, went over in July 1847, to the banks of Salt Lake, to what is called the Black Rock. Some of us went in bathing, and we could walk out to Black Rock, and look down on the water on each side. But how is it now? The waters are some ten feet above that land that we trod upon then. What is the matter? Ought not the waters of the Lake to have decreased, seeing that the waters of the various streams that, before our arrival, emptied their contents into it, are turned broadcast over thousands and tens of thousands of acres of land? Certainly one would think so, for when all this water is turned on the land it evaporates instead of going to increase the volume of the Great Salt Lake; but instead of diminishing, the waters of the Lake have risen some ten or twelve feet above the surface as it existed in 1847, when I first saw it. Hence streams have broken out in the desert, and waters in the wilderness, as it is prophesied, not only in this chapter, but also in various portions of the Psalms.

When speaking of the great day of the coming of the Lord, how often do Isaiah and David speak of the desert, and the waters, rivers and springs that should break out to water the barren, thirsty land! "The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water."

We might go on and speak about the highway that the Lord would have there, that has also been thrown up since we came here. It is even called a highway by the world, that know nothing of these prophecies. I believe I will say, as I pass along, something about the highway, for the same Prophet that predicts about this alteration in the desert, also says there shall be a highway there. Let me refer to another prophecy about this highway, by the same Prophet. It reads thus: "And the Lord shall proclaim to the ends of the world, say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him." But in the sentence preceding this the Prophet says: "Cast up, cast up a highway; gather out the stones; prepare ye the way of the people; lift up a standard for the people." Then come in the words I have quoted. How was the great highway that crosses this continent constructed? You ought to know, for you were the ones who constructed it through these mountains; you were the ones who built some four hundred miles of this railroad, you therefore know how it was done. Did you gather out the stones? Did you prepare the level places for this great highway that the Prophet had predicted? Did you cast it up where there were hollows? Did you fill up the hollows and gather out the stones in order to make it level and convenient? O, yes. Did you make any tunnels and gateways? I don't suppose that the ancient Prophet knew what a tunnel was, hence he says, "go through, go through the gates; cast up, cast up a highway." No doubt he saw in vision how the railroad looked, saw the carriages driving along with almost lightning speed, darting into the mountains on one side, and by and by saw them coming out on the other side; and he did not know how to represent it any better than to speak of it as a gate—"go through, go through the gates," &c. "Prepare ye the way of the people, cast up, cast up a highway, and lift up a standard for the people;" and then come in those notable words, showing that it was a highway to be cast up before the coming of the Son of God. "The Lord has proclaimed to the ends of the world, Say ye to the daughters of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him."

Don't you see from these passages that this is a latter-day work? That there is a proclamation connected with the casting up of this highway? And that it is a proclamation which has reference to every nation, kindred, tongue and people? God was to speak, deliver a message, send forth his servants as missionaries; they were to publish that message to the ends of the world, and to declare to all people that the Lord was to come, "Behold, thy salvation cometh, and his reward is with him, and his work is before him." The Prophet further says "They shall call them," for whom this highway was built that their way might be prepared, and for whom a standard should be raised, "the redeemed of the Lord, a holy people; they shall be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken." Oh, how different from old Jerusalem, a city that has been forsaken! It is almost two thousand years since the Lord forsook it, and the Jews have been forsaken, and scattered among all people.

But when the Lord lifts up this highway, gathers out the stones, sends forth his proclamation and gathers out his Saints who have made a covenant by sacrifice, they will build a city, one that shall be sought out. Old Jerusalem was not sought out; it was built before the Jews went to inhabit it. It was one of the early cities of the ancient nations of Canaan. But this latter-day city, that is called Zion, is to be sought out, and the people that were to

search it out were to be a very good people. "They shall call them the Redeemed of the Lord; they shall be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken."

Now, with all the difficulties we have encountered here, and with all the imaginations of our enemies in regard to us, I humbly trust and hope that the time has come for this prophecy to be literally fulfilled; when this city of the Lord, which is built up according to this prophecy will not be forsaken. I hope that the Lord our God will protect his people and guarantee to them the rights already guaranteed by the Constitution of our Country to every religious denomination in the land.

There are some other prophecies about the gathering of the Saints. I think I will read one that has reference to our coming to this place. You will find it in the 107th Psalm, and it is very applicable to the journey which we performed when we came here.

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for *he is* good: for his mercy *endureth* forever.

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;

"And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.

"Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.

"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, *and* he delivered them out of their distresses.

"And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

"Oh that *men* would praise the Lord for His goodness, and *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!"

This has been fulfilled since the day that David uttered it. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" What redeemed of the Lord? Not those who were gathered out of the land of Egypt before the days of David, but those who are gathered out of all lands, says the Prophet, "'from the East and from the West, and from the North and from the South." From the four points of the compass, from every nation and every clime. "Let them praise the Lord and give thanks to his holy name, because of his mercy and his goodness to them." They were not to find it at first all to their satisfaction; their journey was to be in a solitary way; they were to find no city to dwell in. I can bear testimony to this, for I was among the pioneers, and when we came here we didn't find any great city, with houses already built to go into. We had to live in our wagons, and had to build a little fort to defend ourselves against the half-naked Indians. And thus we located in the midst of a dried-up and thirsty land—a desert; and here in this region, where the solitude was so great that it was only broken by the yells of savages and the howling of wild beasts, we had to go to work to prepare a city for habitation. We had some afflictions—hunger and thirst; "and their souls fainted within them," says David, "but they cried unto the Lord in their afflictions, and he had mercy upon them and delivered them out of their distresses."

In the 31st and 32nd verses the Psalmist says—

"Oh that *men* would praise the Lord *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!"

"Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders."

Why should they be so glad to praise him? He tells us in the next verses—

"He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground."

"A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein."

This has reference to what will take place in the fruitful lands of the Gentiles by and by; but he is going to reverse this so far as his people in the desert are concerned, for he turns the wilderness into standing water, and the dry

ground into watersprings; and “there he makes the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitations.” Just as you did, brethren and sisters. “And sow the fields and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease.”

Has this been fulfilled? I have been away a great many years, and I do not know so much about it as some of these old farmers; but I think if we will traverse this Territory, we will find that our cattle have not decreased since we came here.

There is another prophecy in this Psalm to which I will call your attention, connected with this people that was to be gathered out from all lands into a wilderness and solitary place. The Prophet says—“Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.” Now, is that true? I would ask some of my brethren here, as I have been gone so much, Is there any man here who has families like a flock? If you have, you are fulfilling this prophecy of the Psalmist. I think I heard of and saw in my travels in the Territory quite a number of such men, quite poor men, just such men as David refers to. What wonderful things take place in the last days, in order to fulfil prophecy! “The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.” This latter clause has yet to be fulfilled, it has not yet come to pass. “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” Amen.