

Under Covenant Toward the Promised Land: Section 136 as a Latter-Day Type

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A couple of months ago, my older sister, Margo, serving as Young Women president in her ward in Cape Town, South Africa, expressed frustration that she could find no way to help her young women see the meaning in “Faith in Every Footstep.” In fact, she said, “I am tired of these American stories, these pioneers who died a hundred years ago and with whom I can find no connection.” I knew exactly what she meant.

As a child of relatively new convert parents in Cape Town, South Africa, I was bewildered to encounter American pioneers. After all, we had pioneers of our own—the Voortrekkers: Afrikaner men and women who left the English colony of Cape Town. They wanted to escape British tyranny, speak their own language, and worship their own God. I was fully aware of my Voortrekker heritage—but my pioneer heritage in the Church was, I assumed, sadly lacking. All I had were two parents who, by joining the Church in the 1950s, had branded themselves to the outside world. In their devotion to this new religion, they had saved for eight years, eventually selling my father’s prized cherry-red, 1940 MG roadster to fund what they thought would be a once-in-a-lifetime journey to the London Temple to be sealed to their four children. And there I was

singing “America the Beautiful” in honor of some American pioneer day in the Mowbray chapel on a 1970s Wednesday afternoon 20 kilometers from the tip of Africa. I had no idea what I was doing.

Of what significance were these American pioneers? Why did Sister Cartwright insist on making us dress up in Voortrekker clothing and push wheelbarrows around the Church parking lot in the middle of a winter July rainstorm? (Wheelbarrows were the closest we could come to a little red wagon. We had no idea what the lesson manual meant by those.)

As of February 1996, the majority of our Church members live outside the United States. Like me, they do not have a direct link to the pioneer heritage. I cannot even claim one by marriage—Kevin’s pioneer heritage includes his father’s 1960 journey across the plains of America in a car whose tires were so bald they should have traveled only one block, not three thousand miles from the Bronx, New York. That young 1960 pioneer came of Puerto Rican heritage, raised on a diet of New York Yankees, Broadway shows, and playing hooky

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at Coney Island. That pioneer who made his solitary journey is now the gentle grandfather of my two very wild children. In marrying Kevin, I assumed his pioneer journey as part of my individual heritage—no Young, Smith, Call, or Snow in our combined family journals.

What then is the significance of the 1847 exodus from Nauvoo to the millions like me who have no pioneer blood? There are two ways to look at these stories:

1. First, we can see in the intensely personal accounts guides and mentors. I am moved by the stories of sacrifice, of hope in the face of great sorrow, of obedience when staring at seeming impossibilities. These stories serve as individual mentors for my personal challenges.

2. We can view these accounts in their broad strokes and patterns as types from the beginnings of our religious and cultural heritage that tell us as a people how to act if we will reenact the literal journey in our spiritual lives.

It is in discussing this second approach that I wish to convey to my sister and her young women—and all others like them and me across the world—the great significance of that long-ago pioneer journey to the mountain valleys of Utah.

Collectively, to the Church membership as a whole, this pioneer journey can serve as our mythic root back to the creation of Zion. It can explain to us who we are, how we came to be, and how we must journey through this life if we are to reach or establish Zion in our hearts. We are literally the spiritual posterity of those early pioneers. Their actual journey to a Utah valley to physically establish Zion is the model on which we must base our spiritual journey with “the pure in heart” (D&C 97:21).

Preparing for the Journey

In the dedication of the Mount Timpanogos Temple, and again this last general conference, Elder Faust told the story of his great-grandparents, who, on the eve of leaving Nauvoo,

were in the group of Saints who thronged the temple hoping to receive their temple covenants. Brigham Young was about to leave in his wagon, but his heart was softened, and he kept the temple open into the morning hours so that the Saints would have an opportunity to leave on the westward trek under the protection of temple covenants.

Why were these covenants so important? Because, with the making of the covenants in the endowment session, the Saints lost their image of themselves as individuals and began to see the world as the Lord sees it. As they made the covenants to sacrifice for the Lord, to love their fellow Saints, to remain chaste and pure before God, and to covenant all they had for the building of the kingdom of God, they left behind the typically American myth of realization that now pervades much of the Western world: Horatio Alger, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett—the bushwhackers who travel off the beaten path to accolades and praise. After the temple covenants, the pioneers were able to see through new eyes, the eyes of God. Their vision became God’s vision, and their walk became the walk of God. They were then disciples of Christ, children of Abraham, part of the family of God—irrevocably tied together by divine relationships.

It is fitting that such covenants were made before the westward journey. And it is fitting that we make such covenants before we embark on our spiritual journey toward Zion. Why? Because when the Saints joined the wagon train, they did so with ambivalent feelings. After months of preparation in which parlors were turned into paint shops for wagons and women preserved all they could for the journey, the exodus still came as a heart-wrenching surprise. (See Bathsheba Wilson Bigler Smith, autobiography, microfilm of manuscript, Church Archives, quoted in Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* [Salt Lake City: Deseret

Book Company, 1992], p. 64.) They were leaving behind their lives and much they loved: their sacred temple, their homes and businesses, even their lands and crops in the fields. Yet they knew, and had decided jointly, that, as a people, they were moving to a suitable valley in the West in which they could build another temple of God and live according to his covenants and statutes. They were to start anew with a new organization modeled after the patriarchal family, under a contract with God, willing to go wherever his appointed leaders directed (see Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, p. 65).

In much the same manner, when we make covenants in the temple, we leave behind our old lives. We covenant to forsake our selfishness, our profanities, our egos, and our covetousness, and we consecrate all that we have for the building up of the kingdom of Zion, which Zion is not a physical place in the tops of the mountains but a knowledge of the gospel and the resurrected Christ in the hearts of our fellow travelers. Significantly, this temple covenant, I believe, is not meant to be a continuum of our lives; it is not meant to mesh nicely with the old order. I believe it comes to us like Christ came: with a sword to divide everything asunder, to change life as we know it to life as God wants it to be (see Matthew 10:34–39).

To those who had not prepared in heart and soul, the command to begin the westward trek was stunning. In fact, some of the Saints were left behind for a season so that they could better prepare (see D&C 136:6). However, for those who do these things with a pure heart, the command is clear—not without real fear or sorrow—but full of the Spirit and thus joyful to the soul.

Why is this particular concept of journeying under covenant so powerful?

First, I believe the journey of the soul is inevitable. We will journey whether we want to or not. Dennis Rasmussen, in *The Lord's*

Question, says we are moving either away from God or toward him (*The Lord's Question* [Provo, Utah: Keter Foundation, 1985], p. 4). We are never stationary. It seems then that the natural motion of the soul is to journey. If we wish to journey toward the promised land and kneel before our Maker, we must journey under his covenant made in sacred places before our fellow Saints and witnesses.

Second, journeying under covenant acts as an antidote for the rampant materialism and I-centeredness of our generation. I recently moderated a session of a symposium in which members of the Church bemoaned the fact that the Church didn't offer them a comfortable place in which to explore their own peculiar identity. Their rallying cry seemed to be, "The Church is just not sensitive to our needs." I have also heard those—myself among them—who wish to be entertained for 90 minutes on the Sabbath groan at the lack of stimulation in local sacrament meetings.

Recently one of my honors students tried to justify the acquisition of great wealth. He kept insisting, "I should be able to keep all the Lord has given me through my work and my righteousness." I tried to persuade him to change the terms of the equation: Not whether I should be able to keep everything, but whether the Lord will want to keep me after all I have given. In the dedication of the Mount Timpanogos Temple, I heard anew these phrases: "The temple is ready. Lord, please accept this, our offering." I suddenly realized that in the temple *we* become the offering. We ask not "What does the Church have to offer me?" but "What do I have to offer the Lord, 'the people of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and those who journey with them'?" (D&C 136:2). With that reorientation, the sacrifices required on the trail toward Zion assume a different dimension. Significantly, only in the temple can we commit to this orientation toward our community and our God and prepare ourselves for the journey.

Journeying under Covenant

What are the features of this particular journey? What life are we living when we journey under covenant toward the promised land?

1. *Saints under covenant must be devoted to the concept of journeying, not destination.* The ultimate covenant under which the Saints journeyed is simply expressed in D&C 136:4: “And this shall be our covenant—that we will walk in all the ordinances of the Lord.” Note the covenant is not that they will walk in the Lord’s ordinances until they reach Zion. There is no mention of destination when we walk in the way of the Lord’s ordinances.

In the revelation of 1847, the journey and not the destination seems to be more significant. The Lord does not offer advice on how to settle the Salt Lake Valley; rather, he reminds the Saints they are under covenant to him and to each other. His statutes govern behavior on the trail, not settlement in Zion. He actually consoles them with “Zion shall be redeemed in mine own due time” (v. 18), as if to remind them that he will take care of Zion and their enemies (see verse 30); their responsibility is to take care of each other.

Significantly, the Lord’s time, not human diligence, governs the creation of Zion. Thus we find in section 136 another antidote to a modern malaise—this time to the prevailing mind-set that life is a series of tasks to be completed as quickly as possible. Similarly, when we view our spiritual journey as a set of hurdles, we concentrate on jumping cleanly and crossing the tape first—we want to be the first to see the angel Moroni as we round the bend in Emigration Canyon. So we attend the temple every month, we cross-stitch the Proclamation on Families on a fridge magnet, and we read at least one verse of scripture before our head hits the pillow so that our planner will have all those boxes neatly checked. In our zeal we fail to realize that we are judged not on whether we reach the Salt Lake Valley but on whether we wore ourselves out in the effort to bring

ourselves and all for whom we are responsible as far along the trail as possible.

Patience Loader was 20 years old when she and her family left Council Bluffs three weeks behind schedule as part of the Martin Handcart Company. She wrote movingly of the sacrifice by those of the party to make sure that at least some of their families would reach Zion. In particular she described a Brother Blair who had been one of Queen Victoria’s “life guards” in London before his conversion and immigration:

*He had a wife and four small children. He made a cover for his cart and he put his four children on the cart. He pulled his cart alone. His wife helped by pushing behind the cart. Poor man. He was so weak and waurn down that he fell down several times that day but still he kept his dear little children on the cart all day. This poor man had so much love for his wife and children that instead of eating his mosael of food himself he would give it to his children. Poor man. He pulled the cart as long as he could then he died and his poor wife and children had to do the best thay could without him. . . . The poor children got frozen. Some parts of there bodys was all sores but thay all got in to Salt L[ake] City alive. [Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, *Women’s Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982), p. 231; original spelling and punctuation preserved]*

Ultimately, that we physically arrive at our destination is insignificant. In a last journal entry on April 5, 1847, before she left Nauvoo, Patty Bartlett Sessions wrote: “We start for the mountains or a resting place and leave Winter Quarters” (Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women’s Voices*, p. 198). She recognized that, at 52 years of age, she might not complete the journey to Zion. However, the Lord promised the 1847 Saints before they had even taken a step, “You have received my kingdom” (v. 41).

Now what does that mean? Perhaps that the kingdom of God is not so much a valley in the Rocky Mountains as a state of spiritual readiness and sacrifice, and that once we have committed our lives through temple covenants to the Lord we have the kingdom of God within us.

To maintain that spiritual commitment is perhaps the reason for being “tried in all things” (v. 31). We cannot stay in our Nauvoo forever: we must wade the Mississippi River, join the wagon train, and begin the journey. Ultimately though, this covenant journey is about willingness and worthiness to enter the kingdom of God. President Hunter, in his short ministry as prophet, clarified for us the worth of the temple recommend by asking all to make themselves worthy to hold one. Our recommend is not a hall pass to a particular temple. It is a symbol of our willingness and worthiness to make and live by the covenants of God, whether we live in Provo and may attend the temple at our discretion or in Nairobi, where we might never have the chance, in this life, to make those temple covenants.

In May of 1847, little Peter Weston Maughan was born to Mary Ann Weston and Peter Maughan, English immigrants living in Wisconsin Territory. Later, in 1850, his parents buried him in a dry-goods box somewhere along the Mormon Trail—a trail described by President Hinckley as “a trail of tragedy, a trail of faith, a trail of devotion, a trail of consecration, even the consecration of life itself” (from an address delivered near Riverton, Wyoming, 15 August 1992, quoted in Dell Van Orden, “‘Second Rescue’ of Handcart Pioneers,” *Church News*, 22 August 1992, p. 3). He had fallen from the wagon seat and been crushed by the wagon wheels. His mother had already lost her first husband from injuries he sustained in a mob beating in England (see Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women’s Voices*, p. 37–38). (They had opened their home to preaching by Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff, much to the consternation of their

neighbors.) His mother wrote the following in her life history about little Peter:

*We buried him on a little hill on the North side of the road. The grave was consecrated and then they laid him to rest. Some one had made a nice head-board, with his name printed on, also his age and date of death. This was all we could do, and many prayers were offered to our heavenly Father, that he might rest in peace and not be disturbed by wolves. We turned away in sorrow and grief. [“Journal of Mary Ann Weston Maughan,” *Our Pioneer Heritage*, comp. Kate B. Carter, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1959), p. 377]*

His parents consecrated his grave to God and then turned their faces again toward Zion. Peter’s small body lies as a testament that he was willing and worthy to make the journey to Zion and that he gave all he had, even his life, for the building up of the kingdom of God. I cannot help but think of the last verse of “Come, Come, Ye Saints”:

*And should we die before our journey’s through,
Happy day! All is well!
We then are free from toil and sorrow, too;
With the just we shall dwell!
But if our lives are spared again
To see the Saints their rest obtain,
Oh, how we’ll make this chorus swell—
All is well! All is well!
[Hymns, 1985, no. 30]*

2. *Saints under covenant travel in companies organized and led by the Lord.* The pioneer Saints were organized into companies with a covenant and promise to keep all the commandments and statutes of God (see D&C 136:2). They pledged to each other to travel together as a company under the leadership of “a president and his two counselors . . . under the direction of the Twelve Apostles” (v. 3), the Lord’s appointed. Once these significant covenants had been made, the Saints’ sole

responsibility was to use “all [their] influence and property” (v. 10) to bring their company to Zion and to do so “with a pure heart, in all faithfulness” (v. 11). The revelation refers to the individual Saints in two places: in verse 10, where the individual is told to use “all his influence and property” for the benefit of “this people,” and in verses 20–30, where individuals are counseled how to act toward their fellow travelers. All the further responsibilities are described as follows: “Let [the companies] go to with their might” (v. 6), and verses 7 through 9 all start with “Let each company.”

Interestingly, the Lord calls the Saints of 1847 “this people” (v. 10). There is no division into the worthy or unworthy, into blessed or more righteous. He embraces all Saints with “this people.” According to the divine vision of equality, each company had their own “captains” (v. 3), their own “poor . . . widows . . . fatherless” (v. 8)—all equally deserving of a place in the wagon train. The needy members of each company were the touchstone by which the company would be judged. The pioneer Saints’ treatment of the widows, poor, and fatherless would be either their justification or condemnation: For “the cries of the widow and the fatherless come . . . up into the ears of the Lord against [the] people” (v. 8) who do not care for them.

Brigham Young, Jr., in a 1901 conference address, described the conditions on the trail that reinforce the notion of divine equality:

Day after day those who were in the rear part of the train thought they were doing well if they could camp where the head of the train had camped the previous day. If they made in one day a journey of three miles, they thought they were doing excellently, because they had to bridge the streams, and over every swamp they had to build corduroy bridges. I never will forget them. They were like the lives of the Latter-day Saints. We have to journey sometimes in water up to our necks, where we can hardly keep

our mouths above the surface. So it was at that time. [Brigham Young, Jr., CR, November 1901, p. 77]

In the pioneer journey as in life, some will be at the head of the wagon train and some will be at the rear. Although the stakes might not seem or actually be fair, no status is attached to our position in the train. All travelers must complete their own journey and cross the rivers with “mouths [hardly] above the surface.” However, it is precisely because the stakes on our journeys are not even, or even fair for that matter, that the second great commandment becomes so important: “Love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

Consequently, in our modern journey we may not indulge in the recess game of picking sides according to talent and ability or picking wards and acquaintances according to socio-economic levels or reputation. We can only pledge allegiance to the company to which the Lord has assigned us. We cannot discard those who would weigh us down or lessen our chance of what we perceive to be a speedy, prestigious arrival in Zion. (Here we find again the mistaken notion of Zion as an ultimate destination.) Once we are under covenant, we may not travel alone, even if we think that by staying with the group we lessen our own chances of success.

Thirteen-year-old Mary Goble Pay traveled with her family in an ox wagon. They were assigned to stay with the Martin and Willie handcart companies to offer assistance if necessary (Mary Goble Pay, “Death Strikes the Handcart Company,” in Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979], pp. 105–7). An ox wagon could outravel a handcart. Had the Goble family traveled at their own pace, they probably would not have lost their six-week-old daughter who “died for want of nourishment” and was “buried at the last crossing of the Sweet Water [River].” They might not have lost their

teenage son, who was as “well as he ever was when he went to bed. In the morning he was dead.” They might not have lost their mother, who died “between the Little and Big Mountain” on the day they entered the valley. “She was 43 years old.” Mary wrote later: “We had orders not to pass the handcart companies. We had to keep close to them to help them if we could.” Like Mary, we will never arrive in Zion—even if we are physically standing on the corner block of Temple Square—if those for whom we are responsible do not arrive with us.

Do I ever arrive at my destination? I do—only my individual arrival means nothing if I have not helped those who follow after me to also reach Zion. Zion is where the Saints have gathered together; I cannot inhabit Zion all by myself. Even the language that we use so naturally—“I’m a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”—is rife with reminders of our interconnectedness. When we become members, we are inextricably linked with all the other members of this spiritual body.

We are sometimes tempted to separate ourselves from the group—mostly when we lose our focus of the temple covenants. We begin to think the ways of the world more significant than the ways of the Lord. However, the Lord warns those individuals who

have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant;

They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god. [D&C 1:15–16]

Those “who will not hear the voice of the Lord . . . shall be cut off from among the people” (v. 14). Their destination is not the promised land of the celestial kingdom but a forever wandering in the wilderness.

3. *We reveal our commitment to our covenants by the way we accept chastisement.* With no regard to position, the Lord will chastise those

who disobey the covenants of the company. Brigham Young brought charges of insubordination and dissension against Parley P. Pratt and Bishop George P. Miller, who had been appointed leaders over three particular companies. Although Pratt felt their intentions were honorable, he conceded Bishop Miller had been unnecessarily harsh in his treatment of the companies on the trail, thus making their journey more difficult than it might have been (see *PPP*, 1980, pp. 341–42). The Lord makes this consequence clear: when we cause the burdens of those to whom we are yoked to be heavier, we will be chastised. And “he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom” (D&C 136:31). In addition, when we seek to elevate ourselves above our fellow Saints, our “folly shall be made manifest” (v. 19). Bishop Miller later left the Church as a result of that chastisement, confirming the Lord’s pronouncement that “those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified” (D&C 101:5).

4. *The sole purpose of the journey is to gather all Saints to Zion.* We must be devoted to all journeys—past, present, and future—whether we know the travelers or not. As long as there are others on the trail, or those who *might* travel with us, our stewardship is not over. As part of our covenant, we ensure that the route is negotiable and possible for all; we realize that we cannot be saved without our kindred dead, without our husband or wife, without our children, without our parents, without our neighbors. The success of our journey is contingent upon their completing theirs.

This far-reaching perspective is evident in the Lord’s commandments to the Saints preparing to leave Winter Quarters. In preparation for the trek, the Lord commanded a vanguard of “able-bodied and expert men, to take teams, seeds, and farming utensils, to go as pioneers to prepare for putting in spring crops” (D&C 136:7). That way, when more Saints arrived along the trail, there would be food for them to

eat. Those who were to “remain behind this season” were to “prepare houses, and fields for raising grain” (v. 9). Apparently even those who could not yet make the journey with the rest of the company were still that company’s responsibility. For the Saints had covenanted in the Nauvoo Temple:

We [will] “never cease our exertions, by all the means and influence within our reach, till all the Saints who were obliged to leave Nauvoo should be located at some gathering place of the Saints.” [“Second General Epistle” (12 October 1849), in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), p. 34]

Without that willingness to covenant all they had and were, these people could not enter Zion. Under commandment were all the Saints’ might and money for the betterment of the whole body of the people. They were to work at backbreaking planting and house building for those who were to come after them. In other words, what they sowed they did not reap—they could not reap. They had to move forward from the site of their labors trusting that those preceding them had done so as well.

5. *This journey is not for the purpose of acquisition or accumulation. We take only what we can carry or what we can pull; we take sufficient.* This concern for those who would come after them was also evident in the way the Saints settled the land of the Salt Lake Valley. The original party of 148 people decided no property would be bought; each family would be given property according to their needs. The first pioneers did not take all the land and make a profit selling it to those who would come later. There was also “no private ownership of the streams, and only dead timber [c]ould be used for fuel” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company,

1979], p. 372). Those resources vital to the sustaining of the first community and later communities were kept as common property.

The covenant these pioneer people made before the trek was still valid when they arrived in the valley. Brigham Young urged the Saints, “Let every man cultivate his own lot and set out every kind of fruit and shade tree and beautify the city” (Smith, *Essentials*, p. 374). Each family would assume the role of gardener, of Adam and Eve, figuratively speaking, in erecting and beautifying Zion. Zion did not mean a collection of individual houses of Zion but described a city with citizens committed to the sustenance of each fellow citizen. This was not a venture to gain land and property. It was a venture to establish peace and the true worship of God among the Saints.

We can consider ourselves to be like Adam and Eve in this journey: We work, labor, and rejoice to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28) and to have joy in our posterity. When we move away from the appropriation of Adam and Eve of the resources of the earth, we change our types and start to function under the type of Adam and Eve’s child: Cain. It is fitting that, as in life, the Lord would juxtapose two very different attitudes toward the earth in the children of the first parents. Cain’s thirst for ownership and for praise led to the spilling of the first blood. We follow Cain’s example when we disregard the admonition to earn our bread by the sweat of our face (see Genesis 3:19), attempting instead to gain from the labor of others. We become like Cain when we seek, recklessly, the praise of our superiors and “seek to build up [ourselves]” (D&C 136:19) no matter what the cost. We become like Cain when we lose sight of our goal—which is to establish a place of peace in which to worship God—and instead wish to lay up riches on earth. The Lord reminds us that “the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:31). Thus, if we are to reach

this promised land, we are to be the Adams and Eves and not the Cains of the world.

6. *Saints under covenant are the Lord's stewards.* The Saints were advised: "Be diligent in preserving what thou hast, that thou mayest be a wise steward; for [what thou hast] is the free gift of the Lord thy God, and thou art his steward" (D&C 136:27). The steward was, in ancient times, the keeper of the house, whose duty it was to see that *all* were admitted and fed. He was under contract to obey his master, was appointed by his master to take care of part of the master's household, and was expected to render an account of his dealings with the master's possessions. Our master has told us: "It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another" (D&C 49:20). Thus, as part of the covenant journey, we become responsible to use all that we have been given to aid fellow travelers—i.e., we act as stewards over the blessings of God, dispensing judiciously and wisely as directed by the Lord of the house, who is the only owner of things.

If we view ourselves as stewards, we—and all with which we have been blessed—are under covenant to the Father. We realize that we live in his house and must obey his wishes regarding that particular part of the kingdom in which we function: husband, wife, wealthy man, daughter, father, mother, sister, bishop, visiting teacher, poor woman. To disobey the wishes of the Master is to be an unfaithful servant. We cannot decide who will be the recipient of the riches of this earth; in fact, Brigham Young clarified for the early Saints those for whom they acted as stewards: "Preserve all you can, that you may have abundance to bless your friends and your enemies" (JD 14:44 [8 May 1870]). We can only seek to know the will of the Father and dispense judiciously of ourselves, our influence, and property accordingly.

7. *The covenant journey may be one of merriment, sorrow, deprivation, and plenty.* The nature of the trail demands that it be so. The Saints

were to go to the tops of the Rockies. There was no higher nor more isolated place in continental America. We also travel toward a most high and holy place. We might be required to freeze in the winter, lose our children and companions to starvation, crawl on our hands and knees, and pick cow dung off the trail for heat. We may lose fingers, toes, entire limbs, even our body before the journey is over. Yet through our mortal sorrows, we "call on the Lord [our] God with supplication, that [our] souls may be joyful" (D&C 136:29). At other times we might be "merry, prais[ing] the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving" (v. 28). These vagaries are the nature of the journey when we travel to the high places. Christ reminds us: "[The Father] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Yet if we will humble ourselves in the midst of afflictions, "the Lord [our] God shall lead [us] by the hand, and give [us] answer to [our] prayers" (D&C 112:10).

Echoing the Lord's promises, Patience Loader described the last days of her handcart journey to Salt Lake City:

We got up and prepared our bone soup for breakfast. We did not get but very little meat as the bone had been picked the night before and we did not have only the half of a small biscute as we only was having four oz. of flour aday. . . . This we eat with thankful hearts and we allways as[k] God to bless to our use and that it would strengthen our bodys day by day so that we could performe our dutys. And I can testefie that our heavenly Father heard and ansverd our prayers and we was blessed with health and strength day by day to endure the severe trials we had to pass through on that terrable journey before we got to Salt Lake City. We know that if God had not been with us that our strength would have failed us and our bodys would have been left on the plains. . . . I can truthfully say that we never fealt to murmer at the hardships we was passing

through. I can say we put our trust in God and he heard and answered our prayers and brought us through to the valleys. [Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women's Voices*, p. 238; original spelling and punctuation preserved]

8. *This covenant journey may seem repetitious and unending.* Shortly after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young sent Saints to settle first the valleys to the south and the east: Utah and Heber counties. Some of those families would be called yet again to settle the Iron Mission in the Red Hills outside Cedar City (see Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* [Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 1978], p. 68). Some were sent to find a route for the wagon trains through the canyon country of southern Utah. Some families settled area after area in the same pattern 10 to 15 years apart. We may be asked in our journeys to Zion to repeat what we have already done: teach the CTRs for the fifth time; lead the Relief Society music for another seven years; serve another leadership mission to a country where the Church members are just beginning their journey. We will be asked, by the Lord or by the Lord's servants (see D&C 1:38), to "teach this, [his] will, to the saints, that they may be ready to go to a land of peace" (D&C 136:16).

For the benefit of those who follow behind us, we repeat again the vital truths concerning "the Word and Will of the Lord" (D&C 136:1). Simultaneously, our own souls may be recommitted as we "remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men" (Moroni 10:3). We experience again a mighty change of heart as we remember "the captivity of [our] fathers . . . [the Lord's] mercy and longsuffering towards them" and remember that the Lord has delivered their and our souls from hell, waking us "out of a deep sleep . . . unto God" (Alma 5:6–7). However, this change of heart will only be ours if we are diligent, on those seemingly dreary stretches of trail, in keeping all the commandments (see D&C 136:42).

Conclusion

So what do I find in this pioneer journey that helps me identify with the early Saints? I find something that can help all of us in enduring to the end.

I realize that my awe and reverence and sometimes disbelief—these people were too much, too unbelievable—is perhaps a result of my reluctance to admit that I, too, am capable of such devotion, such sacrifice, and such commitment to the kingdom of God. Nelson Mandela, in his inauguration address as the president of South Africa in 1994, urged his fellow citizens to remember their divine destiny:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. [Quoted in J. Bonner Ritchie, "Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn," *Brigham Young Magazine*, August 1996, p. 34]

I learn that while I may physically be in Zion, actually in that sacred valley toward which those first Saints traveled, I must make my own spiritual exodus from Nauvoo. I learn that I am under covenant to fashion from the barren wilderness of Utah or my soul a place in which I can worship the Almighty God. I realize I must see this land and this life as the Lord sees it, bringing my individual vision to match the vision of the Lord. I must bend my individual will toward the community conscience, replacing the individualistic word *right* with the communal term *responsibility*. I learn I am merely a steward and gardener—not owner, not proprietor, not merchant—and I learn that this earth is given not for private ownership but for communal reward. Most important, I learn that I travel, in convoy and under covenant, toward a promised land. And in the

royal courts on high, I will be home: along with those who made that first journey to Zion; beside those who traveled on bald tires across America; with those who made the trip to London in a second-class cabin with four children; and in the presence of those whose bodies,

large and small, lie buried in holy ground along the trail—all patterns for me to follow.

It is my prayer that we live worthy to be gathered in the presence of those who first showed us how to establish Zion, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.