

# JOSEPH SMITH'S VIEWS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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In a masterful editorial entitled "The Government of God," Joseph Smith said:

The government of the Almighty has always been very dissimilar to the governments of men, whether we refer to His religious government, or to the government of nations. The government of God has always tended to promote peace, unity, harmony, strength, and happiness; while that of man has been productive of confusion, disorder, weakness, and misery. . .

It has been the design of Jehovah, from the commencement of the world, and is his purpose now, to regulate the affairs of the world in His own time, to stand as a head of the universe, and take the reins of government in His own hands. When that is done, judgment will be administered in righteousness; anarchy and confusion will be destroyed, and "nations will learn war no more." (DISC, V, pp. 61-63.)

## I. Background Views of the Kingdom of God

### 1. Scope of the Kingdom

Joseph Smith did not limit his view of the Kingdom of God to the religious sphere of life, but extended it to the social, economic and political areas of society. He received revelations on such matters as education, health, recreation and marriage. He was given a divine economic law. And the basic political principles upon which God's millennial government will rest were made known to him. Certain revelations also had some significant things to say about the Constitution of the United States.

In a day when ideologies destructive to freedom are making serious inroads into our way of life, every member of the Church should understand what the Lord has revealed concerning true social,

economic and political principles, as they are to be developed within the Kingdom of God.

## 2. All things to be Gathered together in Christ

Joseph Smith was called to lay the foundation of the Dispensation of the Fulness of times, in which all things are to be gathered together in Christ. To this end two things are essentials:

A. Christ's Church must be built up upon its social and economic law, to become a society sufficient within itself to care for every legitimate human need.

B. A government must eventually be established under the direction of the Holy Priesthood, known as the Government of God, capable of extending freedom and justice to all men.

So important is this political organ to the consummation of God's purposes that the Prophet argued that this "is the only thing that can bring about the 'restitution of all things spoken of by all the holy Prophets since the world was'--'the dispensation of the fulness of times, when God shall gather all things in one.'" (DHC, V, 64.)

## 3. Religious and Political Aspects of the Kingdom of God

As John Taylor once observed, the Kingdom of God must eventually be both a church and a state. (JD, V, 23-25.) Within this divine system, the Prophet explained that, "Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High, holding the keys of power and blessings." (DHC, V, 555.) Having referred to the various organizations in the Church, Brigham Young also explained that while "this is what we are in the habit of calling the Kingdom of God" there are "further organizations." And with respect to the fuller vision of the Kingdom as a political order, he said:

The Prophet gave a full and complete organization of this kingdom the spring before he was killed. . . . The Kingdom of God will protect every person, every sect and all people upon the face of the whole earth in their legal rights; I shall not tell you the names of the members of this kingdom, neither shall I read to you its constitution, but the constitution was given by

revelation. The day will come when it will be organized in strength and power. (JD, XVII, 156.)

While both the church and the state were to be united under the direction of the Priesthood, they were nevertheless to be separate in their functional operations. Explained George Q. Cannon:

On this point the Prophet Joseph gave particular instructions before his death, and gave an example, which he asked the younger elders who were present to always remember. It was to the effect that men might be chosen to officiate as members of the Kingdom of God who had no standing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Kingdom of God when established will not be for the protection of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints alone, but for the protection of all men, whatever their religious views or opinions may be. Under its rule, no one will be permitted to overstep the proper bounds or to interfere with the rights of others. (DHC, VII, 381-383.)

#### 4. The United States Constitution and the Kingdom of God

The Constitution of the United States was expected to be incorporated within the Kingdom of God and used to establish its political law. That the Constitution provides the proper form of government for men is evident from the Lord's statement when He said: "And as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil." (D.&C. 98:7.) Brigham Young also explained that "the form of the Government of the United States differs but little from the Kingdom of God." (JD, VI, 342.)

Within the Kingdom of God, however, the Constitution was to become a universal document designed to give freedom and justice to all men. Having expressed the ideal of the Kingdom of God as a system designed to do this, George Q. Cannon therefore said:

That is the kind of kingdom we have to contend for; that is the kind of kingdom we have to establish, and it is already provided for in the Constitution given unto us by God, and

through the glorious labors of the fathers who laid the foundation of this government, who were inspired and raised by our Almighty Father for this express purpose. There is no liberty that a human being can desire, neither is there a right that can be exercised properly, that we do not have under the Constitution of our land. It needs no amendment about it; *it is broad enough, if interpreted in its true spirit, to cover the individual, the continent, and the entire globe and furnish freedom for all.* (DD, XX, 204, italics added.)

This view that the Constitution is designed to grant freedom to all men is also expressed by the Lord when He said of that inspired document: "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." (D.&C. 98:5.) Again, in another revelation it was said that the Constitution was established "and should be maintained for the rights and protection of *all flesh*, according to just and holy principles." (D. & C. 101:77, italics added)

## II. The Role of the Society of Zion in the Kingdom of God

To see the Prophet's full vision of the Kingdom of God, we must understand that the Society of Zion was to play a vital role in the divine plan. The social and economic order the Prophet endeavored to establish among the Saints was to be founded upon the uplifting and regenerating powers of the Gospel. Under the influence of these spiritual powers, the Saints were to be enlightened, and sanctified, and united in their desires to where they could see eye to eye. When the patriarch Enoch established this system in ancient times, it was said: "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." (Moses 7:18.)

### 1. Covenant Society

The Society of Zion was a covenant society. Every phase and program of the system was founded upon the principle of personal covenant. One entered the system by the new and everlasting

covenant of baptism. Priesthood was conferred with an oath and a covenant. In entering the economic program of consecration and stewardship, one did so with a deed and a covenant. And the home was founded upon the new and everlasting covenant of Marriage. Having received the economic law of Zion for the benefit of the Saints, Joseph Smith explained: "It was my endeavor to so organize the Church, that the brethren might eventually be independent of every encumbrance beneath the celestial kingdom, by bonds and covenants of mutual friendship, and mutual love." (DHC, I, 269.)

Let us look for a moment at the constituent elements within a covenant society.

First, it must be a society of free people.

Second, as free people, members of this good society must be responsive to the Spirit of the Lord, and enlightened by its intelligent powers.

Third, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, these free and responsive people must be matured to where they are dependable and responsible individuals.

Fourth, as free, responsive and responsible individuals, members of the Society of Zion must be filled with Christian love and dedication, to where they have the same regard for others that they have for themselves and are willing to consecrate all.

## 2 Zion as an Ensign

Being based upon the highest ideals of freedom and brotherly union, Zion's covenant society proposed to liberate fully the creative powers of the individual and thereby establish an economy of abundance wherein men might be free, united and economically independent under Christ. After giving instructions on the economic program of Zion, a revelation said of the need for the Saints to achieve such independence:

Behold, this is the preparation wherewith I prepare you, and the foundation, and the ensample which I give unto you, whereby you may accomplish the commandments which are given you;

That through my providence, notwithstanding the tribulation which shall descend upon you, that the church may stand independent above all other creatures beneath the celestial world. . . . (D. & C. 78:13-14.)

The Prophet's concept of the Kingdom of God thus envisioned the establishment of Zion as an ensign and a standard to the world, showing others how a free and progressive people dedicated to Christian ideals can become independent above all other systems among men. This society was to be the nucleus or center of the Kingdom of God. But associated with Zion under the law of the Priesthood there was to be a political system founded upon the basic principles set forth in the Constitution of the United States. While Zion was expected to point the way to true spirituality and social justice, the Government of God was designed to extend freedom and legal justice to all men. Here, in brief, was the Prophet's ideal.

### *III. Generalizations*

Having set forth some basic concepts within the Kingdom of God, let me draw a few generalizations and conclusions.

1. The Kingdom of God proposes that the social and economic aspects of society be integrated into the spiritual Bore of the Gospel, leaving the state unsocialized with the primary responsibility of upholding freedom and justice for men. By contrast, a socialized state proposes to integrate the social and economic aspects of society into its political core, leaving religion completely free and unassociated with the other spheres of society. Note, for example, the development in this direction in modern trends.

2. The spiritual powers of the Gospel are the key to the establishment of a true society capable of achieving social justice without impinging upon the freedom of men. Within the society of Zion, the individual is enlightened and regenerated by the Holy Spirit to where he can become an independent agent capable of acting

freely, intelligently and in enlightened union with others, in establishing a program of true security and economic independence. By contrast, man-made systems that attempt to establish social justice through the state of some other agency lack these enlightening and regenerating spiritual powers. To achieve union and justice they must be manipulated like puppets, by various artificial devices. Such regimentation results in a loss of freedom for the individual. The creative powers of man are also stifled and initiative is suppressed in such systems; and like lifeless bodies they are subject to forces of deterioration, so that greed, graft and corruption are perennial problems among them. and the security which men seek through such systems is but a fleeting and evasive substitute for that which may be obtained within the Kingdom of God.

3. To establish the Kingdom of God, the Saints are under the responsibility to build up their own program of social and economic independence, to where they become independent above all other systems beneath the celestial world. This, may I stress, includes becoming independent above state-sponsored welfare measures. We cannot build up Zion by seeking to socialize the state, for we have our own program for achieving true social and economic justice, revealed by the Lord. It is our ideal, instead, to become an ensign and a standard to the world. Here, may I suggest, is our challenge; and here is our opportunity. It is the only system that I know of that is capable of solving the problems of our complex world.