

# ZION RISING



YOUR PERSONAL RESTORATION  
AND AWAKENING IN CHRIST

*Samuel D. Castor*

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**BOOK ONE:**  
**ZION ANCIENTLY**

## CHAPTER 1

# ZION: IN THE BEGINNING...

**“My kingdom is not of this world.”  
—Jesus Christ, John 18:36**

All of humanity has been influenced by the Heavens above. Religions throughout time teach of a heightened existence of elevation and illumination, where peace and joy abound: a holy place that is glorious, peaceful, and bright, our collective next destination—a haven from the noise of the earth—calling to us from above. Most obvious are the Abrahamic religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, pointing to Heavens above the earth, filled with brightness, glory, and holiness. But this tradition is not just Abrahamic.

The tradition also shines in the Greek and the Roman religions, where a family of gods and goddesses ruled from Mount Olympus, a celestial city that floated above the earth and radiated golden light. These “deus” or shining ones descended Olympus to influence events on earth and inspire invention, art, and love.<sup>10</sup> Buddhism also has roots above, inviting us to a layered universe with various “planes,” where earth is only one “realm” where we can progress in refinement through a stepped continuum crowned with Heavens.<sup>11</sup> Hinduism similarly reverences radiant beings in the sky: female “devi” and male “deva”—the “heavenly or shining ones”<sup>12</sup>—like the divine couple of Shiva and Shakti with their sons who dwell on Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas.<sup>13</sup> Likewise across the globe the ancient American Mayan described brilliant gods who framed Heaven above, *then* earth beneath for glory.<sup>14</sup> Since the dawn of time, there has been a pervasive belief in our collective origin in Heaven above.

Consequently, elevation and light have universally symbolized majesty, authority and power. Hopeful to harness this, leaders claimed they were chosen by Heaven before birth—foreordained—to lead the people below. Examples of this heavenly right to rule abound: kings, monarchs, tzars, and emperors throughout time physically elevated themselves above their subjects on thrones and pointed to the Heavens, claiming they were invested with a divine authority because Heaven had chosen them and their bloodline to rule below.

Egypt coronated its rulers as “sons of Ra”—a celestial god who rode his solar ark across the sky to raise the sun.<sup>15</sup> Kings and queens in England, France, Spain, Russia, Austria, and Germany were referred to as “Highness” to show they were higher than their subjects and closer to Heaven. Throughout China’s and Japan’s dynasties, over 550

emperors were titled “Son of Heaven,” who could speak for God if they followed Heaven’s “mandate” and ruled righteously.<sup>16</sup>

Nature itself directs us up. From the trees reaching for the sun, to the mountain peaks pointing skyward, to the clouds and birds soaring above us, the earth seems to direct us to a place above our realm, stirring our inner senses to never forget something just beyond our reach. This collective yearning for higher and brighter existence left its mark on our world’s history. It has inspired colossal pyramids, temples, churches, and even soaring skyscrapers that point to the skies. Artists reaching for Heaven have depicted heavenly ascents to the clouds. But even our most glorious creations here on earth—in all their majesty—only remind us earth is not Heaven. At least not *yet*. Heaven above holds something greater for us, something familiar but also brighter, broader, and more magnificent. This *something* we feel calling to our hearts is the song of Zion.

God’s servants have heard the song and echoed it. Moses, Isaiah, Nephi, Mosiah, Alma, Mormon, Mahonri, Ether, and others all pointed skyward, with references to “lifted up,” “sealed up,” “raised up,” “laid up,” “hid up,” and “called up” throughout the scriptures, promising the Lord will “take up” the righteous at the last day.<sup>17</sup> It is our choice whether we rise with Zion or remain in the decaying darkness below. Zion is our glorious, communal purpose: to *rise* back home to Heaven—together.

Isaiah taught that just as the Heavens are *above* the earth, so are God’s thoughts *above* our thoughts and His ways *above* our ways.<sup>18</sup> He pled for the time when the Heavens will drop down from *above*, as the earth opens and the righteous spring up to Heaven—together.<sup>19</sup> This springing, elevating, lifting glory comes as quickly as we accept Christ.

Achieving and ascending as Zion is such a central pillar of Christ’s plan of redemption that Joseph Smith, taught “we ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object.”<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Brigham Young taught that Zion should be our *sole purpose*, so we are prepared to meet and abide the brightness and glory of Christ as He descends with Zion at His Second Coming.<sup>21</sup> We prepare *for* Zion above as we prepare ourselves *as* Zion beneath. This preparation starts as we answer the call of Zion in our own hearts until the peace and unity that emanates from our hearts fills the earth. Zion is our individual, familial, and global purpose.

Christ is calling to us to frame and create what God intended all along—Heaven on earth. I hope the following doctrinal foundation stones help us answer the call to “awake and arise” together. To receive Heaven here on earth, we must awaken to the truths we knew before. We can remember this life is simply a place to “become” something more, a stage set for a glorious finale, where we join hearts and rise together back home to Christ—as Zion.

## OUR COLLECTIVE BEFORE

Isaiah taught that peace comes as we learn doctrine.<sup>22</sup> I think this is because doctrine is correct perspective—seeing things as they really are. It is easy to believe that this life is our only reality and become lost in the hum of existence: the world with its cultures, people, movements, and momentum that vibrate and collide, buzzing about us. We may feel alive, but we are in a deep sleep and all is not as it seems.

When we look at the sky and feel the majesty of the sun, moon, stars, and all the galaxies that surround us, it is natural to feel we are not only witnesses but *part* of

something grand, noble, . . . *eternal*. God Himself tells us that the majestic and powerful movements of the Heavens are evidence of His glory, and that He knew us there in the beginning before we entered our mothers' wombs.<sup>23</sup> We are more than our fallen, broken, darkened state. We are a composite of our glorious past, our fallen present, and our bright potential, our eternal future.

Our past was with Heavenly Parents, who were and remain our home.<sup>24</sup> As children of the divine, we inherited the potential to become like them. Our inherited divinity defines us far more than *any* experiences we might endure here below. The only boundary to the glory of eternity is *our* willingness to receive it.<sup>25</sup>

## HEAVEN'S WAR

Before coming to earth, we looked upon our Heavenly Parents and their exalted state with admiration, hope, and longing. The blinding contrast between our glory and that of our Heavenly Parents was undeniable. They have mastered their spirits, physical bodies, time, light, and all creative power. They have ascended higher and higher as Elohim—the Gods—male and female.<sup>26</sup> As such, they burn brighter than the noonday sun.<sup>27</sup>

We wanted to rise to their level, to create like them, to be full of light and happiness—*like them*. But we needed more experience than the peace of Heaven could provide. They had a “great plan” for us—a way for all of us to ascend and receive everything they have.<sup>28</sup> The plan would allow us to join our spiritual matter with physical matter, to amplify and extend our senses, test ourselves, grow, make mistakes, and learn by personal experience.<sup>29</sup> But before we could ascend, we would need to descend.

To prove the purity of our hearts and minds, we would be “blindfolded”—with a veil of forgetfulness drawn over our heavenly senses—to see if we would truly choose to accept the divinity within us. I have wondered if this spiritual blindfold was also a gift, to ease the pain of our homesickness for Heaven. This veil would shut out the brilliant and pure light, peace and joy of Heaven. But it would allow us to tune our hearts to feel, our ears to hear, and our spiritual eyes to see Christ in each experience. He could help us feel, hear, and eventually see our Heavenly Parents, our friends, family, and loved ones calling to us from beyond the veil, pleading with us to remember who we are and that we are loved and that we can choose to return, urging us to remember that blindfold is temporary and nothing compared to the expansive eternities of Heaven. The test of the veil could help us become like our Heavenly Parents.

This test struck many with dread. In this blinded state we would make mistakes and experience pain, exhaustion, violence, and horrors unknown in Heaven. We would be hurt and we would hurt each other. We were warned earth life could stain and damage us in ways that could prevent us from returning, for “no unclean thing can enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>30</sup> Worst yet, some of us might settle for the temporary dust of this earth rather than rise back up for the eternal gold of Heaven.

Debate about the wisdom of our Heavenly Parents' plan flared into spiritual warfare. There were those who looked at our Heavenly Parents' glory and status as something to be taken, rather than achieved through experience, sacrifice, and grace. Lucifer objected. He believed he could “ascend into heaven” and place his throne above God's without obedience to the laws of Heaven.<sup>31</sup> He insisted all could rise above God without trial, experience, or risk *if* we followed and surrendered our hearts to him, and he openly

rebelled and sought to “destroy the agency of man.”<sup>32</sup> His insurrection led him down dark paths until he became Satan: the devil, the dragon, the serpent, the father of lies.<sup>33</sup> The Heavens wept over Lucifer’s rebellion.<sup>34</sup>

Imagine, for a moment, how difficult this choice must have been for all of us, itself a test of our faith. Many abandoned the potential glory. A “third part” of the hosts of Heaven chose to reject that plan.<sup>35</sup> The rest chose to descend to earth.

We chose to trust that, because of Christ, what Satan depicted as a tortuous descent of damnation could be turned into a glorious ascent of fulfillment. We trusted that even if we were not “good enough” on our own, we could be good enough in Christ. We also believed He would help us unite our hearts and minds in love and weave our gifts and talents together as families and communities to create a tapestry of salvation that could lift us back home to Heaven.

## THE FALL AND THE NEED TO RISE

After the war in Heaven, Satan was cast down to the earth and immediately sought “to destroy the world” and tear at that tapestry of salvation we planned to create together with Christ.<sup>36</sup> His first step was to “beguile” (deceive) Adam and Eve.<sup>37</sup> Apocryphal books describing the Fall note that before Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they had divine light—a “bright nature”—radiating within them. This light lifted up their hearts and with it they could see and hear angels singing praises in Heaven above the Garden of Eden. Upon eating the fruit, “all creation became hidden,” and their bright nature was withdrawn so they could not “see things afar off.” Adam and Eve wept bitterly after learning they had lost their “brightness within” and could no longer see each other, Heaven’s angels, or hear Heaven’s songs.<sup>38</sup>

After Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, our Heavenly Father asked Adam, “Where art thou?” or in Hebrew “*ayekah?*” meaning literally “where is your light?”<sup>39</sup> This was not God asking where Adam was physically. Rather, He was inviting Adam to recognize that Adam had *chosen* to fall and in doing so was now separated from God and without Heaven’s light.<sup>40</sup>

This loss of light still affects us today. After the Fall, our ability to see our role in creation became hidden. We do not radiate or see light as we did before. We are now caught in a deep sleep, living as if in a dream, blind and deaf to Heaven’s harmonic burning.<sup>41</sup> But we can still feel that something is now lost. This may be one reason we often yearn to feel *seen* and *heard* in relationships. As luminous beings now caught in darkness—bruised and stumbling with limited sight—we ache for the ability to *feel* and *hear* but especially *see* the brilliance of home.

The light we *can* see is only a sliver of God’s power that radiates in the universe. Like when faint light from a sunrise first pierces the canvas of a dark tent without revealing the full glory of the sun, we are currently blind to the full spectrum of brilliance that Christ, the Father of Lights, has placed around us.<sup>42</sup> Even with our most powerful scientific instruments that track individual photons and sense ultraviolet and infrared light, our senses are veiled to the true nature of the endless space that surrounds us.

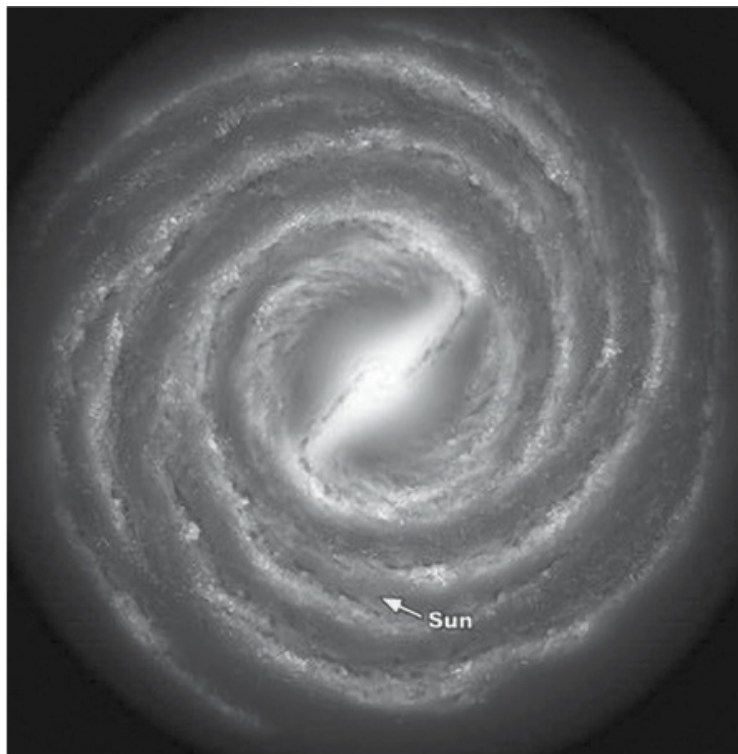
Einstein’s theory of gravity suggested we perceive less than five percent of the energy, light, and matter in the universe.<sup>43</sup> Unable to prove this, he later considered this theory his greatest failure. But the theory of gravity was later confirmed when, for unknown

reasons, our first interstellar satellites were drawn to mass and gravity undetectable by our most sophisticated tools. Scientists had painstakingly measured the thrust and rocket fuel necessary to help these satellites escape our solar system. Yet, as they reached the edge of the galaxy, Pioneer 10, and months later Pioneer 11 slowed faster than anticipated.

This happened the same for both satellites even though they were launched from the earth at different times from different angles. Still unable to see or calculate these effects from earth, the scientists dubbed the unknown gravitational forces “dark matter” and “dark energy,” not because they radiate no light, but because we cannot see them, even with our most advanced scientific instruments.

Not only are we blinded by the Fall, but we are also separated from God’s presence, not only spiritually but *physically*. Joseph Smith taught when Adam and Eve fell, the earth itself also fell as a scroll from Heaven.<sup>44</sup> This separation from our Heavenly Parents was so traumatic it is described as spiritual death and removal from God. But the earth’s current location in the universe is not our final destination. When we are redeemed from the Fall, the earth will “be rolled back into the presence of God and crowned with celestial glory.”<sup>45</sup>

Some scientific theories support this notion that we fell planetarily and that our sun is like a comet with the planets caught in its wake, as if ejected from *somewhere*—still falling.<sup>46</sup> It is as if the earth and the entire solar system were launched from their original celestial orbit—like a boat leaving port—to explore the universe and return home enriched with experience. NASA has reinforced this and shows the earth light years away from God’s creative bar at the center of the universe, giving new meaning to the prophets’ reminder that one day we will all be raised in the air to be judged at the “pleasing bar of God.”<sup>47</sup>



**Image 1** *Courtesy of NASA/JPL-Caltech/R. Hurt (SSC/Caltech)*

The gaping galactic chasm between fallen earth below and Heaven above left us craving to return home to regain our light and our full senses. Overcoming this separation and spiritual blindness is our collective aching, to become more than we are now. Rising from the Fall is humanity’s universal pilgrimage. It is the objective of every hero’s quest, the golden thread of every protagonist. It pulls at each of our hearts to journey through life until we awake and arise.

In fact, the Hebrew word for pilgrimage (עֲלִיָּה) pronounced “aliya” means to “ascend” or “go up.” My friend and Isaiah scholar Avraham Gileadi notes, the pilgrimage tradition “expresses our inborn desire to reach a higher, transcendent state.”<sup>48</sup> We all desire to rise back home from the Fall.

Just as we consciously chose to go down to earth below, Christ consciously exercised His agency to descend and *stand under* our fallen, darkened state. In doing so, Christ *understands* each of us. By standing under us, He can declare He knows us, can perfectly heal us, and help us join together to rise up from the Fall and return home filled with His light.<sup>49</sup>

## **GIFTS TO HELP US RISE**

We have always been free to choose who we become. Joseph Smith declared, “free independence of mind” is one of Heaven’s “choicest gifts.”<sup>50</sup> To foster that divine independence, our Heavenly Parents struck the perfect balance between their parental

responsibility and our freedom. They did not force or coerce us—to do so would have crushed the seeds of divinity they had placed in each of us. Instead, they gave us space to act for ourselves—with boundless potential to grow—and taught us the laws we could follow to become like them.

As we come to earth, some of us show this pre-development more than others. Many have an aptitude or even genius-level talent for music, art, literature, science, math, or engineering. These “gifted,” “talented,” “prodigies” are said to be “born to do” this or that, because such pre-existing talents are undeniable. Mozart created his first musical compositions at age five. Pablo Picasso painted his first masterpiece at age nine. Blaise Pascal revolutionized math and pioneered modern computer science at age eleven. Each reveal a prior existence beyond their short years on earth.

In 1950, my wife’s grandmother, then fourteen years old, attended the Mid-Century White House Conference for American Youth with U.S. President Harry Truman. She heard speakers from across the country, including physicist Albert Einstein. She recalls him saying, “There had to have been a life before this, because I have not lived here long enough to understand the dimensions of mathematics that I do. *I came here knowing.*”<sup>51</sup> How could we not have a knowledge of something more as children of the divine?

You may be saying to yourself, “*Okay*, but what does this have to do with me? I am not Einstein.” Whether we sense it now or not, all of us came knowing, at some level, like Einstein. And more importantly we came with gifts, spiritual gifts that are powerful and essential, designed to help us feel God within us, recognize truth, build Zion, and return home enriched by experience rather than damaged by it. Our gifts include power to transcend our mortal state and connect with each other and with the divine. These gifts include faith, hope, charity, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning spirits, speaking tongues, and many, many, many more.<sup>52</sup>

We are urged to not forget the gifts that are in us, as all gifts “come from above.”<sup>53</sup> The Apostle Paul assures us that every one of us has *at least one* spiritual gift from God<sup>54</sup> and that we have the potential to obtain *all* divine gifts.<sup>55</sup> This is true for each of us and everyone around us. And Christ’s invitation to come and partake of His heavenly gift—to receive “all that He hath”—still rings out in the universe. It calls to us to belong, build, and become Zion—*together*.

This is true especially now as society begins to fracture. Our Heavenly Parents orchestrated a grand collection of their most gifted children in these last days. Equipped with heavenly power, we are destined to burn brightly against the darkness; work miracles in Christ’s name; and gather, purify, and lift Zion here and now. Our Heavenly Parents showed us how to weave our gifts and talents together into families and communities, in a grand tapestry of salvation, to interconnect our hearts and minds in Christ, and rise back home to Heaven.

## **A PHYSICAL BODY—A TEMPLE FOR OUR SPIRITS**

When we are born into this world, we continue to progress.<sup>56</sup> We join our spirits with matter and are commanded to fulfill the “measure of our creation,” magnify our gifts and talents here on earth and build Zion like communities in joy.<sup>57</sup> Our physical bodies are one of those divine gifts.<sup>58</sup> Ancient scriptures teach that after Adam and Eve’s spirits were first clothed in the flesh, before they fell, the angels trembled at their presence and

light.<sup>59</sup>

Satan is insatiably jealous of Adam and Eve's bodies. Because he and his followers lack physical bodies, they are damned, forever stopped in their progression. They are unhappy, miserable, and self-consumed, and they rage in their own darkness. Without a body, they will never know what it is like to eat a cheeseburger and fries and top it off with a cool milkshake. They will never feel the warmth of a hug or of holding someone's hand or the thrill of a first kiss. They will never feel the joy of holding a little one in their arms.

Because they lack the ability to permanently possess and enjoy physical matter, Satan and his followers seek to cover us in darkness to suppress our divine gifts. Without our consent, Satan has *no* power. Thus he works overtime to obtain our consent by enticing us to sin and violate the alignment between our bodies and our spirits so the spirits that follow him can have greater influence over us and "possess" us to destroy us.<sup>60</sup>

An example of this Satanic manipulated *consent* occurred in 1929, when it was culturally considered "unladylike" to smoke. Cigarette companies, eager to sell more cigarettes, hired one of America's most influential men of the time, Edward Bernays, to remove the stigma of smoking. Mr. Bernays and his wife Doris, hired fashionable and attractive women to light their "torches of freedom" and smoke in the Easter Day Parade in New York.

The national press shared photos of these women smoking, smiling, and parading. Overnight the stigma of smoking was erased and women across America began to smoke. Years later, Mr. Bernays lamented the unknown ill-health effects of smoking but noted his stunt worked because in a democratic society, where consent is necessary to effectuate change, his actions were the "engineering of consent."<sup>61</sup>

Satan, like a spiritual virus seeking a physical body for a host, is the master of engineering consent. Unable to generate any lasting light of his own, he persuades us to surrender our light to his evil ways. God's commandments center on helping us stay in control of our bodies so we can enjoy them to the fullest and radiate light—forever. Our battle is with an invisible enemy. As Apostle Paul declares, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but . . . against the rulers of the darkness of this world."<sup>62</sup> Without Christ's enmity and commandments, Satan and his followers could overpower us to give up our agency and take control. With them, we "have right to the tree of life" and can "enter in through the gates into the city" of Zion.<sup>63</sup>

At times, I have heard friends justify sin by saying "I was born this way" or "God made me this way." But this tension between our physical bodies and our spirits is a test of this earth. We're here to learn to let our spirits and bodies learn to dance, sing, and work together—to reconcile them in Christ.<sup>64</sup> This is why prophets declare the "natural man is an enemy to God, and has been since the Fall of Adam," and we will remain enemies to God until we yield to Christ and our foreordained paths.<sup>65</sup> Christ's invitation to "lose our life to find it" is abandoning our *own* paths, appetites, and natural desires and letting the Lord fill our vision with heavenly perspective, trusting that our life can be full of what we created before with Christ if we are willing to receive it. We yield to Christ, purify our fallen natures, and fill ourselves with light by obeying His laws and ordinances.

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