



Hope of Israel

President Russell M. Nelson and Sister Wendy W. Nelson

Worldwide Youth Devotional • June 3, 2018 • Conference Center, Salt Lake City, Utah

President Russell M. Nelson: Words are inadequate to express our gratitude to that seminary choir. My goodness, you did that well. Thank you. Thank you very much. As I look at this Conference Center filled with beautiful Latter-day Saints, I feel like I finally got the large family I was hoping for. There's 22,000 of you here tonight and many more thousands who are with us through this broadcast.

Sister Nelson and I are really overjoyed to be with you tonight. We love being with you, the youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and your teachers and parents.

We wish we could hear from each one of you about your experiences in preparing for our worldwide gathering, as you read daily from the Book of Mormon and as you prayed to hear what the Lord is eager to teach you.

Again, I express our thanks for the seminary choir for singing our opening hymn with such feeling. That hymn—"We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"—those words turned our hearts to the Prophet Joseph Smith. How indebted we are to him!

He is *the* prophet of this last dispensation! Imagine! He was your age when he was inspired by the words of the Apostle James: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."¹

Those words compelled young Joseph to go to a nearby grove of trees, where he poured out his heart to God.

The heavens opened! Joseph saw the Father and the Son and learned for himself where to go for answers to his questions.

Now I plead with each of you to do as the teenaged Joseph did. Take your questions directly to your Heavenly Father in prayer. Ask Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, to guide you. You can learn for yourself—right now at your age—how to receive personal revelation. And nothing will make a bigger difference in your life than that!

I promise *you*—not the person sitting next to you, but *you*—that, wherever you are in the world, wherever you are on the covenant path—even if, at this moment, you are not centered *on* the

path—I promise you that if you will sincerely and persistently do the spiritual work needed to develop the crucial, spiritual skill of learning how to hear the whisperings of the Holy Ghost, you will have *all* the direction you will ever need in your life. You will be given answers to your questions in the Lord’s own way and in His own time. And don’t forget the counsel of your parents and Church leaders. They are also seeking revelation in your behalf.

When you know your life is being directed by God, regardless of the challenges and disappointments that may and will come, you will feel joy and peace.

Now, we would like to talk with you about *the greatest* challenge, *the greatest* cause, and *the greatest* work on earth. And we want to invite *you* to be part of it!

I’ve asked Sister Wendy Nelson to provide some context for that important message. Please, Sister Nelson.

Sister Wendy W. Nelson: My dear brothers and sisters, whom we love and believe in, I’d like to begin by telling you what my husband and I saw one day as we drove through the hills of Utah on an all-terrain vehicle.

It was a beautiful autumn day. We loved being among trees that were golden and gorgeous, tall and straight, all reaching to heaven.



Then, we turned a corner and I saw a tree that reminded me of me and how I often feel in many situations.



Do you know that feeling? You look around and everyone else is tall and straight and reaching to heaven, so to speak.

They have everything figured out. They wear the perfect clothes, always seem to say the right things, have no problems, are perfectly obedient—and seem never to have made a mistake in their lives.

And then, well, there’s you and me!

My dear brothers and sisters, it’s time to stop comparing ourselves with others. It’s time to put away those erroneous views of ourselves and others. The truth is that we are not as hopelessly flawed as we may think, and others are not as perfect as they may appear—all except, of course, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The only thing that really matters is that you and I are doing exactly what we committed—even covenanted—premortally with our Heavenly Father we *would* do while we are here on earth.

So, let me ask you a question: What *were you* born to do?

How I wish you could watch a 10-minute video of your premortal life on YouTube.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that if you could gaze into heaven for five minutes, you would know more on a topic than if you studied it all of your life.² So just imagine if you could gaze for 10 minutes at your premortal life!

Of course we realize that the Lord has wisely drawn a veil over those memories. But, just for a moment, imagine the effect on your life right now if you were permitted to watch 10 minutes of your premortal life.

I believe if you could see yourself living with your Heavenly Parents and with Jesus Christ; if you could observe what you did premortally and see yourself making commitments—even covenants—with others, including your mentors and teachers; if you could see yourself courageously responding to attacks on truth and valiantly standing up for Jesus Christ, I believe that every one of you would have the increased power, increased commitment, and eternal perspective to help you overcome *any* and *all* of your confusion, doubts, struggles, and problems. *All* of them!

I believe if you could remember who you said you would help while you are here on earth, or what anguishing experiences you agreed to go through, that *whatever* really tough situation you are presently in—or will be in—you would say, “Oh, now I remember. Now I understand. This difficult situation makes sense to me now. With the Lord’s help I can do this!”

Now, here’s another thing I invite you to think about. I like to imagine that each of us came to earth with a scroll attached to our spirits entitled “Things to Do While on Earth.”

Let’s talk about what might be on that scroll. Let’s talk about five of the things surely written on your scroll according to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First, you came to receive a mortal body. And that, my friends, is a really big deal.

Second, you came to be tested.

By the way, have you noticed that our testing often involves learning to control our bodies’ appetites and passions, which can sometimes get way out of control? If you are presently struggling with the residual effects of any kind of addiction or of major unrepented sin, I urge you to unburden yourself

by talking with your bishop—today. He holds priesthood keys that can help you.

A third thing to do while on earth: choose to follow Jesus Christ and stand up for Him, just as you did premortally.

Fourth, choose to repent daily and partake of the sacrament weekly. As you do, you will be spiritually healed, strengthened and magnified, and ultimately sanctified and exalted through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Now, here is a fifth item on your list: find and fulfill your mortal missions. My dear friends, premortally you and I were each given wonderful missions to fulfill while we are here on earth.

We have opportunities to fulfill our mortal missions, but we don’t *have* to. No one will *make* us. We have our agency to choose how we spend our time and energy, our talents and resources. In fact, *what* we choose to do is actually part of our testing.

The choice is yours and mine. Will we choose to do *whatever it takes* to fulfill the wonderful missions for which we were sent to earth?

While that question simmers in your mind, let’s shift and talk about why you are here on earth—at *this particular time*, which is such a unique time in the history of the earth.

Why are you here on earth right now?

Why were you not born back in the 1880s? or 30 years from now?

Let me tell you of an experience that taught me firsthand about the historic days in which we live.

We often talk about living in the latter days. We are, after all, Latter-day Saints. But perhaps these days are more “latter” than we have ever imagined.

This truth became a reality for me because of what I experienced during one 24-hour period of time that commenced on June 15, 2013. My husband and I were in Moscow, Russia.

While President Nelson met with priesthood leaders, I had the privilege of meeting with nearly 100 of our sisters. I *love* our Russian sisters. They are spectacular!

When I stepped to the pulpit to speak, I found myself saying something I'd never anticipated. I said to the women: "I'd like to get to know you by lineage. Please stand as the tribe of Israel that represents the lineage declared in your patriarchal blessing is spoken."

"Benjamin?" A couple of women stood.

"Dan?" A couple more.

"Reuben?" A few more stood.

"Naphtali?" More stood.

As the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were announced—from Asher to Zebulun—and as the women stood, we were all amazed with what we were witnessing, feeling, and learning.

How many of the twelve tribes of Israel do you think were represented in that small gathering of fewer than 100 women on that Saturday in Moscow?

Eleven! Eleven of the twelve tribes of Israel were represented in that one room! The only tribe missing was that of Levi. I was astonished. It was a spiritually moving moment for me.

Immediately after those meetings my husband and I went directly to Yerevan, Armenia. The first people we met as we got off the plane were the mission president and his wife. Somehow, she had heard about this experience in Moscow, and with great delight, she said, "I've got Levi!"

Just imagine our thrill when my husband and I met their missionaries the next day, including an elder from the tribe of Levi who just happened to be from Gilbert, Arizona.

Now, when I was a little girl attending Primary in Raymond, Alberta, Canada, I learned that

in the last days—before the Second Coming of the Savior—the twelve tribes of Israel would be gathered. That truth was thrilling to me and, at the same time, quite overwhelming to wrap my mind around. So imagine what it was like for me to be with members of all twelve tribes of Israel within one 24-hour period of time!

I have since learned that I probably should not have asked those sisters to identify themselves by lineage because patriarchal blessings are sacred and the lineage declared in them is personal. Yet I am so grateful for the privilege I had of seeing the fruits of the gathering of Israel firsthand. The impact of that experience has never diminished in my heart or mind.

My dear brothers and sisters, these are indeed the latter days! There has *never* been a time like this in the history of this world. Never! Premortally, you and I committed to do a great work while we are here on earth. And with the Lord's help, we will do it! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Nelson: Thank you, Wendy. I love you! Isn't she wonderful?

My dear young brothers and sisters, these surely *are* the latter days, and the Lord is hastening His work to gather Israel. That gathering is the most important thing taking place on earth today. Nothing else compares in magnitude, nothing else compares in importance, nothing else compares in majesty. And if you choose to, if you want to, you can be a big part of it. You can be a big part of something big, something grand, something majestic!

When we speak of the *gathering*, we are simply saying this fundamental truth: every one of our Heavenly Father's children, on both sides of the veil, deserves to hear the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. They decide for themselves if they want to know more.

Those whose lineage is from the various tribes of Israel are those whose hearts will most likely be

turned to the Lord. He said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”³ Those who are of the house of Israel will most easily recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and will desire to be gathered into His fold. They will want to become members of His Church, make covenants with Him and Heavenly Father, and receive their essential ordinances.

The Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that now, meaning our day, is the eleventh hour and the last time that He will call laborers into His vineyard for the express purpose of gathering the elect from the four quarters of the earth.⁴

My question tonight to every one of you between the ages of 12 and 18 is this: Would you like to be a big part of *the greatest* challenge, *the greatest* cause, and *the greatest* work on earth today?

Would you like to help gather Israel during these precious latter days? Would you, who are the elect, be willing to help find the elect who have not heard the message of the restored gospel? Would you like to be among those “swift messengers” of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke?⁵

Now, participating in the gathering of Israel will require some sacrifice on your part. It may even require some changes in your life. It will definitely take some of your time and energy and your God-given talents. Are you interested?

Just think of the excitement and urgency of it all: every prophet commencing with Adam has seen our day. And every prophet has talked about *our* day, when Israel would be gathered and the world would be prepared for the Second Coming of the Savior. Think of it! Of all the people who have ever lived on planet earth, *we* are the ones who get to participate in this final, great gathering event. How exciting is that!

Our Heavenly Father has reserved many of His most noble spirits—perhaps, I might say, His finest team—for this final phase. Those noble spirits—those finest players, those heroes—are *you*!

I testify that the gathering is now, and it is real. In the year I was born, the total membership of the Church was less than 600,000 people, with no members in South America. Today there are more than 16 million members worldwide, with nearly 3 million members in South America.

Let me tell you about an experience I had in 1979. I was then serving as the General President of the Sunday School. I was invited to attend a meeting of Church leaders at which the President of the Church, President Spencer W. Kimball, spoke. He charged us to pray that the doors of nations would be opened so that the gospel of Jesus Christ could be brought to all people on earth. He specifically mentioned China and asked that we pray for the people of China. He also said, “We should be of service to the Chinese people. We should learn their language. We should pray for them and help them.”

I returned home to my wife, Dantzel (who passed away more than 13 years ago), and said to her, “President Kimball asked us in that meeting to learn Chinese! And I did *not* hear him say, ‘Everyone except Brother Nelson!’ So, would you be willing to study Mandarin Chinese with me?” Of course, she agreed and we were tutored in Mandarin.

Six weeks after President Kimball’s charge, I was attending the annual meeting of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery. It was being held in Boston, Massachusetts. That morning, I had prayed in my hotel room for the people of China, just as President Kimball had requested. I went to the first meeting of the day and sat where I always sat at these professional meetings—at the front of the room. As the meeting proceeded, however, I became increasingly uncomfortable in my chair. As the lights were turned down for a slide presentation, I slipped out of my chair and walked quietly to the back of the room—a place where I would usually never sit. When the lights came up again, I found myself sitting by a Chinese doctor. He introduced himself as Professor Wu Ying-Kai from Beijing, China!

After a pleasant conversation with him, I extended an invitation for him to visit Salt Lake City and give a lecture at the University of Utah Medical School. He gladly accepted and did exceptionally well. Then he returned to China.

Not long thereafter, he invited me to be a visiting professor of surgery at Shandong Medical University in Jinan, China. That led to subsequent invitations for me to serve as a visiting professor at two more universities in China.

These wonderful professional experiences—prior to my call to the Twelve—climaxed when I was asked by Chinese surgeons to perform an open-heart operation to save the life of their most celebrated opera star. That I did, and gratefully that operation was a success. It was, incidentally, the last one of my professional life.

For almost 40 years now, I have been praying for the people of China. I rejoice in my association with medical colleagues and other dear friends in China. What a joy it is for me now to be officially designated as an “old friend of China.”

It is my testimony that when we follow through with *whatever* the prophet of God asks us to do, the way will be opened and lives will be changed.

Now, I hope you are asking yourself, “What can I, as a teenager, do to help gather Israel?” Well, Sister Nelson and I asked that very question, and a few others, to a group of youth from the ages of 12 to 18, many of whom are here tonight.

We first asked, “What is the gathering of Israel? And what does it mean to you?” Their answers varied, but the majority indicated they weren’t quite sure what it was. Tonight, we want you to know that the gathering of Israel ultimately means offering the gospel of Jesus Christ to God’s children on both sides of the veil who have neither made crucial covenants with God nor received their essential ordinances.

Every child of our Heavenly Father deserves the opportunity to *choose* to follow Jesus Christ, to accept and receive His gospel with all of its

blessings—yes, all the blessings that God promised to the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who, as you know, is also known as Israel.

My dear extraordinary youth, you were sent to earth at this precise time, the most crucial time in the history of the world, to help gather Israel. There is *nothing* happening on this earth right now that is more important than that. There is *nothing* of greater consequence. Absolutely *nothing*.

This gathering should mean *everything* to you. This is the mission for which you were sent to earth.

So my question to you is “Are you willing to enlist in the youth battalion of the Lord to help gather Israel?” Please think about it. Don’t answer just yet.

Let’s return to other questions Sister Nelson and I asked our young friends. We asked, “If the prophet invited every 12- to 18-year-old person in the Church to enlist to help gather Israel, what would you be willing to do?”

The youth responded with inspiring comments such as, “If the prophet invited us to enlist to help gather Israel, I *absolutely* would take part in it.” Another said, “I would drop whatever I’m doing and help!” Another: “I would go and do *whatever* he asks me to do, because the prophet is a preacher from God.”

Their answers also included: “I would be willing to do more family history work. I would be more open and make a greater effort to talk with others about the gospel. I would be a good example in showing Christlike attributes. I would do more baptisms for the dead, change aspects of how I live my life and the choices I make, travel anywhere he needs me to go, learn a new language, meet new people, lend my copy of the Book of Mormon to those who have never read it. And I would be the very kindest person I can be.”

We also asked these youth what they would be willing to sacrifice so they could help gather Israel. Again, the youth thrilled us. They responded: “I would spend less time in sports so I could help a person in need of truth. I would sacrifice hanging

out with friends and instead invite them to come to the temple. I'd definitely cut down time on my phone. I'd give up some screen time. I'd [even] be willing to sacrifice Sunday afternoon naps!"

We asked, "If you wanted to enlist to help gather Israel, what would you want to start doing or stop doing?" They responded with such answers as "I would study the scriptures more, and more intently, so I could answer questions people might ask me. I would spend less time on social media; be more engaged in doing simple acts of member-missionary work, including daily acts of service. I would spend less time on my phone, and, when I am on my phone, I would post scriptures or other spiritual messages on social media. I would study general conference talks because they are super important. I would eat healthy foods so I can stay fit. I would stop thinking everything is about me." Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your answers to our questions.

Think of this, my dear young brothers and sisters, right now I am preparing for the day when I will be required to give an accounting to the Prophet Joseph Smith, to President Brigham Young, and others—and ultimately to the Lord—about my stewardship as God's prophet upon the earth today. I do not want to be asked, "Brother Nelson, why were you not more clear with the youth about *their* part in gathering Israel? Why were you not more bold in enlisting them to participate?"

So, now I am inviting *every* young woman and *every* young man between the ages of 12 and 18 in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to enlist in the youth battalion of the Lord to help gather Israel.

What will help you? As you continue to read daily from the Book of Mormon, you will learn the doctrine of the gathering,⁶ truths about Jesus Christ, His Atonement, and the fulness of His gospel not found in the Bible. The Book of Mormon is central to the gathering of Israel.⁷ In fact, if there were no Book of Mormon, the promised gathering of Israel would not occur.

And now I invite you to prepare yourself by doing five more things—five things that will change you and help you change the world.

First, disengage from a constant reliance on social media, in order to decrease its worldly influence upon you.

Let me tell you about one young man your age, the grandson of a dear friend of mine. He is popular with his friends and a leader in his high school. Recently, his parents found things on his phone that were inappropriate for a follower of Jesus Christ. They insisted that he go off social media for a time. They exchanged his smartphone for a flip phone, and he panicked. How would he stay connected with his friends?

Initially he was furious with his parents, but after just a few days, he thanked them for taking his smartphone away. He said, "I feel free for the first time in a long time." Now he calls his friends on his flip phone to connect with them. He actually talks with them instead of always texting!

What other changes have occurred in this young man's life? He says he now loves being free from the fake life that social media creates. He is actively engaged in life instead of having his head in his phone all the time. He participates in outdoor recreational activities instead of playing video games. He is more positive and helpful in his home. He seeks opportunities to serve. He listens better in church, has a brighter countenance, is so much happier, and is actively preparing for his mission! All this because he took a break from the negative influence of social media.

So, my first invitation to you today is to disengage from a constant reliance on social media by holding a seven-day fast from social media. I acknowledge that there are positives about social media. But if you are paying more attention to feeds from social media than you are to the whisperings of the Spirit, then you are putting yourself at spiritual risk—as well as the risk of experiencing intense loneliness

Challenge 3

and depression. You and I both know youth who have been influenced through social media to do and say things that they never would do or say in person. Bullying is one example.

Another downside of social media is that it creates a false reality. Everyone posts their most fun, adventurous, and exciting pictures, which create the erroneous impression that everyone except you is leading a fun, adventurous, and exciting life. Much of what appears in your various social media feeds is distorted, if not fake. So give yourself a seven-day break from fake!

Choose seven consecutive days and go for it! See if you notice any difference in how you feel and what you think, and even *how* you think, during those seven days. After seven days, notice if there are some things you want to stop doing and some things you now want to start doing.

This social media fast can be just between you and the Lord. It will be your sign to Him that you are willing to step away from the world in order to enlist in His youth battalion.

My second invitation is to make a weekly sacrifice of time to the Lord, for three weeks in a row, to let Him know that you want to be part of His youth battalion—more than you want anything else. For three weeks give up something you like to do and use that time to help gather Israel.

Anytime you do *anything* that helps *anyone*—on either side of the veil—take a step toward making covenants with God and receiving their essential baptismal and temple ordinances, you are helping to gather Israel. It is as simple as that.

As you pray about this sacrifice of time, you will be guided to know both what you can give up that week and what you can do instead to help gather Israel. For example, a young golfer might give up a round of golf and spend that time in the temple baptistry.

My third invitation is for you to do a thorough life assessment with the Lord, and perhaps with your parents and your bishop, to ensure that your feet are firmly planted on the covenant path. If you have wandered off, or if there are some things you need to let go of to help your mind and heart be more pure, today is the perfect time to change.

If you aren't sure how to repent, talk with your bishop or your parents or both. They will help you understand the Atonement of Jesus Christ. They will help you experience the joy that *true* repentance *always* brings.

Please do *not* stay off the covenant path one more minute. Please come back through true repentance, now. We need you with us in this youth battalion of the Lord. It just won't be the same without you!

My fourth invitation is for you to pray daily that all of God's children might receive the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You and I are living to see, and will continue to see, Israel gathered with great power. And you can be part of the power behind that gathering!

My fifth invitation is for you to stand out; be different from the world. You and I know that you are to be a light to the world. Therefore, the Lord needs you to look like, sound like, act like, and dress like a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Yes, you are living in the world, but you have very different standards from the world to help you avoid the stain of the world.

With the Holy Ghost as your companion, you can see right through the celebrity culture that has smitten our society. You can be smarter than previous generations have ever been. And if you are sometimes called "weird," wear that distinction as a badge of honor and be happy that your light is shining brightly in this ever-darkening world!

Challenge 4

Challenge 5

Challenge 2

Set a standard for the rest of the world! Embrace being different! The booklet entitled *For the Strength of Youth* should be *your* standard. It is the standard that the Lord expects all His youth to uphold. Now, as His humble servant, I plead with you to study this booklet again. Prayerfully read it like you've never read it before. Mark it up. Talk about it. Discuss the standards with your friends. Decide how you can live these standards, *your* standards, with even more exactness.

You have a copy of your own. So tonight at the end of the meeting, if you choose to enlist, please take a copy of *For the Strength of Youth* and give this new copy to a friend who may not know your standards or who may not live them.

Pray about who needs this booklet. You will be guided. And it will be exciting.

Now, let me summarize by reviewing my five invitations for you to enlist in the Lord's youth battalion to help gather Israel:

1. Hold a seven-day fast from social media.
2. Make a weekly sacrifice of time to the Lord for three weeks.

Notes

1. 1 James 1:5.
2. 2 See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 419.
3. 3 John 10:27.
4. 4 See Doctrine and Covenants 33:3, 6.
5. 5 See Isaiah 18:2.

3. Keep on the covenant path. If you are off, repent and get back on the path.
4. Pray daily that all of God's children might receive the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
5. Stand out. Be different. Be a light. Give to a friend one copy of the booklet *For the Strength of Youth*.

My beloved younger brothers and sisters, you are among the best the Lord has *ever* sent to this world. You have the capacity to be smarter and wiser and have more impact on the world than any previous generation!

As I conclude, I invite you to stand with the youth from all around the world and experience the thrill of being a member of the Lord's youth battalion in "Zion's army" by singing our closing hymn, "Hope of Israel," because this hymn is all about you!

From the depths of my soul, I testify that this is the work of Almighty God. He lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church, restored to accomplish its divine destiny, including the promised gathering of Israel.

You *are* the hope of Israel, "children of the promised day!"⁸ I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

6. 6. Doctrine relating to the gathering of the house of Israel is among the earliest lessons taught in the Book of Mormon: "After the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; . . . the natural branches of the olive tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 10:14).
7. 7. See, for example, 3 Nephi 5:23–26.
8. 8. "Hope of Israel," *Hymns*, no. 259.

THE CHURCH OF
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OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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