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## “Renounce War and Proclaim Peace”: Early Beginnings

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WAR IS A COMPLEX ISSUE—socially, politically, economically, and religiously. However, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can rely on clearly articulated doctrines and principles as they seek to formulate their own stance on armed conflict in general and on specific wars in particular. These inspired and inspiring principles issue from the Lord Himself through the standard works and the published words of prophets and apostles in this last dispensation.

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"There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon" (Revelation 11:7). *The Archangel Michael*, painting by Guido Reni. Courtesy of Art Resource, Inc.

## Origins and Nature of War

War has taken many lives and has caused much misery in this fallen world. As President Thomas S. Monson lamented, “The cruelty of war seems to bring forth hatred toward others and disregard for human life.”<sup>1</sup> But, significantly, war is not unique to mortality. It existed in our premortal life. Its author was Lucifer, or Satan, an angel in authority in the presence of God who rebelled against Him (see D&C 76:25). As a result of Satan’s arrogant obstinacy, “there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels. . . . And the great dragon was cast out [of heaven], that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:7, 9).

The War in Heaven was fought over the foundational issues of eternity: who would be the earth-born Savior of humankind, how salvation would be gained, and whether or not agency would be preserved. Lucifer sought to destroy the agency of humankind and to usurp the kingdom of the Father and the Son. He and “a third part” of our Heavenly Father’s spirit children rejected Jesus Christ and His Atonement. They were thrust out of the Father’s presence, cast down to earth without the possibility of gaining mortal bodies, and so became the devil and his angels (see D&C 76:25–28; 29:36–37; Moses 4:1–4).

Latter-day revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith unequivocally declares that Satan transferred to this earth the war he began in heaven, causing great misery. “Wherefore, he maketh war with the saints of God, and encompasseth them round about. And we saw a vision of the sufferings of those with whom he made war and overcame, for thus came the voice of the Lord unto us” (D&C 76:29–30). John the Revelator also testified that “it was given unto him [Satan] to make war with the saints” in this mortal realm

(Revelation 13:7). In our day, President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, said: “Now, all of us know that war, contention, hatred, suffering of the worst kind are not new. The conflict we see today is but another expression of the conflict that began with the War in Heaven.”<sup>2</sup>

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Thus, warfare in mortality is actually the earthly manifestation of the war inaugurated in our premortal existence, with all of its ensuing misery, sorrow, and destruction—horrendous destruction. In fact, for his rebellion and unrelenting prosecution of war against agency, Satan himself was called “Perdition” (D&C 76:26), meaning utter destruction, complete ruin or loss. He is the personification of complete ruin. He is the personification of war. Therefore, how can we expect that war will produce anything but destruction? And it should come as no surprise that the fundamental principle of agency is almost always at the heart of earthly armed conflict between those who support its expansion and those who press for its contraction.

Again, President Hinckley said, “War, of course, is not new. The weapons change. The ability to kill and destroy is constantly refined. But there has been conflict throughout the ages *over essentially the same issues*.”<sup>3</sup>

Warfare, then, is endemic to mortality. It has been with us as long as Satan has been. It is so much a part of the history of this world that John the Revelator used the images and symbols of war to summarize and characterize this earth’s temporal history, as portrayed in six one-thousand-year periods called seals (see D&C 77:7). In John’s scheme, the horse, the bow, and the sword all

symbolize war—war that Satan has unleashed and fostered in this world (see Revelation 6:1–9; 9:16–17). And, of course, the culminating event preparatory to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is Armageddon—a battle so sweeping and horrendous that “all nations” will be gathered together to fight against Jerusalem (see Zechariah 12–14; Revelation 16:14–21).

But even the Second Coming does not end the horror of war once and for all. After the Millennium, Satan “shall be loosed for a little season, that he may gather together his armies. And Michael, the seventh angel, even the archangel, shall gather together his armies, even the hosts of heaven. And the devil shall gather together his armies; even the hosts of hell, and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies. And then cometh the battle of the great God; and the devil and his armies shall be cast away into their own place, that they shall not have power over the saints any more at all. For Michael shall fight their battles, and shall overcome him who seeketh the throne of him who sitteth upon the throne, even the Lamb” (D&C 88:111–15).

Hence we see that, ironically, warfare and the plan of salvation (or great plan of happiness) are inextricably tied together. This does not mean, however, that God relishes or even approves of war. But He does possess a particular view about it.

## **The Lord’s View**

On August 6, 1833, the Lord revealed anew His overarching perspective on war. Known as Doctrine and Covenants 98, the revelation came to Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio, as a result of the persecution being heaped upon the Saints in Missouri. Having suffered physically and emotionally, and having lost property as a consequence of the adversary’s war against the Church of Jesus Christ, it was only natural that the Missouri members “should



*Saints Driven from Jackson County, Missouri*, painting by C. C. A. Christensen. Museum of Art, Brigham Young University.

feel an inclination toward retaliation and revenge.”<sup>4</sup> But the Lord asked for and outlined something different. From the words of the revelation, it is clear that these principles extend to all the Lord’s people across every dispensation. The Lord called these principles “an ensample unto all people” (D&C 98:38).

First, the Lord declared that His Saints are to “renounce war and proclaim peace” (D&C 98:16). Instead of seeking war, they are to “seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children” (D&C 98:16). In other words, true Saints of the Lord’s kingdom are asked to search first for peaceful solutions to problems that could be dealt with violently. They are to counter the destructive forces of war by living the gospel covenant and by establishing eternal links and bonds between generations through priesthood ordinances that can seal together

the entire human family—the family of God. God asks that His children be bound together rather than torn apart. The power to counter the destructive forces of war and establish God’s kingdom throughout the world is as real as the power that is unleashed in armed conflict. But the capacity to harness that power is predicated upon righteous living and intense, sustained effort to prepare for and establish peace.

It is doubtful that as much effort has ever been expended in proclaiming peace as it has been in promoting war. President Spencer W. Kimball rebuked the world when he stated:

We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan’s counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior’s teaching: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven”(Matthew 5:44–45).<sup>5</sup>

Warfare is fundamentally incongruous with the Lord’s nature and personality. For example, in ancient Israel, King David was forbidden to build a permanent temple of the Lord in Jerusalem because of his involvement in much warfare: “But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight” (1 Chronicles 22:8). War and bloodshed take their toll on

individuals and on nations. Warriors who survive armed conflict are often those who bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. As a youth, David was characterized as being a man after the Lord's "own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). But war desensitized and hardened David to the point that he killed Uriah the Hittite by sending him to "the forefront of the hottest battle" (2 Samuel 11:15) to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife.

President David O. McKay stated what others have said—that "war is incompatible with Christ's teachings" and that "it is vain to attempt to reconcile war with true Christianity."<sup>6</sup> The ancient seer Enoch beheld wondrous visions of the first and second comings of the Prince of Peace. He taught the gospel of Jesus Christ, walked with God, and "was before his face *continually*" (D&C 107:49; emphasis added). But perhaps most touching and telling is his personal witness of God weeping over man's horrible treatment of his fellow-man: "And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains? And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity? . . . The Lord said unto Enoch: . . . Unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood" (Moses 7:28–29, 32–33).

War is a manifestation of that hatred and malice. It pains God deeply, and He has counseled against war in very strong terms. Still, the Lord does not refuse to tutor and counsel His children when war does break out. Although He teaches the ideal ("renounce war and proclaim peace," D&C 98:16), He understands human nature and knows that war is sometimes unavoidable, precisely because Satan seeks to overthrow the kingdom of God by inciting war. God



knows that men use the very agency He provided them in order to reject Him and His beneficent plan. But He never ceases to call, persuade, direct aright, and give guidance to His followers.

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Thus, a second part of the Lord’s doctrine of war that has broad application comprises a policy of what might be termed “defensive war.” The Lord exhorts His covenant peoples to bear patiently the attacks inflicted upon them by their enemies (see D&C 98:23–27) and “not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people” unless He commands it (D&C 98:33). “There are times and circumstances,” said President Hinckley, “when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty, and against tyranny, threat, and oppression.”<sup>7</sup> Throughout the ages, God has commanded and inspired righteous people to resist tyranny and oppression and fight for family and liberty. Who can doubt that Captain Moroni was so inspired? He scrupulously adhered to the Lord’s doctrine of defensive warfare, believing “that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity” (Alma 48:16).

Moroni is the model—the personification—of President Hinckley’s teachings on the nature of divinely approved warfare.



*Captain Moroni Raises the Title of Liberty*, painting by Arnold Friberg.  
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He did not glory in the shedding of blood. Nevertheless, there came a time when Moroni “rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole. And he fastened on his head-plate, and

his breastplate and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land” (Alma 46:12–13).

In what has become a classic statement on war, President David O. McKay also explained that there are conditions and reasons which justify Christian disciples in taking up arms against an opposing force:

Such a condition, however, is not a real or fancied insult given by one nation to another. When this occurs proper reparation may be made by mutual understanding, apology, or by arbitration.

Neither is there justifiable cause found in a desire or even a need for territorial expansion. The taking of territory implies the subjugation of the weak by the strong.

Nor is war justified in an attempt to enforce a new order of government, or even to impel others to a particular form of worship, however better the government or eternally true the principles of the enforced religion may be. . . .

There are, however, two conditions which may justify a truly Christian man to enter—*enter, not begin*—a war: (1) An attempt by others to dominate and to deprive another of his free agency, and (2) Loyalty to his own country. Possibly there is a third, viz., Defense of a weak nation that is being unjustly crushed by a strong, ruthless one.

Paramount among these reasons, of course, is the defense of man’s freedom. To deprive an intelligent human being of his free agency is to commit the crime of the ages. Without freedom of thought, freedom of choice, freedom of action within lawful

bounds, man cannot progress. Throughout the ages, advanced souls have yearned for a society in which liberty and justice prevail. Men have sought for it, fought for it, have died for it. Ancient freemen prized it, slaves longed for it, the Magna Carta demanded it, the Constitution of the United States declared it.

A second obligation that impels us to become participants in war is loyalty to government. The greatest responsibility of the state is to guard the lives and to protect the property and rights of its citizens; and if the state is obligated to protect its citizens from lawlessness within its boundaries, it is equally obligated to protect them from lawless encroachments from without—whether the attacking criminals be individuals or nations. The state is duty bound to protect itself against treachery, and its only effective means of doing so under present world conditions is by armed force.<sup>8</sup>

## God as Divine Warrior

Illustrating and emphasizing the constancy of the Lord's position on war, Doctrine and Covenants 98 is actually a recapitulation of the law of warfare He gave to "all [his] ancient prophets and apostles" (D&C 98:32). He justified His covenant people in going to battle only *after* they had brought the matter before Him.

Behold, this is the law I gave unto my servant Nephi, and thy fathers, Joseph, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, and all mine ancient prophets and apostles.

And again, this is the law that I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them.

And if any nation, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue;

And if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither the second nor the third time, they should bring these testimonies before the Lord;

Then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people. (D&C 98:32–36)

The Lord then reminded the Saints of this dispensation that in ancient times, after sincere efforts at peace failed, He would fight His followers' battles for them, "and their children's battles, and their children's children's, until they had avenged themselves on all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation" (D&C 98:37). It is in this context that Exodus 15:3 is meant to be taken: "The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name." The Lord fights the battles of the righteous.

The same promise given to the ancients has been reissued to the Saints of the latter days. President Spencer W. Kimball stated:

We forget that if we are righteous the Lord will either not suffer our enemies to come upon us—and this is the special promise to the inhabitants of the land of the Americas (see 2 Ne. 1:7)—or he will fight our battles for us (Ex. 14:14; D&C 98:37, to name only two references of many). This he is able to do, for as he said at the time of his betrayal, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53.) We can imagine what fearsome soldiers they would be. King Jehoshaphat and his people were delivered by such a troop (see 2 Chr. 20), and when Elisha's life was threatened, he comforted his servant by saying, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kgs. 6:16). The Lord then opened the eyes of the servant, "And he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kgs. 6:17).

. . . What are we to fear when the Lord is with us? Can we not take the Lord at his word and exercise a particle of faith in him? Our assignment is affirmative: to forsake the things of the world as ends in themselves; to leave off idolatry and press forward in faith; to carry the gospel to our enemies, that they might no longer be our enemies.<sup>9</sup>

As President Kimball pointed out, there is overwhelming evidence showing that God does fight the battles and wars of His covenant followers. To the Israelites, who were facing the onslaught of the Egyptian army at the shores of the Red Sea, Moses declared, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:13–14). The Lord fulfilled His promise.

In Joshua’s day, “the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. . . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel” (Joshua 10:13–14).

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord declared that He would defend Jerusalem, the city of His temple, against the attack of the Assyrians. And indeed He did!

Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it.

By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord.

For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.

Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.

So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. (Isaiah 37:33–37)

The foregoing are just a few of the many examples that can be drawn from ancient sources (modern ones exist as well) showing God's desire and capability to be King, Battle Master, Guardian, and Protector of His covenant people. Without question, sacred history has shown the Lord to be "a man of war" (Exodus 15:3). He has gone into battle to defend His people and further His purposes. And He has justified people in going to war over tyranny, oppression, and liberty. He may continue to do so. But here a huge caution must be reiterated: it is God's place to justify man in going to war and not man's place to justify self-determined involvement in war based on examples of God's fighting past battles. "Few armies in any century, and especially the twentieth, have gone to war without the conviction that their cause was somehow justifiable and even righteous. *Wehrmacht* soldiers of Hitler's conquering Third Reich wore the Motto 'Gott mit uns,' or 'God with us,' emblazoned on their belt buckles."<sup>10</sup> Human beings can deceive and be deceived. Only God is wholly righteous. Only He is master of justice and mercy. Only He can know all things, including the thoughts and intents of people's hearts (see D&C 6:16). Only He can weigh and evaluate with perfect understanding the merits of an action. Only He is or can be the perfect Judge in all matters. Only He has the wisdom and power to use war to further His eternal purposes. Decisions about war, including guiding principles, should be left to Him.

Prophets ancient and modern have spoken about, and provided examples of God using war to further His eternal purposes. These eternal purposes contrast with the sometimes short-sighted,

impatient, more immediate focus of mortals. From personal experience President Ezra Taft Benson knew and testified that the Lord had “turned disasters—war, occupation, and revolution—into blessings.”<sup>11</sup> By His intervention in the American Revolutionary War, the Lord turned what appeared to be certain disaster (for the colonists) into an amazing victory and a great blessing for the whole world. Though the war was bloody and destructive in its effects, miracle after miracle occurred on the North American continent during the war (1775–83) to establish political, religious, and economic freedom in America and thereby hold up a standard and an ensign for the rest of the world to rally around.

It was nothing but the intervention of God that snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. Weakness on the part of the colonists was one of the reasonable arguments of those who opposed a war against Britain. Indeed, on paper the colonies were no match against the motherland. They were anything but unified. The colonists had differing interests, economically and politically. Geographically they were stretched out 1,400 miles—from Maine to Georgia. They had no collective financial backing. In 1775 Great Britain had a standing army of fifty-five thousand and over two million men that could be called to arms. The colonies had an untrained militia of several thousand that were a ragtag assemblage of farmers, trappers, and entrepreneurs. Britain had the most powerful navy in the world. The colonies had no navy. Britain had thousands of armaments, rifles, and cannons. All the guns and powder the colonists had came from England.<sup>12</sup>

But the Lord moved into the conflict. His plans and maneuvers were unstoppable. France and Spain became “blind instruments *in the hands of providence* employed to aid in founding a nation which should cultivate those republican virtues that were destined yet to regenerate the world . . . and eventually to overthrow the timeworn system of tyrannical usurpation of the few over many.”<sup>13</sup> The





*General George Washington Receives a Salute on the Field of Trenton, 1776.*  
Courtesy of National Archives.

eyewitness testimony of George Washington regarding God's intervention is compelling. "It having pleased the Almighty Ruler of the Universe propitiously to defend the cause of the United American States . . . by raising up a powerful Friend among the Princes of the Earth to establish our liberty and Independence upon lasting foundations, it becomes us to set apart a day for gratefully

acknowledging the divine Goodness, and celebrating the important Event which we owe to his benign interposition.”<sup>14</sup>

The Revolutionary War suited God’s purposes. He did not delight in the loss of life or limb, nor the shedding of blood, nor the destruction of lands and property. But the war suited His eternal purposes, and He turned it into an eternal blessing for all peoples. Out of the war came the United States Constitution, which “should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles; that every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another. And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood” (D&C 101:77–80).

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It is significant that the Lord says He redeemed the land by the shedding of blood. Those patriots and colonists who lost their lives or shed their blood in the American Revolutionary War did so for a noble and eternal cause. God turned that sacrifice into something that has benefited the human family for eternity. As President Joseph F. Smith noted: “This great American nation the Almighty raised up

by the power of his omnipotent hand, that it might be possible in the latter days for the kingdom of God to be established in the earth. If the Lord had not prepared the way by laying the foundations of this glorious nation, it would have been impossible (under the stringent laws and bigotry of the monarchical governments of the world) to have laid the foundations for the coming of his great kingdom. *The Lord has done this.*"<sup>15</sup>

God uses the loss of life in warfare to further His eternal purposes and to bless those who perish. Moroni, prophet and captain of the guard, provided comfort to those who mourn the loss of loved ones in armed conflict. "For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord" (Alma 60:13).

Soon after the United States entered World War II, during the April general conference in 1942, Elder Harold B. Lee instructed the Saints:

In this terrible war now waging, thousands of our righteous young men in all parts of the world and in many countries are subject to a call into the military service of their own countries. Some of these, so serving, have already been called back to their heavenly home; others will almost surely be called to follow. But "behold," as Moroni said, the righteous of them who serve and are slain "do enter into the rest of the Lord their God," [Alma 60:13] and of them the Lord has said "those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them." (D.&C. 42:46) Their salvation and exaltation in the world to come will be secure. That in their work of destruction they will be striking at their brethren will not be held against them. That sin, as Moroni of old said, is to the condemnation of those who "sit in their places of power in

a state of thoughtless stupor,” those rulers in the world who in a frenzy of hate and lust for unrighteous power and dominion over their fellow men, have put into motion eternal forces they do not comprehend and cannot control. God, in His own due time, will pass sentence upon them.<sup>16</sup>

At the very next conference, in October 1942, Elder Lee gave additional insight into why the righteous are sometimes slain in battle. He declared, “It is my conviction that the present devastating scourge of war in which hundreds of thousands are being slain, many of whom are no more responsible for the causes of the war than are our own boys, is making necessary an increase of missionary activity in the spirit world and that many of our boys who bear the Holy Priesthood and are worthy to do so will be called to that missionary service after they have departed this life.”<sup>17</sup>

The Lord possesses an eternal perspective. Man usually possesses a restricted view. The Lord has all power and wisdom to accomplish His purposes, which are always in harmony with His work and His glory, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Man possesses limited power and knowledge. We cannot see the end from the beginning in all things. It is both comforting and essential to remember, when talking about war, illness, or any of the many injustices or unfair aspects of life, that ultimately the Lord “doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world” (2 Nephi 26:24).

It is also in this telestial state of mortality that the Lord permits the existence of war and its attendant evils in order to have agency operate in our lives and to have the tests of daily living refine us as His disciples. The First Presidency again explained:

God, doubtless, could avert war, prevent crime, destroy poverty, chase away darkness, overcome error, and make all things

bright, beautiful and joyful. But this would involve the destruction of a vital and fundamental attribute in man—the right of agency. It is for the benefit of His sons and daughters that they become acquainted with evil as well as good, with darkness as well as light, with error as well as truth, and with the results of the infraction of eternal laws. Therefore he has permitted the evils which have been brought about by the acts of His creatures, but will control their ultimate results for His own glory and the progress and exaltation of His sons and daughters, when they have learned obedience by the things they suffer.<sup>18</sup>

### **This Latter-day Dispensation**

Because the Lord knows the end from the beginning (see Isaiah 46:10), His perspective on war is informed by all events past and future. Every era has witnessed wars and rumors of wars, but the Lord has taken particular care from the beginning of time to focus attention on the dispensation of the fullness of times and on the commotion and warfare that will engulf the world prior to His Second Coming. Prophecies about wars and destruction given in all previous dispensations ultimately funnel our attention toward these last days.

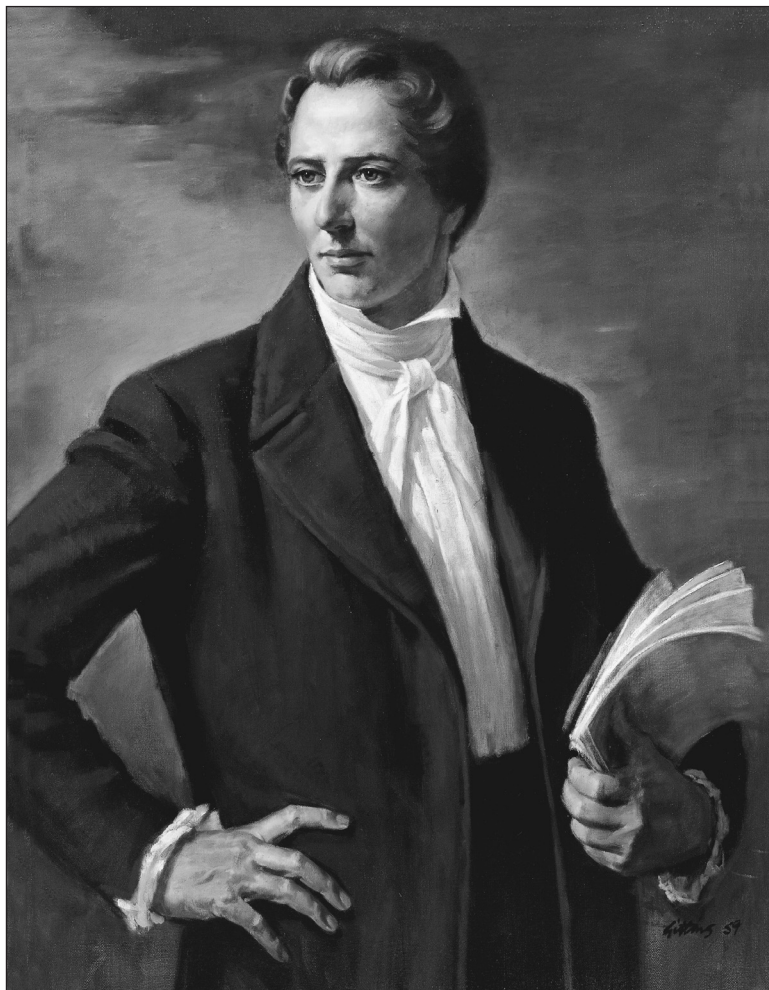
Enoch saw the wickedness, vengeance, and war that would be rampant on earth before the Second Coming (see Moses 7:59–67). Lehi and Nephi saw in vision the wars and rumors of wars that began to spread among all nations prior to the Restoration of the gospel and beyond (see 1 Nephi 14:16–17). During His earthly ministry, our Lord proclaimed that during the last days the earth's inhabitants would “hear of wars, and rumors of wars” before His return in glory (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:28). And, finally, Joseph Smith began to comprehend early on in his ministry what the ancients knew: that beginning in his own time there would constantly

be wars and rumors of wars until the end of the world (see D&C 45:26). He came to know that war would be poured out upon the earth because of the wickedness of people. The beginning of the end would be the American Civil War, commencing in South Carolina in 1861, and war would spread to all nations and would not cease until the coming of the Son of Man (see D&C 87).

Even before the revelations of March 7, 1831 (see D&C 45), and December 25, 1832 (see D&C 87), the Saints experienced conflicts and received revelations that began to help them understand the Lord's attitude toward war. In January 1831, as persecution toward the Church increased in New York, the Lord commanded the Saints to move west to Ohio in order to "escape the power of the enemy" (D&C 38:31). Rather than retaliate against or resist those promoting violence, the Lord told His people He wanted them gathered to Him "a righteous people, without spot and blameless" (D&C 38:31). Then He would give to them His law and endow them with "power from on high" (D&C 38:32). And so the New York Saints moved west to northern Ohio, ready to enjoy the promised endowments of knowledge and power from on high.

It is significant that the Lord prefaced His instruction regarding escape from enemy forces by chiding the Saints for focusing on the grand signs of the times, while being somewhat oblivious to the smaller, yet significant issues at home. "Ye hear of wars in far countries, and you say that there will soon be great wars in far countries, but ye know not the hearts of men in your own land" (D&C 38:29). From this comment, we know that the Saints were well aware of the latter-day prophecies regarding war, and were thinking about them.

The Kirtland period of Church history was one of unparalleled development. Priesthood organization, doctrinal restoration, glorious manifestations, and the members' spiritual education all issued from the Kirtland experience. Construction on this new



*The Prophet Joseph Smith Jr.*, painting by Alvin Gittens. © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

dispensation's first temple—the focal point of this era's pentecostal outpouring—began on June 6, 1833. But work on the temple again raised the specter of war against the Saints, and thus Kirtland also proved to be a period of significant persecution. “Mobs threatened to destroy the temple, and those who worked on it by day guarded

it at night. Night after night for weeks, Heber C. Kimball said, we 'were not permitted to take off our clothes, and were obliged to lay with our fire locks in our arms.'"19

In Ohio, resistance to the Church and to the Prophet Joseph Smith increased as the Church's economic position decreased and the Kirtland Safety Society inched toward failure. Inside the Church, apostasy spread. Outside the Church, hatred increased. In August 1837, apostates Warren Parrish (a former scribe to Joseph Smith) and John Boynton (a member of the Quorum of the Twelve) led a group armed with pistols and bowie knives and stormed the temple. Peace was restored, but by the fall of that year another group led by Parrish, Boynton, and Luke Johnson sought to overthrow the Church and take over the temple. Between November 1837 and June 1838 ten to fifteen percent of the Church's membership in Kirtland apostatized. In January 1838, Joseph Smith was warned of an assassination plot and had to be secreted out of town. War against the Saints in Ohio continued to escalate.

Again, the answer to rising conflict against the Prophet and the faithful Saints was not retaliation but withdrawal to the West. By 1838, Church leadership and Church headquarters were concentrated in northern Missouri. Tragically, opposition to the Church in Missouri would prove to be more intense and bitter than in New York or Ohio. It challenged the Saints' adherence to the Lord's requested response to conflict.

While the Saints were in Ohio, this other center of gathering had developed in Missouri. In 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith had revealed that Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, was the center place of Zion, site of the future temple, and consecrated gathering place of the Saints, and that land should be purchased there (see D&C 57). By 1833, twelve hundred Saints had migrated to Jackson County, but mob violence was determined to drive them out. "Efforts to defend their rights through peaceful means only in-





The mob attacks Haun's Mill. *Haun's Mill*, painting by C. C. A. Christensen. Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

furiated the Missourians further. . . . The Mormons' weak attempts at defense proved useless, and by the middle of November [1833] the Jackson County Saints were no more.”<sup>20</sup> The exiles made their way across the Missouri River to the north in Clay County.

It was in the midst of these Missouri persecutions, in August of 1833, that Doctrine and Covenants 98 was revealed. It is instructive that as the intensity of the opposition increased, justifiably inclining the Saints toward revenge and retaliation, the Lord revealed His ancient law of warfare, discussed above, a law grounded in the principle of waiting patiently on the Lord. In February 1834, after the November expulsion of the Saints from Jackson County, the Lord called upon the Prophet to lead an expedition of Saints known as Zion's Camp to help restore the Missouri Saints' property and to protect them from further depredations. But in so doing, the Lord

seems to have provided an addendum to the principles of war and retaliation given in section 98.

Verily I say unto you, my friends, behold, I will give unto you a revelation and commandment, that you may know how to act in the discharge of your duties concerning the salvation and redemption of your brethren, who have been scattered on the land of Zion;

Being driven and smitten by the hands of mine enemies, on whom I will pour out my wrath without measure in mine own time.

For I have suffered them thus far, that they might fill up the measure of their iniquities, that their cup might be full;

And that those who call themselves after my name might be chastened for a little season with a sore and grievous chastisement, because they did not hearken altogether unto the precepts and commandments which I gave unto them.

But verily I say unto you, that I have decreed a decree which my people shall realize, inasmuch as they hearken from this very hour unto the counsel which I, the Lord their God, shall give unto them.

Behold they shall, for I have decreed it, begin to prevail against mine enemies from this very hour. (D&C 103:1–6)

This revelation also spoke of the redemption of Zion by “power” (D&C 103:15). Though some Saints may have thought this implied conquest by force, the Prophet’s intentions did not include military-style aggression, as further events surrounding Zion’s Camp attest. While encamped on Fishing River, Missouri, Joseph received another revelation. It came as “mob violence against the saints in Missouri had increased, and organized bodies from several counties had declared their intent to destroy the people.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, stunningly, the Lord concluded this revelation with a powerful

command: “And again I say unto you, sue for peace, not only to the people that have smitten you, but also to all people; and lift up an ensign of peace, and make a proclamation of peace unto the ends of the earth; and make proposals for peace unto those who have smitten you, according to the voice of the Spirit which is in you, and all things shall work together for your good. Therefore, be faithful; and behold, and lo, I am with you even unto the end. Even so. Amen” (D&C 105:38–41). Zion’s Camp disbanded without taking military action.

By the summer of 1838, the continuing and unresolved depredations against the Missouri Saints weighed heavily upon Church leaders. These concerns and frustrations seem to have boiled over in sermons delivered by Sidney Rigdon that season. His July 4 oration, held at the public square of Far West, Missouri, proved to be a pivotal moment in Mormon relations with neighboring Missourians. Elder Rigdon started out nobly enough, recounting the principles of freedom established by the founders of America. But he ended up announcing that the Saints were through suffering abuse from their enemies. “We have proved the world with kindness, we have suffered their abuse without cause, with patience, and have endured without resentment, until this day. . . . But from this day and this hour, we will suffer it no more. . . . That mob that comes on us to disturb us; it shall be between us and them a war of extermination, for we will follow them, till the last drop of their blood is spilled, or else they will have to exterminate us; for we will carry the seat of war to their own houses, and their own families, and one party or the other shall be utterly destroyed.”<sup>22</sup>

Looking back six years later, Jedediah M. Grant said the speech “was the main auxiliary that fanned into a flame the burning wrath of the mobocratic portion of the Missourians. They now had an excuse, their former threats were renewed, and soon executed, [and] we were then . . . all made accountable for the acts of one man.”<sup>23</sup>

President Brigham Young also placed blame for the Church's subsequent troubles on Rigdon's speech. "Elder Rigdon was the prime cause of our troubles in Missouri, by his fourth of July oration."<sup>24</sup>

Between August 6, 1838, and October 27, 1838, at least six significant conflicts broke out between the Mormons and the Missourians. The die was cast. On October 27, 1838, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued his infamous Extermination Order against the Mormons, they "having made war upon the people of this state."<sup>25</sup> The Lord's counsel had not been followed by everyone, and given all that He had said about renouncing war and continually holding up the standard of peace, it was with supreme irony that the Mormons were ordered to be "exterminated or driven from the State . . . for the *public peace*."<sup>26</sup>

Again the Saints, guided by prophetic example, moved away from what could have been turned into massive armed conflict. They established a new city on the Mississippi at a place formerly called Commerce, Illinois, and thus created a new capital of their kingdom—Nauvoo. Once there, the Prophet Joseph did not abandon the Lord's principles of defensive war when divinely sanctioned. But he seemed to come to believe that such principles can profitably flow from a position of military as well as spiritual strength. Hence, the Nauvoo Legion was created in February 1841 as part of the charter granted to the city of Nauvoo. The legion was organized with two cohorts—the horse troops and the foot troops. Joseph Smith was elected commander of the legion with the rank of lieutenant general and John C. Bennett as second in command with the rank of major general.

Though the legion was "demonized by its critics as a symbol of Mormon militarism and empire-building," it was "defended by its supporters as a means of self defense."<sup>27</sup> Certainly the idea of the legion was a product of all that the Saints had suffered at the hands of their enemies. "From their 1833 expulsion from Independence to



*Joseph Mustering the Nauvoo Legion*, painting by C. C. A. Christensen.  
Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

the slaughter at Haun's Mill in 1838, the Mormon stay in Missouri is written in blood. . . . Little wonder, then, that as they reassembled in Illinois self-defense was an uppermost priority."<sup>28</sup> But there was another factor in its establishment as well. The Nauvoo Legion was also a unit of the Illinois state militia, and service in the legion satisfied the Military Act of 1792, which required every able-bodied white male between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to enlist in their local militia. Thus, as Joseph Smith stated, the legion was not to be a Mormon-only organization, and the Prophet couched its existence in terms of self-defense for all citizens. He said, "The Legion is . . . a body of citizen soldiers organized . . . for the public defense, the general good, and the preservation of law and order—to save the innocent, unoffending citizens from the iron grasp of the oppressor,

and perpetuate and sustain our free institutions against misrule, anarchy, and mob violence.”<sup>29</sup>

The legion participated in parades, practice drills, mock battles, and other special occasions. But its very existence was foreboding to the naysayers and opponents of the Church. Even though the legion “was the product of a defensive rather than an aggressive psychology,”<sup>30</sup> it gave enemies of the Church an opportunity to vent their feelings and plant questions in the minds of already nervous non-Mormon citizens of the region. For example, Thomas Sharp, editor of the *Warsaw Signal*, wrote: “Why these weekly parades? Why all this strictness of discipline? We pause for reply. How military these people are becoming! Everything they say or do seems to breathe the spirit of military tactics. Their prophet appears, on all great occasions, in his splendid regimental dress, signs his name Lieutenant General, and more titles are to be found in the Nauvoo Legion than any one book on military tactics can produce. . . . Truly fighting must be part of the creed of these saints. Are the Danites still separate or merged with the Nauvoo Legion?”<sup>31</sup>

In truth, the Nauvoo Legion never engaged an enemy force or fired a shot in anger, but its presence helped to polarize fear and opposition toward the Mormons once more. As early as 1842, Governor Thomas Ford called for at least a modification of both the Nauvoo City Charter and the Nauvoo Legion. In June 1844, the Prophet was murdered, and the Nauvoo Legion was called out to guard the city from attack. In January 1845, Illinois revoked the Nauvoo Charter, and the legion ceased to exist legally. However, some of its members still felt it was needed to protect homes and property, and some of these legionnaires fought futilely in the Battle of Nauvoo in 1846 to prevent the fall of the city. By then, however, most of the Saints had left for the West. It was a pointless effort. President Brigham Young did ask remnants of the legion to help form militia units to protect the exiles during the Mormon exodus

in 1846 and 1847. Some members of the legion later served in the Mormon Battalion.

## Conclusion

The Nauvoo experience, like the experiences in New York, Ohio, and Missouri, tested the patience and resolve of the Saints to renounce war and proclaim peace. But many of them remained true to the revelations of God given through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Saints learned by bitter experience that the history of opposition to the Church and to the Saints is one of constant, unrelenting persecution. It is a history of Satan's hand in the affairs of his fallen, temporary, mortal kingdom. However, it is also a history of the Lord's hand in the affairs of His eternal kingdom on earth.

War had a profound effect on the Saints in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois in the early part of this dispensation. It taught them that armed conflict causes misery and destruction. It made them keenly aware of the unfairness of mortality. It caused many to turn from the Church but caused others to turn to the Lord because He was their *only* recourse. Disagreeable as it was, war was a catalyst for the development of faith and for some of the most powerful revelations we know.

Through those revelations, the Lord has helped His disciples to understand the nature of war and what principles He, with His infinite knowledge, wisdom, and power, wants followed. War began in heaven with the rebellion of Lucifer against righteousness and agency, and it has continued to this very day. War is the result of greed, lust, and selfishness. The righteous are often drawn into war because of the need to defend home, family, land, country, liberty, and religion from the encroachment of an aggressor. The Lord has promised to fight the battles of the righteous against their aggressors, but if the Lord's people sin they will not have the Lord's protection.



The Lord's people must not be guilty of the first, second, or third offense. The Lord sometimes allows the righteous to be slain so that the wicked may be condemned and the righteous be given the blessings of heaven. Having to face armed conflict, depredation, and persecution impressed upon the Prophet Joseph Smith and his loyal supporters the kind of being God actually is.

The Prince of Peace wants peace! He wants His disciples to hold up the standard of peace in the face of war, even if it means withdrawing from a region for a time. Perhaps that is the greatest legacy left to us by the New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois Saints. Their sacrifices and their responses to conflict show that it is possible to live as the Lord bids us—renounce war and proclaim peace and seek instead to turn the hearts of the children and the fathers to one another. They avoided conflict at great cost to themselves and their families, leaving their homes in the dead of winter, and sometimes sacrificing all of their material possessions. Unfortunately, these are lessons that come hard to those not so willing to follow the Lord's requests at all hazards—the proud, the impatient, the self-centered, and the short-sighted—in other words, those focused only on mortality. But obedience to the Lord's will in this matter brings nothing less than the approbation of heaven and the blessings of a godlike personality.

## Notes

1. Thomas S. Monson, "Mercy—The Divine Gift," *Ensign*, May 1995, 54.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," *Ensign*, November 2001, 74.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "War and Peace," *Ensign*, May 2003, 78; emphasis added.



4. Heading to Doctrine and Covenants 98.
5. Spencer W. Kimball, “The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976, 3.
6. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1942, 74.
7. Hinckley, “War and Peace,” 80.
8. Llewelyn R. McKay, comp., *Secrets of a Happy Life: From the Writings and Discourses of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 76–77; emphasis in original.
9. Kimball, “False Gods,” 3.
10. Daniel K Judd and Benjamin M. Rogers, “‘Wars and Rumors of Wars’: A Restoration Perspective,” *Religious Educator* 5, no. 1 (2004), 103.
11. Ezra Taft Benson, “A World Message,” *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 96.
12. See Mark E. Petersen, *The Great Prologue* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 51–52.
13. Petersen, *The Great Prologue*, 57, quoting Wilson’s History of the United States.
14. William H. Wilbur, *The Making of George Washington* (New York: Patriot Education, 1973), 198.
15. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 409; emphasis in original.
16. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, April 1942, 95–96.
17. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1942, 73.
18. Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose, in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:325–26.
19. “Elder Kimball’s Journal,” *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1845, 771.
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21. Heading to Doctrine and Covenants 105.

22. Quoted in Alexander L. Baugh, “The Mormons Must Be Treated As Enemies,” in *Joseph*, 289.
23. Quoted in Baugh, “Enemies,” 289.
24. Quoted in Baugh, “Enemies,” 289.
25. Quoted in Baugh, “Enemies,” 292.
26. Quoted in Baugh, “Enemies,” 284; emphasis added.
27. Richard E. Bennett, “The Nauvoo Legion,” in *Joseph*, 358.
28. Bennett, “Nauvoo Legion,” 359.
29. Quoted in Bennett, “Nauvoo Legion,” 359.
30. Robert B. Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 101.
31. Quoted in Bennett, “Nauvoo Legion,” 393.