



## Salt Lake City: City Stake of Zion

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President Brigham Young's first matter of business upon entering the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847 was to locate the place to build a temple in which the Saints could make sacred covenants with God. Once the site for the temple had been designated, Church leaders proceeded to lay out the city plat of streets and city blocks, with the temple block as the starting point. Today, Temple Square and the bordering blocks in each direction exhibit care for the sacred nature of the heart of a city stake of Zion.

The concept of Zion has several meanings and the idea of Zion being a city laid out in a specific pattern is somewhat unique to Latter-day Saints. For example, Zion may refer to Jerusalem or specifically Mount Zion, a location in the southwest of the city of Old Jerusalem. It also refers to a people, such as the people of Enoch, whom the Lord called Zion because they were of one heart and one mind (see Moses 7:18),

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or to any group of people that are pure in heart (see D&C 97:21). On the other hand, the Lord revealed that the city of the New Jerusalem would be called Zion (see D&C 45:65–67), which city was later identified to be built specifically in Independence, Missouri (see D&C 57:1–3; 84:2–4). To describe Zion, Latter-day Saints have used the image of a tent whose curtains stretch out from the center place and are secured by stakes driven in the ground (see Isaiah 54:2). The Lord refers to stakes of Zion (see D&C 68:25–26) or stakes to Zion (see D&C 82:13), which are large ecclesiastical units, today composed of individual congregations called wards. Unique among the many perspectives of Zion is that of a city with a specific plat or layout for the city. Further, this plan for the city of Zion provided a guide for planning other cities settled by the Latter-day Saints. The Lord designated a city laid out in the same pattern as a “city of a stake of Zion” (see D&C 94:1), or what is referred to as a city stake of Zion.

The Prophet Joseph Smith laid out a distinctive city plat for the New Jerusalem or center place of Zion, and for the cities that formed the stakes of Zion.<sup>1</sup> Originally, he directed that once one plot of one mile square was laid off with surrounding acreage for barns, stables, and platted fields, “lay off another in the same way, and so fill up the world in these last days; and let every man live in the city, for this is the city of Zion.”<sup>2</sup> The surrounding city plots were referred to as stakes to Zion. The movement of the Saints required that a continuous adding of city stakes adjacent to the center could not be implemented. Rather, city stakes adopting these original instructions were established in Kirtland, Ohio; Far West and Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri; and Nauvoo, Illinois. After the exodus to the west, the Saints established Salt Lake City, which became one of the most conspicuous of those city stakes. Although there are many organized stakes of the Church in the city today, until 1904 there was one exceptionally large stake of the Church for the entire city.<sup>3</sup> The concept of a city stake of Zion is most clearly recognized during the single-stake time period before the massive growth of the city. Nevertheless, more than a century later, the

heart of Salt Lake City has retained the pattern of a distinctive blueprint for a city stake of Zion. The following discussion provides an explanation of Salt Lake City as a city stake of Zion; it connects elements of the city to the directions given by the Prophet Joseph Smith for building up the New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri. These directions in turn echo the divinely revealed order of the camp of ancient Israel as they journeyed in the wilderness.

### Plot for the City of Zion and Her Stakes

The Prophet Joseph Smith sent instructions to the Saints in the area of Independence, Missouri, regarding the foundation for the city of Zion. This city plot placed schools and houses for worship in the center. Two blocks were set aside for sacred buildings, with twelve buildings, or temples, in each block. The block to the west of the center was set aside “for store-houses for the Bishop, and to be devoted to his use.”<sup>4</sup> The remaining ten-acre blocks that spread out in straight lines running north to south and east to west from the city center were generally for residential lots. These lots were one-half acre each, with one home per lot, and the streets were 132 feet wide. “Farming areas were located on the outskirts of town, allowing the farmer and his family to enjoy all the urban advantages of schools, public lectures, and social gatherings.”<sup>5</sup> This basic plat was implemented in other cities where Saints gathered to stakes of Zion. Regarding the similarities among the initial plot for the city of Zion and cities in the stakes of Zion, Lynn Rosenvall pointed out, “The similarities and differences between the basic plan and the actual cities have been pinpointed in an examination of more than five hundred settlements colonized by Church members between 1830 and 1900. . . . As each city developed, the basic features of ‘Zion’ were retained, even though exact amounts of land designated for each function varied in each settlement.”<sup>6</sup>

It is evident that Salt Lake City was patterned after the plot for the New Jerusalem, or the city of Zion (see D&C 45: 66–67; 57:1–3),

revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. President Brigham Young assigned Orson Pratt to design the future city of Salt Lake by drawing upon Joseph Smith's plan for the city of Zion. Orson went to work immediately, drawing the city plot with wide streets and large lots (see fig. 1). By August 2, 1847, the base and meridian were established as the southeast corner of what was to become Temple Square. From there, he and Henry Sherwood began to survey the plat for Salt Lake City; streets were identified by the number of blocks east, west, north, and south of the meridian marker.<sup>7</sup> The city plat for Salt Lake was not exactly the same as the early Missouri plot. For example, rather than each lot size being a half acre, the early Salt Lake City lots were more often 1.25 acres each. In addition, the streets were forty feet wider, as they included twenty-foot-wide sidewalks on each side. Further, more than one house could be built per lot, and Salt Lake City residential lots included gardens, barns, and places for livestock.<sup>8</sup> Regarding these variations, Craig F. Galli noted, "Brigham's adaptation to the original City of Zion Plat to allow for extra-wide streets facilitated future urban design adaptations that enhanced the community in several ways as Salt Lake City's population grew."<sup>9</sup> The wider streets have allowed for easier transition to meet the needs of automobiles, street cars, and mass transit without disturbing existing buildings. In addition, "as the Saints surveyed the city, they constructed city blocks to be altered to fit the foothill terrain and allowed buildings to be structured where none had been planned."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the plat of Salt Lake City generally followed that of the city of Zion in Missouri. Thus, it is accurate to state that the Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation for the planning of Salt Lake City and Brigham Young and other Church leaders based the city in revelation.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the American Institute of Certified Planners posthumously recognized the Prophet Joseph Smith's influence on Salt Lake City, designating the plat for the city of Zion as a National Historic Planning Landmark.<sup>12</sup>

Within the city plat for Zion in Independence, Missouri, the Lord commanded that the "city shall be built, *beginning at the temple lot*"



Before Brigham Young and the pioneer company crossed the Midwestern plains to the Salt Lake Valley, the Lord clarified that they were to establish a stake upon arriving: “Let every man use all his influence and property to remove this people to the place where the Lord shall locate a stake of Zion” (D&C 136:10). It is most likely that the previously established pattern of beginning a city stake of Zion focused greater emphasis on the selection of the site for the Salt Lake Temple and the plotting of the city from that point. Moved by the Spirit of God, on Monday, July 26, President Young and other leaders climbed what is now called Ensign Peak, located in the foothills north of Temple Square. They viewed the valley from that elevated spot to select the site for the temple. From Ensign Peak, those leaders waved a banner or ensign, symbolically indicating that the Salt Lake Valley would be a latter-day gathering place.<sup>13</sup> “Late in the afternoon [of Wednesday, July 28], all the Apostles then in the valley, accompanied by Thomas Bullock, the president’s secretary, Brigham Young designated the site for the temple block between the forks of City Creek.”<sup>14</sup> They were accompanied by Elders Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, Amasa Lyman, and Ezra T. Benson. “Waving his hands, Young said that they should reserve 40 acres at that site for the temple.”<sup>15</sup>

### Moses’ Tabernacle and the City of Zion

The pattern of placing temples in the center of the Lord’s people was implemented long before this dispensation.<sup>16</sup> The earliest recorded pattern is found in the Lord’s instructions to Moses regarding the tabernacle and the organization of the camp of Israel. There are several similarities between the plat for Salt Lake City and the organization of the camp of ancient Israel as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness. For example, the center of the camp of Israel was the tent of the Lord, or the tabernacle, a type of portable temple. Whether the people camped for one night, or several weeks or were

on the march, the Lord specified a particular order and layout of the camp of the tribes of Israel. In the camp, the curtained gate and doors of the tabernacle faced east, toward the direction of the morning light. The Lord revealed that the tents of the prophet Moses and his brother Aaron, the high priest, were to be pitched on the immediate east side or entrance of the tabernacle, “keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel” (Numbers 3:38). This position of the families and tents of Moses and Aaron, the presidents of the Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthoods, may have represented their assignments as the sentinels placed to guard the entrance to the holy space of the tabernacle courtyard and to the tent of the Lord. Immediately to the west, north, and south, Aaron’s sons were given their positions in the camp of Israel, essentially surrounding the tabernacle with the priesthood as they pitched their tents along the way (see Numbers 1–2). In Salt Lake City, President Young and members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles set up inheritances for the presiding officers, similar to Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s sons. The properties of President Young and Presiding Bishop Newel K. Whitney, like Moses and Aaron, were purposely located on the block directly east of the temple (see fig. 1). Like their ancient counterparts, they were the presidents of the greater and lesser priesthoods respectively (D&C 84:6, 25–27; 107:13–16, 91).

The environs of the ancient tabernacle and the modern temple were designed to protect the holiness of the house of the Lord. The Lord instructed Moses to appoint the Levites to oversee and care for the tabernacle and the sacred vessels and furniture that belonged to it. As part of their ministry, they were also to “encamp round about the tabernacle” (Numbers 1:50). Likewise, Brigham Young extended the spirit of holiness to the area surrounding Temple Square in Salt Lake City by placing the inheritances of modern priesthood leaders nearby. The residential lots in the vicinity of Temple Square were given to Church leaders such as Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, both counselors in the First Presidency, and Orson Hyde, George A.

Smith, Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, and Ezra T. Benson—all members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see fig. 1).

### **Buildings and Businesses in the City of Zion**

In accordance with this pattern, during the years that have followed the original laying out of the plot of Zion in Salt Lake City, Church buildings dedicated to the work of the Lord, have risen on the temple block, and a wall has been placed around it. Each of these edifices contributed to building up Zion in her beauty and to helping the Saints become a truly Zion people. Similar to the twenty-four houses of the Lord that the Prophet Joseph Smith indicated were to be at the center of Zion in Missouri, many other Zion-oriented buildings have been erected in the center of Salt Lake City. Many of the early structures included meeting places on Temple Square—first under a bowery, then in an early gable-roofed tabernacle building, and later in the famed elliptical roofed Salt Lake Tabernacle.<sup>17</sup> From 1879 to 1882, President John Taylor directed the building of the Assembly Hall on Temple Square as a smaller gathering place. In 1855, to meet the needs of the Saints to receive sacred ordinances as the temple was being built, they erected the Endowment House, a temporary temple, on the northwest corner of Temple Square, later adding an adjoining room that housed a font for baptisms for the dead. “When the temple was completed,” noted President Gordon B. Hinckley, “a wall was constructed surrounding what has come to be known as Temple Square. The traffic outside the wall is frequently heavy and noisy. Within the wall, there is an environment of peace and beauty. The grounds with their artistic walkways, broad lawns, magnificent trees, and brightly colored flowers become a world apart from the outer surroundings.”<sup>18</sup>

The principles of Zion extended beyond the walls of Temple Square and governed the Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI) and other businesses. For example, placards were placed above many



businesses with the inscription “Holiness to the Lord.” This same plat for the city of Zion extended into other settlements throughout the West. The early Saints planted seeds of the city of Zion in their various communities after the pattern found in Salt Lake City. These seeds included temples, bishops’ storehouses, businesses associated with ZCMI, and the homes and farms of Saints.

To understand the desire to establish Zion among the early pioneers, one must appreciate the concerns President Young and other leaders expressed about commerce. For example, William S. Godbe, a wealthy businessman and eventual apostate, desecrated the spirit of Zion and looked to commercial and financial concerns apart from the purposes the Lord had revealed.<sup>19</sup> Further, whenever any Gentiles, or non-Latter-day Saints, sought to gain power and control of the city, of businesses or of the government, he or she was viewed as an opponent to Zion, and to the city of the stake of Zion. That perspective adds insight to modern renovation projects in and around Temple Square. Often, the intent of these projects is to protect the sacred environment of Temple Square and permit visitors to enjoy the Spirit of the Lord, unhindered by surroundings not conducive to contemplating the beauty of Zion.

### **The Mountain of the Lord within the City of Zion**

While the plat for Salt Lake City definitely has practical advantages, it has philosophical underpinnings as well. The design of a city of Zion with a temple at its heart has its beginning long before the Mormon settlement of Salt Lake City. Laying out a city from the point of the temple follows the divine pattern of the creation of the earth, when land first came forth out of the waters, creating a place for humankind to live (see Genesis 1:9–10). Recognizing that the land above the waters was, in reality, the top of a mountain breaking the watery surface and that God’s matchless power brought it forth, the resultant land is referred to as the mountain of the Lord.<sup>20</sup> Further, the concept of the mountain of the Lord is associated with the dwelling place or house of

God on earth. At the very least, the mountain of the Lord is the location where God meets with man on earth. For example, Moses saw the burning bush when he “came to the *mountain of God*, even Horeb” (see Exodus 3:1; emphasis added). Isaiah and Micah wrote of a future day in which many people will say, “Let us go up to the *mountain of the Lord*, to the house of the God of Jacob” (see Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2; emphasis added). Decades before the Restoration of the gospel, Michael Bruce (1746–67) penned the words to a hymn, “Behold, the Mountain of the Lord,” later included in the Latter-day Saint hymnal. His words express awareness of Isaiah’s symbolic reference:

Behold, the mountain of the Lord  
In latter days shall rise  
On mountaintops, above the hills,  
And draw the wond’ring eyes.  
To this shall joyful nations come;  
All tribes and tongues shall flow.  
“Up to the hill of God,” they’ll say,  
“And to his house we’ll go.”<sup>21</sup>

In accordance with this symbolic perspective, the Salt Lake Temple is often referred to as the mountain of the Lord. Indeed, its walls are made from mountain granite.<sup>22</sup> This designation follows a pattern established earlier in this dispensation when the Lord called “the city of New Jerusalem,” “Mount Zion” (see D&C 84:2–3; 133:18). The actual elevation of the city or of the temple site varies only a little from the surrounding area, but it is designated as a “mountain of the Lord” because of the temple to be built there.

Latter-day Saints are not unique in associating temples with the primordial mount of creation. Many cultures incorporate the concept of a mountain of the Lord into their sacred buildings and temples. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seeley point out that “many temples were considered embodiments of the cosmic mountain—a

high place of universal preeminence—which connected the heavens with the earth and where the gods often dwelt. The idea of the cosmic mountain, a place where humans ascended and Gods descended to meet them, is often reflected in the names of such Mesopotamian temples as *E-kur* (mountain house), the name of Enlil’s temple at Nippur, and *Dur-an-ki* (bond of heaven and earth).<sup>23</sup> The architecture of many ancient temples such as the ziggurats of ancient Babylon, the pyramids in Mesoamerica, and temples in many other cultures represented sacred mountains. The temples and the mountains themselves often became associated with the dwelling place of God.

Ultimately, the primordial mountain, the mountain of the Lord, or the temple, represents the beginnings and center place of Zion. Isaiah explained, “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (see Isaiah 2:3). In latter days, the Lord explained that the Saints were to gather to build the city of Zion, “which city shall be built, beginning at the temple lot . . . that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the Saints, beginning at this place, even the place of the temple” (see D&C 84:3). Thus temples philosophically connect the creation of the earth with building the city of Zion—a city dedicated and consecrated to God (see D&C 57:1–3; 58:57; 103:35).<sup>24</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

Salt Lake City provides a glimpse into what the Prophet Joseph Smith intended for the future building up of the New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri. Indeed, Salt Lake City serves as a vivid example of a city stake of Zion. The modern building up of Zion connects Latter-day Saints with peoples that had the same labor in former times, specifically to the children of Israel in the days of Moses. The pattern of beginning a city stake of Zion, with a center block set aside for the work of the Lord, may draw us to the very creation of

the earth. In addition, as a city stake of Zion, Salt Lake City heralds another type of creation—that of the millennial earth. Revelations and efforts to build Zion, her city stakes, and temples may teach of a day when the Saints will welcome the Lamb of God, when he “shall stand upon Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (D&C 133:18; see also Revelation 14:1). Granted, Salt Lake is but a glimpse of Zion, but it may allow us to better envision with John the Revelator as he testified, “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).

### Notes

1. Richard H. Jackson, “The Mormon Village: Genesis and Antecedents of the City of Zion Plan,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 223–40. Specifically, the plats for Kirtland, Ohio, Far West, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois, follow the pattern for the City of Zion in Independence, Missouri. It is suspected that Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri, was also laid out according to the pattern of the plans for the City of Zion. The original plat of the city of Far West, discovered in 1990, offers a visual image of the four-square city plan. “The historic document, in near-perfect condition, is drawn with black ink on sheepskin. It is labeled ‘Original Platte of Far West, Caldwell Co., Mo.’ In August 1836, two counselors in the Missouri presidency, W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer, selected the 640-acre site for Far West. The town site was surveyed with the temple block in the center and public squares in each quadrant. Surveyors platted all of the streets 5 rods wide, except those adjacent to the temple block, which were 8 rods, or 132 feet across. The different street widths are clearly evident in the leather plat. The document appears to have been used to note the assignment of city lots. In more than 60 of the lots, including one of the public squares, someone has placed a firm dot with a pencil.” Glen M. Leonard, “Far West Plat Reflects Inspired City Plan,” *Church News*, April 28, 1990, 4.

2. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 1:358.
3. See Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 104.
4. *History of the Church*, 1:358.
5. John Livingstone, W. Jeffrey Marsh, Lloyd D. Newell, Craig James Ostler, John P. Starr, and David M. Whitchurch, *Salt Lake City: Ensign to the Nations* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), 72; *History of the Church*, 1:357–59.
6. Lynn Rosenvall, “Joseph Smith’s Influence on Mormon City Planning,” *Ensign*, June 1974, 26.
7. Orson F. Whitney, “Orson Pratt: Apostle, Pioneer, Philosopher, Scientist and Historian,” *Improvement Era*, January 1912, 201. Livingstone and others, *Salt Lake City: Ensign to the Nations*, 21.
8. See Richard Jackson, “The Mormon Village: Genesis and Antecedents of the City of Zion Plan,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 223–40.
9. Craig D. Galli, “Building Zion: The Latter-day Saint Legacy of Urban Planning,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 1 (2005): 117.
10. Rosenvall, “Joseph Smith’s Influence,” 26.
11. In a note to his history of the Church, referring to the plat for Salt Lake City, B. H. Roberts wrote, “the reader will recognize that this plan of city-building is nearly identical with that given to Joseph Smith for the city of Zion in Jackson county, Mo.” *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1957), 3:280n27.
12. The award plaque is located inside the west wall of Brigham Young Historic Park (southeast corner of State Street and North Temple). The park also honors Brigham Young for carrying out the City of Zion plat in Salt Lake City.
13. See Dennis A. Wright and Rebekah E. Westrup, “Ensign Peak: A Historical Review,” in this volume.
14. Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 3:280.
15. Thomas G. Alexander, *Grace and Grandeur: A History of Salt Lake City* (Carlsbad, CA: Heritage Media Corporation, 2001), 19; see also Wilford Woodruff’s journal entry for July 28, 1847.

16. Although Enoch “built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion” (Moses 7:19), no mention is made in the scriptures of a temple in that city or the city plat. The same is true of other cities that might have been built after this pattern, such as Melchizedek’s city of Salem (see Genesis 14:18).
17. Gordon B. Hinckley, “To All the World in Testimony,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 4; see also Scott C. Esplin, “The Salt Lake Tabernacle,” in this volume.
18. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Salt Lake Temple,” *Ensign*, March 1993, 5.
19. Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 5:258–69.
20. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely, *Solomon’s Temple: Myth and History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 9–14. Sometimes this mount is also referred to as the primordial or cosmic mount, underscoring both its prominence as the most ancient mount and its association with the mystical or celestial nature attributed to the works of God.
21. Michael Bruce, “Behold, the Mountain of the Lord,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 54.
22. Underscoring this concept, in 1993 a film entitled *The Mountain of the Lord* was produced under the direction of the First Presidency to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple. “The Mountain of the Lord,” *Ensign*, March 1993, 10.
23. Hamblin and Seely, *Solomon’s Temple*, 10.
24. It may have been with this in mind that the Psalmist declared of God, “His foundation is in the holy mountains” (Psalm 87:1).