

Flourish Upon the Hills

As I was studying the Jesus Christ scriptures this week under the topic of “Jesus Christ, Head of Church”, I came across a phrase that I was not familiar with. Surprisingly, this phrase occurs repeatedly in the Doctrine and Covenants. Perhaps my favorite reference to this phrase is in 49:25. ***Zion shall flourish upon the hills and rejoice upon the mountains, and shall be assembled together unto the place which I have appointed.***

There are multiple ways to interpret this scripture. I will explore two of them.

- 1) When the Latter-day Saints first came to the Salt Lake Valley, it was nothing but desert, with a large body of water that was salty and unsuitable for use in farming. As they began to plant that first spring in 1848 after their arrival, “hordes of black crickets, some as big as a man’s thumb, came down from the foothills and began devouring the crops. All who were able took sticks, shovels, brooms, rags, or whatever else they could find and went into the fields to battle the intruders. The Saints dug trenches around the crops, drove the crickets into them, and tried to drown the pests. Still they came. Brigham Young later joked that when they killed one cricket, two more came to bury the first. It must have seemed that way to the hungry Saints. For over two weeks they battled crickets while praying for help. Finally, on the Sabbath, while Charles C. Rich was preaching, huge flocks of gulls flew in from the Great Salt Lake and began to devour the crickets. The gulls ate until they were full, vomited what they had eaten, and ate again, repeating this strange behavior for many days, saving much of the crop.” [“Deseret” by Sherrie Johnson – Church History and the Fulness of Times institute manual pp 337-351]. The point is that the Lord blessed the early pioneers. By eating these crickets, these seagulls (birds) saved enough of the crop so that the people could survive the winter. However, after an extremely harsh winter that same year, many of the Saints wanted to leave Utah and move to California. President Brigham Young promised, “As the Saints gather here and get strong enough to possess the land, God will temper the climate, and we shall build a city and a temple to the Most High God in this place.” With this encouragement, most of the people stayed. From those humble beginnings, if you look at the Salt Lake Valley today, one will have to say that Zion has indeed “flourished upon the hills and rejoiced upon the mountains”
- 2) In D&C 35:24, we read ***“Keep all the commandments and covenants by which ye are bound; and I will cause the heavens to shake for your good, and Satan shall tremble and Zion shall rejoice upon the hills and flourish; and Israel shall be saved in mine own due time; and by the keys which I have given shall they be led, and no more be confounded at all.”*** This reference clearly has a much broader meaning than just Salt Lake City becoming one of the great cities of the world. Let’s look at it a bit closer. Zion is defined by the Lord as *“the pure in heart”* (D&C 97:21). The word “flourish” means to grow, prosper, develop, increase and multiply. So, we can understand that in the last days, the pure in heart will grow, prosper, develop, increase, and multiply. But why the reference to the “hills”?

As I was trying to better understand this reference to “hills”, I found 1 Kings 20:28. *“And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord.”* The Syrians believed that Israel could only win battles in the “hilly regions” of Samaria because they believed in pagan gods whose power was tied to geographic regions. They made the mistake of projecting their belief onto the Israelites and their God. They were quite surprised when they learned that the God of Israel was not limited by geography or altitude as Israel *“slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day”* (1 Kings 20:29). In the bible, hills and valleys often symbolized life’s ups and downs. The

hills represented good times and celebrations. The valleys represented discouragement and trouble. Is it any wonder that the very flourishing of Zion “upon the hills” would be seen as a celebration? As the very best of times? As a time of great blessings and prosperity? Was it any wonder that the Syrians mistook the Samaritan hills as the strength of Israel’s military success? Wherever Zion is growing, there is prosperity, joy, gratitude and a multitude of blessings!

And now the connection to the Ghana Kumasi Mission. I will refer to D&C 39:13. *“Thou art called to labor in my vineyard, and to build up my church, and to **bring forth Zion, that it may rejoice upon the hills and flourish.**”* Do you see it? We have each been called to this mission for the very purpose of building up the church and bringing forth Zion. This is the land the Lord has appointed for each of us to do this very work. Why? Because the Lord wants the pure in heart, the elect of God, those who choose Him over the world, those who define the very essence of Zion, to live upon the symbolic hills of our lives, meaning times that are good, times filled with joy and gladness, times where families love each other and rejoice in their blessings. This is what it means for *“Zion to rejoice upon the hills and flourish”*. May we catch the vision of this great work and bring this promise to fruition through our desires, our diligence, our exact obedience, and our faith in Jesus Christ.

Hurrah for Israel!

All my love,

President Kunz