In the restoration, Joseph Smith taught his people that they can, and must, become people of Zion. That vision inspires the labors and programs of the Church to this day. In establishing Zion, Latter-day Saints believe they may be a light to humankind (D&C 115:4-6) and usher in the millennial reign of Christ (Moses 7:60-65; D&C 43:29-30). During the millennium, Zion will have two great centers—Jerusalem of old and a new Jerusalem in America—from which “the law” and the “word of the Lord” will go forth to the world (Isa. 2:3; Ether 13:2-11).

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Zion as explained here is much more detailed than, but bears certain social similarities to, the idea of Zion found in the work of Martin Buber in On Zion: The History of an Idea (New York, 1973). An LDS work that applies the idea of Zion to contemporary life is Hugh W. Nibley’s Approaching Zion (CWHN 9).

A. D. SORESEN

ZIONISM
Zion (Hebrew, early the Jerusalem mountain on which the City of David was built) is employed in LDS scripture both geographically and spiritually: the land of Zion and “the pure in heart” (D&C 84:99; 97:21; 100:16; cf. Moses 7:18-21). The declaration that “we believe in the literal gathering of Israel and the restoration of the ten tribes” refers to a new Zion in America as well as a renewed Jerusalem in the Old World. Latter-day scripture declares that Jerusalem will become the spiritual-temporal capital of the whole Eastern Hemisphere, “One Great Centre, and one mighty Sovereign” (MFP 1:259), while Zion will be the place of refuge and divine direction in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1831, less than two years after the organization of the Church, Joseph Smith received a revelation that included the imperative “Let them who be of Judah flee unto Jerusalem, unto the mountains of the Lord’s house” (D&C 133:13). In 1833 he wrote that the tribe of Judah would return and obtain deliverance at Jerusalem, citing Joel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Psalms, and Ezekiel (cf. TPJS, p. 17).

In March 1836, the dedicatory prayer given by Joseph Smith at the Kirtland Temple—since canonized and used as a pattern in later LDS temple dedications—pleaded that “Jerusalem, from this hour, may begin to be redeemed; and the yoke of bondage may begin to be broken off from the house of David” (D&C 109:62-63). In 1840-1841, Orson Hyde, an apostle, was commissioned by the Prophet to go to Jerusalem and dedicate the land. His prayer petitioned for the gathering home of the exiles, the fruitfulness of the earth, the establishing of an independent government, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and “rearing a Temple in honor of thy name” (Heschel, p. 18). Two years later, Joseph Smith prophesied that the gathering and rebuilding would occur “before the Son of Man will make his appearance” (TPJS, p. 286). These prayers and prophecies have been frequently reiterated by other apostolic authorities, both on the Mount of Olives and on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land and in official convocations of the Saints throughout the world.

Jewish tradition warns that commitment to “sacred soil” without faith in the living God is a form of idolatry. Early in the twentieth century the Zionist movement advocated a compromise between secular Zionists, who envisioned a state without traditional Judaism, and religious Zionists, who argued that the state must be grounded in traditional Judaism. History in the modern political state of Israel has thus far implemented that compromise.

Spiritual Zionism among Latter-day Saints is advocated in the setting of concern for all of the children of God. It does not pronounce on specific geopolitical struggles or endorse speculations on the exact “when” and “how” of the fulfillment of ancient and modern prophecy. Many LDS leaders see events of the past 160 years as a preface. They continue to plead for peace and for coexistence with all the peoples who lay claim to old Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and others.

The term Zion, pertaining to a spiritually significant New Jerusalem in America, is one of the central themes of the Doctrine and Covenants (see New Jerusalem).

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TRUMAN G. MADSEN