

I: Beginnings

What, would you say, is one of the very first tales of woe in recorded history?

The inescapable answer leads us to a fundamental cause of all evil. (This is eons before money, so that isn't it.) Scripture reveals our pre-mortal history and the first instance of recorded treasonous rebellion. The ensuing shower of evil continues even now.

In our premortal life, we watched an advanced spirit of light and knowledge become impatient with his progress. He watched as Father's creations willingly obeyed him. Always by persuasion and longsuffering and, most of all, by faith.

"And the Gods watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed." (LDS Abr 4:18; RE Abr 7:5, See also the Lectures on Faith 1:14-16)

Lucifer lusted to be obeyed by any means necessary. His methodology was rejected and he rebelled:

"...an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God, who rebelled against the Only Begotten Son whom the Father loved and who was in the bosom of the Father, was thrust down from the presence of God and the Son, and was called Perdition, for the heavens wept over him..." (LDS D&C 76:25-26; RE T&C 69:6)

But why the weeping? Weren't they getting rid of a mutinous rebel? Why not celebration?

Why the Heavens Wept

Misfortune, self-inflicted or otherwise, is not cause for festivity. Have any of Father's children fallen further than Lucifer? As an appropriate answer to this question, the heavens wept.

"...he was Lucifer, a son of the morning...he is fallen...we beheld Satan, that old serpent, even the devil, who rebelled against God, and sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ—Wherefore, he maketh war with the saints of God, and encompasseth them round about." (LDS D&C 76:27-29; RE T&C 69:6)

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Isaiah laments:

“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning...For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (LDS Isa 14:12-14; RE Isa. 6:6)

LDS members have been well taught about a particularly critical Heavenly Council in our premortal existence.

“In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it.” TPJS, pg. 349

Our mortal salvation was the primary topic of debate. Lucifer offered to lose no one at the cost of agency; Father offered His plan with agency, and risk.

Lucifer, “who rebelled against God, and sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ” was not simply a tantrum-throwing teenager. He was guilty of treason and mutiny. His desire was to usurp Heavenly Father’s kingdom. He saw what Father had and wanted it, without the necessary effort, experience, and resulting character, perfections, and attributes.

Lucifer saw Father’s creations obey him because of Father’s honor. They trusted Him and knew He would never lie to them. Father administers His love, justice, and mercy with absolute equity and exquisite perfection throughout His kingdom. This is known throughout Father’s creation and is the reason for willing obedience. You cannot counterfeit honor.

Lucifer was impatient and lusted after a shortcut to being obeyed. He did not understand honor. Father explained what happened later when He told Moses:

“...for he rebelled against me, saying, give me thine honor, which is my power; and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency...” (LDS D&C 29:36; RE T&C 9:11)

And Father let them go. When God promises unconditional agency, it is unconditional. (He is not a politician.) Tragically sad as circumstances can be, at times, our agency is that important. Lucifer made his case the best he could:

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"Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor." (LDS Moses 4:1; RE Gen 2:15)

Lucifer did not understand that honor is earned. Like the oil in the virgin's lamps, honor is not transferable, or conferrable. Lucifer suffered envy for what Father had earned by His successful climb up Jacob's ladder. And so, we find envy at the root of all the evil we suffer at the hands of Satanic forces. Envy is the angry fire behind it all. Envy is a fundamental cause.

II: Envy is Complicated

Even though envy is a fundamental attribute of the natural man, can you completely separate envy from pride, greed, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth--the Seven Deadlies? Perhaps not. However, envy appears to be the sin pushing the prideful, greedy, wrathful, lustful, gluttonous, and slothful, over the edge.

Envy precedes, and is the engine of, jealousy. Envy is always comparing. Comparisons between Father's children can easily slide into the miserable abyss of envy and lust for the honors of men and their material goods.

Paul warns:

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number*, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." (LDS 2 Cor 10:12; RE 2 Cor 1:34)

*(Strong's #1469; i.e., Don't sit at the cool kid's table.)

In the quest for righteousness, our Lord has the answer to perhaps, the most critical question ever asked:

"...why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men..." (LDS D&C 121:34-35; RE T&C 139:5)

George Hinkle didn't understand any of this when he made his deal with Colonel Lucas to deliver Joseph Smith for arrest and prosecution, on the pretense of a negotiating pow-wow. The ruse used on Joseph was to enlist his help in bringing peace between the Mormons and the Missourians.

Hinkle's betrayal of Joseph's trust condemned Joseph, and his comrades, to Liberty Jail for the cold months of 1838. It was more like a medieval dungeon. It is doubtful that there was room in George Hinkle's heart for much of anything but envy.

A favorite movie, (People Will Talk, 1951), more poetically teaches the point.

A short, envious, stiff-collared, hard-hearted, bureaucratic, university professor attempts to discredit a creative, compassionate, fair-minded, and financially more successful colleague.

The attempt failed, embarrassingly. The following was said to the envious failure:

"Professor Elwell, you're a little man. It's not that you're short. You're...little, in the mind and in the heart. Tonight, you tried to make a man little whose boots you couldn't touch if you stood on tiptoe on top of the highest mountain in the world. And as it turned out...you're even littler than you were before."

Such are my feelings about George Hinkle, Sampson Avard, and all the rest who bore false witness against Joseph Smith in the early days, and those who continue to deny historical and scriptural facts and order the lighthouse* to change course 10 degrees. *(Reference to the "lighthouse" story in Steven R. Covey's book, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989.)

III: Beware of Envy's Path

The pathway to envy will likely consist of admiration, aspiration, and/or ambition. Any one will do. Multiples of them can escalate to a nearly psychotic, self-righteous state of calm, self-assured, but false security, with an insidious undercurrent of vainglorious pretension. We might call it the Chosen People Complex which is often supported by institutional emotional conditioning. Ironically, Dictionary.com lists the opposite of vainglory, as humility.

We've paid strict heed to the Francis Bacon, John Lock, and David Hume, empiricist bunch. It's as if we've broken through all that was restricting the limits of human knowledge and experience, and reached godhood on earth, all by ourselves. We pretentiously name our banks and department stores, "Zion."

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I was stunned at the raw truth contained in the following quote about the effects of knowledge and its acquisition, "Epistemic humility doesn't mean that you don't aim high. It means you don't pretend you reached it."
(<http://www.spirithome.com/humility.html>)

We are, indeed, like five-year-olds in a physics lab, thinking we can constructively contribute to God's plan. The kind physicist can only supply a broom and a dustpan, and we do our best. We lack what was practiced among the people of Enoch and Melchizedek. These days, few think enough to wonder and ask about such things.

Unbridled ambition looks for shortcuts rather than doing the work. There is no shortcut to the top of the ladder of competence. Anxiously desiring another's capability with no intention of earning it, is envy. Envy wants something for nothing or very little. Ambition fueled by envy ravages dignity and honor, leading headlong into tests of moral integrity. Envy says, "You have to cut corners to be successful like _____."
(Fill in your object of envy.)

Admiration and aspiration are more ambiguous. What you find will be what you expect to find. Both a positive and negative case can be made for either. However, admiration tends to be positive, while it is the opposite for aspiration. Hence our Lord's warning regarding aspiring to the honors of men.

Envy is selfish, while sincere admiration is essentially gratitude. And gratitude cools the fires of envy. Humility produces gratitude for the effort and sacrifice of others, resulting in beautiful art, inventions, and all worthy endeavors.

Envy only wants to be a celebrity, a show-off, with followers. Much of our entertainment is based on envy. That collective appetite supports billions in revenue for both the entertainment and advertising industries. Envy is big business.

Ambition tends to the negative as a result of moral weakness. In reality, ambition is neutral until we determine character, virtue, and self-mastery. Ambition at its core is simply, "an earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction...and the willingness to strive for its attainment..." (Dictionary.com)

An earnest desire for some achievement is laudable as long as the achievement is laudable and the necessary sacrifices are worthy. The honors of men and the things of this world are not laudable achievements in and of themselves. Hence the difficulty

with ambition and the Lord's warning about "vain ambition." It tends toward the visible and is envy-inducing.

After a concert, it is common to hear a remark like, "I would give anything to play like that." No, actually, you wouldn't. The thousands of hours of practice required to play, as did the concert musician, are beyond your willingness to sacrifice. If not, you would be a musician and not envious of a musician.

A more honorable after-concert comment might be more like: "I admire the effort and sacrifice required to produce such beauty. Truly beautiful music is made in no other way, and those who have worked to make it, deserve admiration."

A comment about a wealthy individual might be, "I would give anything to have that kind of wealth." Again, no, you wouldn't. If you knew the sacrifices of integrity, honor, family, relationships, health, or similar fundamentals regularly traded for wealth, you would reject the proposition outright. Envy, however, wants the reward without the sacrifice.

Envy of position can lead to a life of misery chasing after mortal honors. Here are some particularly cogent thoughts about fame, which I've paraphrased from the source:

"Neil Maxwell talked about it, he said, yeah, it's out there, but you just don't inhale. The perfect characterization is the curse of "celebritydom."

"We turn them into celebrities; we want to turn them into Brittany Spears, because that's the ultimate end of celebritydom. It is hollow, it is stale, it is flat, and it is unprofitable—there is nothing to it. Why do you think Brittany Spears is the mess she is? Because fame and fortune are nothing.

"And I suspect those who enjoy the envy of position, who ultimately managed to weasel or brown-nose their way to where they thought it would be great, arrive at that point, look around and say, 'Well this is just like where I was, nothing has changed,' because the change has to be a change internal to the person and not a mere change in geography or topography—going from the third floor to the tenth floor, doesn't change you. You're still that same hollow, miserable, envious chap." (Transcript from the Zion Symposium, Denver C. Snuffer Jr., February 23, 2008; spelling and paraphrasing mine.)

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Admiration, aspiration, and ambition are always available to us, and can also be used in a variety of positive ways. Admire with gratitude, aspire to goodness and charity, and let righteous ambition lead you to God. Envy is the "evil twin" of each of these attributes. A ready guard is always necessary. Question your own motives. Drive envy away with your lack of attention. Don't inhale.

IV: Envy Hiding

A particular kind of envy is more difficult to see and diagnose. You have a talent. Someone you greatly respect has a similar talent, only more so. Their natural ability in this area is significantly greater than yours. In addition, they have worked more diligently to develop their talent than have you. By their natural, God-given gift, and exhaustive effort to develop it, they have achieved far more productivity and attention.

You conclude that by some fault other than your own, you have been cheated. This is perhaps the most destructive form of envy. It is everywhere, common. This is the form of envy from which Lucifer suffers.

Envy is insidious. It can sit just under the radar of awareness, where it drives emotion to a place of nagging misery. Envy may deceive you into considering the object of your envy as a mentor when your true objective is not learning and growth but the honors of men by association.

Blindness to envy enables and hides its insidious nature. Outwardly, you feel justified, while cunning envy cankers the soul and bleeds honor. Envy slides effortlessly into self-loathing. The resulting lack of self-esteem inhibits productive behavior and camouflages effective solutions. In anxious despair, it becomes easy to be convinced by the "friendly" scorpion to jump on his back to cross the stream to safety. Oh, yeah, that'll work.

Envy eradication requires courage and an increase of faith in our Savior's ability and willingness to help. Agonizing reappraisal* may require gut-wrenching realizations, sudden paradigm shifts, and other unpleasant but purifying spiritual emetics. *(The phrase, "agonizing reappraisal," is a lyric from Sea Level, That's Your Secret, 1977)***

Evil does not relinquish control without a battle. Only a courageous fight will gain eternal salvation and joy in this life. Turn away from envy and iniquity and face the Lord in repentance. Then face the conflict with honor. Do not let evil shoot you in the back because you ran from the fight.

V: Envy, Emotions, and Evil Paths

Envy has played a pivotal role in history since our premortal life, when Lucifer envied Heavenly Father's honor and thus His power. Today, envy is a central component of the emotional conditioning techniques used by corporations, governments and their associated political organizations, academia, and religions. Envy has been a big deal in the profession of persuasion for a long time.

Having been rejected by the Lord, Cain envied Able's position as the righteous one who would receive the birthright and the Holy Order. With the first murder, he sought to displace Able as the head of the genealogical line that would produce the Savior. How many times has envy been at the heart of murder or great loss?

Was there envy in the heart of Lot's wife as she disobeyed and looked back at the great city she was leaving? How could Jared, son of the righteous King Omer, in the Book of Mormon, have conspired with his daughter to murder his father for the kingdom, if it wasn't for envy?

The people in Samuel's day were envious of other nations that were ruled by kings. They thought a king would fight their battles and make life easy, making all their decisions for them. "...we desire a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us and fight our battles." (LDS 1 Sam 8: 19-20; RE 1 Sam 4:4)

This was their response, even after Samuel had rehearsed all the terrible things a king might inflict upon them. Envy is powerful. Samuel gave them a preemptive "I told you so" beforehand. Even so, they refused to listen.

"And you shall cry out in that day because of your king whom you shall have chosen you, and the Lord will not hear you in that day." (LDS 1 Sam 8:18; RE 1 Sam 4:3)

The prodigal son* is a story about a young man who makes a disastrously shortsighted decision based on his envy of the world outside his own. After wasting his inheritance on "riotous living," and suffering in the drought that ensued, he "came to himself" and begged his father to take him back, only as a servant. Of course, the father threw a party and welcomed home his son. *(LDS Luke 15:11-32; RE Luke 9:13-15)

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Upon hearing of his younger brother's arrival home, and the celebration going on, the faithful elder brother became envious, from which anger ensued. "...he was angry, and would not go in..."* Envy convinces that the grass is always greener somewhere else and that another's joy rightfully belongs to you. This double-edged sword cuts both ways. *(LDS Luke 15:28; RE Luke 9:15)

Poor Isaac was in for it from the beginning. As a child, Ishmael persecuted little Isaac: "Sarah watched the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom Hagar had borne unto Abraham, mocking, and she was troubled."* The rest is history with the sons of Ishmael locked in a seemingly-forever envy of the younger brother. *(LDS Gen 21:9; RE Gen 82)

Treachery and envy don't care much about genealogical lines though. "...and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him..." (LDS Acts 7:8-9; RE Acts 4:3)

We could continue this romp down Envy Lane, but I think this horse is about dead. And so, sadly, were Joseph and Hyrum. Envy had three Smith casualties, if you count Samuel. We should.

Suffice it to say, without envy, the world would be a very different place, perhaps more like the Zion we seek. There is no higher honor than to be worthy of an invitation there. And thus, we have discovered the goal of our most immediate mortal career path.

"and I will bring you to Zion..." (LDS Jer 3:14; RE Jer 2:3)

We chain and bind Satan and make him a non-issue, by recognizing and rejecting his temptations. Understanding our role in this face-off is a primary task of mortality. The Lord cannot accomplish this for us. Nor can He learn algebra for us.

"Wherefore, beware lest ye are deceived; and that ye may not be deceived seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given;" (LDS D&C 46:8; RE T&C 32:3-4)

"And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things." (LDS D&C 88:67; RE T&C 86:12)

Imagine an entire society of people living this way and striving for these things. In such an environment, more fluid organizations will arise with greater adaptability and effectiveness. At the same time, it will be messy and inconvenient for those who cannot leave behind the trappings of hearts set upon the things of this world and aspirations to the honors of men. Such people will not find it satisfying.

"Those who are comfortable with the way things are in this world will not be at ease in the spirit world." (TheNorthStarChronicle.com, Filling the Immensity of Space, January 27, 2020)

What we are attempting to create is a spiritual environment in the face of mortality, a daunting task. Daunting because we are swimming upstream in a world of aspirations and pressure. Zion is God's to create, but He needs some folks who actually want to be there and are willing to sacrifice for that cause. It's up to us to practice, practice, practice, like the eager young musician. Practicing Christlike behavior and opening our hearts to His law*, grooms us to be like Him. Those who are like Him will see Him as He is**. This is His will, and our path.

*(LDS Jer 31:33; RE Jer 12:9)

** (LDS Moroni 7:48; RE Moroni 7:9)

VI: Equality Overtakes Envy

Instances of envy-inducing media and personal situations are everywhere. Can we become more immune to the negative effects of these influences?

The most important thing to consider and understand is all over the scriptures. There's no doubt or wiggle-room on this one. We are all equal before God. Access to God is given freely to anyone who desires it. There is no line. "Don't need no ticket, you just thank the Lord" (Curtis Mayfield, People Get Ready, 1965.)

Here are two relevant examples, one from Peter through Cornelius, and one from God. Cornelius was a Gentile who had not converted to Judaism, but was a righteous man. Even so, Jews were forbidden his association. An angel advised Cornelius to contact Peter for a visit, which he did. After a vision from God, Peter told Cornelius:

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"God has showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean...Truly I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that fears him and works righteousness is accepted with him." (LDS Acts 10:28, 34-35; RE Acts 6:6,7)

This was huge for Peter—a magnificent paradigm-shift. Being humbled, he recognized the lighthouse of inequity and the resulting iniquity, and obediently changed a deeply held belief. Peter was open and sensitive to the Lord's will, regardless of false traditions. Are we?

Then, our Lord confirms:

"And for your salvation, I give unto you a commandment...all flesh is mine, and I am no respecter to persons..." (LDS D&C 38:16; RE T&C 22:6)

Exactly why is it critical that God is no respecter of persons?

Joseph Smith answers in the third Lecture in Faith, verse 23:

"But it is also necessary that men should have an idea that he is no respecter of persons, for with the idea of all the other excellencies in his character and this one wanting, men could not exercise faith in him; because if he were a respecter of persons, they could not tell what their privileges were, nor how far they were authorized to exercise faith in him, or whether they were authorized to do it at all; but all must be confusion. But no sooner are the minds of men made acquainted with the truth on this point — that he is no respecter of persons — than they see that they have authority by faith to lay hold on eternal life, the richest boon of Heaven, because God is no respecter of persons and that every man in every nation has an equal privilege."

This is fundamental and Babylon-shaking doctrine. It lays us flat, staring into the abyss of our pedestal-making judgments, and envy. It topples rock-star leadership.

It raises those who thought they had no chance. It provides no advantage or hindrance to anyone, regardless of organizational affiliation. Isn't this what missionaries teach the seeker? Our Lord is an intimately personal God. All are equally invited to approach Him with the confidence and expectation of an audience, and answers.

Ask with faith. And soon will be observed sudden bursts of knowledge. You recognize that they came from a source seemingly outside you but yet inside too. As you express gratitude for the increase in knowledge and light, you'll receive more, as you ask. This is how we attain the Glory of God and His Grace.

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He waits for us to resonate with the frequencies of Heaven. The tuning mechanism is our Christlike behavior and our heart's righteous desires. Envy causes spiritual dissonance, which interferes with those frequencies. With spiritual alignment to Heaven, communication becomes clearer.

Be One, and Be Unique

While we are one with each other, and with God, all having equal privilege before Him, we remain unique in our individual capabilities and spiritual gifts. How boring would be mortality, if we were all the same.

(Just a short note before Paul reminds us of fundamental doctrine. The Hebrew language has no neutral term for gender. A group of men and women is referred to as "masculine." Hence, both men and women are recipients of spiritual gifts.)

"But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit all; for to one is given by the spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit, to another faith by the same spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these work that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing to every man separately as he desires." (LDS 1Cor 12:7-11; RE 1Cor 1:48)

Each gift is a reminder of the Lord's interaction with us, and His trust. We are uniquely blessed and challenged, male and female, to increase our ability to identify, develop, and use our gifts. As we bless others, the Lord takes note, and we grow closer to Him and become more like Him.

Recognizing the gifts of others when we have neglected our own can lead to envy. Envy of another's spiritual gift is an affront to the judgments of God. Really? We would call into question the Lord's will for us and others?

Because of our equality before God, envy of mortal position or gifts, is empty and irrelevant. Our Lord provides a path for each of us back to the Father through His Atonement. Where we are on our unique path is irrelevant to anyone else's position on their path.

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Neal Maxwell warns: "It is not wise for us to compare crosses." (Neal A. Maxwell, BYU Devotional, Taking Up the Cross, Jan 4, 1976.)

The message appears to be: "Discover your own spiritual gifts and use them to bless others." Direction on our path is far more important than position. In spite of that truth, comparing path positions and paychecks has become all too common in Babylon.

The engine of envy is pride, with lubrication provided by money. Paul warns Timothy about those who reject the Gospel of Christ and, instead, embrace a secular, strife-filled culture of iniquity, where money is the ultimate reward and scorekeeper. See if this sounds tragically familiar:

"...he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof comes envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness...For the love of money is the root of all evil..." (LDS 1 Tim 6:4-5, 10; RE 1Tim 1:16)

VII: A Civilization That's Just an Idea, So Far

Zion does not yet exist in our mortal world. Nor does the New Jerusalem, which God will establish as a prelude to Zion. Why do these places—or, better put, environments—not yet exist here?

God alone can create the Zion of the dispensation of the fullness of times. No man can accomplish that task. It is solely His. (Pun intended.) The many mortal battles left to fight are among the wicked. Our battle is with whatever is keeping us from our integrity, virtue, and honor, like envy. Beware of men in white robes offering Zion to you. They want your envy as their reward for the counterfeit they deliver.

Envy leads to strife

We have enough strife in this world. Love God, one another, and be one, are the commands. Our Lord's influence calms fears and doubts and teaches patience and faith. Let envy melt and drain away in the heat of Gospel light. Let Him lead to the still waters.

Practice holiness, meekness, and lowliness of heart:

"...wherefore, he must needs have charity. And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh

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no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." (Moroni 7:44-45 LDS; Moroni 7:9 RE)

You have the power to open the door where Christ waits. Open that door, and you will find Him there, with a reassuring and forgiving hug. Confidence before the Lord is better than envy.

"...and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion..." (LDS Jer 3:14; RE Jer 2:3)

"...this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: after those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord — for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." (LDS Jer 31:33-34; RE Jer 12:9)

The Zion of the last days is our Lord's to organize and execute. Our corresponding task requires oil in our lamps born from His law on our hearts and our resulting Christlike behavior and devotion. An easy task? Not hardly. Doable? Yes!

The choice, as always, is ours.