

“Delivered by the Power of God”: Nephi’s Vision of America’s Birth

Kenneth L. Alford

In contrast to Lehi’s tree of life vision, which is not tied to specific historical events, Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 is brimming with historical details, references, and prophetic insights. In 1 Nephi 13, Nephi was probably shown the successful struggle surrounding the birth of the United States¹ and the fact that the Lord would use his power to influence the outcome.

Nephi wrote “that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity” would “humble themselves before the Lord” so they could be “delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:16, 19). Nephi foresaw “the restoration of the gospel six hundred years before the Savior’s birth, and the events leading up to it were shown him in considerable detail,”² namely concerning the colonization of North America and the American Revolution.

The sheer improbability of an American victory in the Revolutionary War is staggering. By all the standard measures of military contests—population, power, wealth, size and experience of the respective armies and navies, depth and experience of each country’s military leadership, diplomatic

Kenneth L. Alford is an associate professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University.

power and connections, and political organization—Great Britain should easily have been victorious. To face the most professional army and navy in the world, the American colonists could field only an army of volunteer militia and a few undergunned ships. As the historian Robert Thompson noted: “Especially great were the difficulties of America from the lack of the manufactures [*sic*] needed to equip and support an army. They had no cloths to make uniforms, no canvas for tents, no shoes and no leather to make them, no cannon save such as they could borrow or buy in Europe, no gunpowder for either large or small arms, no bunting for flags. Twice the patriotic women of Philadelphia searched their household stores, and sent every blanket they could spare to Washington’s forces; and the awnings from the shops, the sails from the ships, and the contents of the sail-lofts went to make tents.”³

Never before had colonies militarily defeated their mother country and established themselves as an independent republic. Early Americans recognized the Lord’s hand in their unlikely victory over Great Britain. On July 2, 1776, when the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence and pledged to each other their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor, they did so “with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.”⁴ Throughout the Revolutionary War and the decades that followed, Americans openly acknowledged God’s intervention on their behalf.

During 1976, the American bicentennial year, President Ezra Taft Benson commented, “Secular scholarship, though useful, provides an incomplete and sometimes inaccurate view of our history. The real story of America is one which shows the hand of God in our nation’s beginning.”⁵ It is fair to ask, then, what evidence exists to demonstrate that the power of God was with the American cause during the fight for independence? And how widely recognized was that assistance?

To prove absolutely to a skeptical world that God influenced the outcome of the American War for Independence will probably remain elusive. Through his prophets, though, God has declared that it was so. Elder L. Tom Perry has pointed out that the “evidence is overwhelming of God’s hand in the establishment of this nation.”⁶ If we look at events through the eyes of faith, we will find numerous instances of divine assistance. As the Reverend John F. Bigelow stated in a Civil War–era sermon, “My purpose is simply to verify, by a few brief references, the presence of God’s hand.”⁷ In the interest of space and time, we will examine just three of the many possible instances of Divine

Providence, “the power of God,” coming to the aid of the fledgling colonies: George Washington and the Founding Fathers, the wartime weather, and the great chain across the Hudson River in New York at West Point.

Washington and the Founding Fathers

In addressing the events of the Revolutionary War, Nephi referred to the American colonists as “the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity,” and he noted that they “did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them” (1 Nephi 13:16). As if to stress the recognition that God would be on their side, in the following three verses Nephi again clearly states that he “beheld that the power of God was with them” (v. 18) and that they would be “delivered by the power of God” (v. 19).

It is truly inspiring to study the humility, character, competence, and integrity of the great men God assembled to give birth to the American republic. As Bigelow noted, the “same Providence which gave us Washington, gave us others also, who were worthy to be his brothers, if not his peers in the common cause of the country.”⁸ At a White House dinner on April 29, 1962, President John F. Kennedy, not entirely in jest, acknowledged how unique the Founding Fathers were when he told a distinguished gathering of Nobel Prize winners, “I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”⁹ In latter-day scripture, the Lord announced the very personal interest that he had taken regarding the birth of the United States. The Founding Fathers, he declared in section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants, were “wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose” (D&C 101:80). Bigelow also stated: “The American cause needed men of far-sighted sagacity, of regulative talent, of constitutive ideas, of able statesmanship. It needed men of diplomatic abilities, those who would be faithful at home, and just abroad. It needed men of incorruptible patriotism, those who would fill the offices of Government, not in the interest of self, but in that of the country. How adequately God supplied the men to meet these demands, our constitutional history leaves us in no doubt.”¹⁰

The Founding Fathers were truly men “furnished by Providence.”¹¹ During the April 1898 general conference, President Wilford Woodruff said, “I am going to bear my testimony to this assembly, if I never do it again in my life, that those men who laid the foundation of this American government. . .

were the best spirits the God of heaven could find on the face of the earth. These were choice spirits, not wicked men. General Washington and all the men that labored for the purpose were inspired of the Lord.”¹² Interestingly, it was to President Woodruff that those men appeared at the St. George Temple in 1877 requesting that their temple work be completed. President Benson shared his conviction regarding America’s Founding Fathers that “when one casts doubt about the character of these noble sons of God, I believe he or she will have to answer to the God of heaven for it.”¹³

While all of the Founding Fathers contributed significantly, in their own way, to the establishment of the United States of America, one man was absolutely essential—George Washington. Referring to Washington in an 1841 nationally published sermon, the Reverend George Cheever stated that “Divine Providence had, for years, been giving him special training for his work. . . . I cannot but think that the hand of God was signally manifest, and in nothing more so than in giving us just such a man as our Washington. . . . It is not too much to say that, had he been a different man, in the slightest essential degree, . . . he would have failed . . . and the American cause would have been lost.”¹⁴

God’s protection and intervention to bring about an American victory in the Revolutionary War, as foretold in Nephi’s vision, was demonstrated many times during George Washington’s life. There are several historical accounts when Washington—like Samuel, the Lamanite—had his life miraculously preserved. One early incident occurred in the summer of 1755 during the French and Indian War. As a twenty-three-year-old aide-de-camp, Washington accompanied General Edward Braddock’s regiments into the Ohio region, where they were attacked on July 9, 1755, by French and Indian forces at the Battle of the Monongahela. Braddock and over half of the approximately 1,300 British regulars were killed or wounded. Colonel Washington, although not officially in the chain of command, organized survivors and helped the army retire from the field. In a letter to his brother John, written from Fort Cumberland a few days following the battle, Washington acknowledged his miraculous escape. “As I have heard since my arriv’l at this place, a circumstantial acct. of my death and dying speech,” he wrote, “I take this early opportunity of contradicting both, and of assuring you that I now exist and appear in the land of the living by the miraculous care of Providence, that protected me beyond all human expectation; I had four Bullets through my Coat, and two Horses shot under me, and yet escaped unhurt.”¹⁵

In his 1843 book *The Life of George Washington*, historian Jared Sparks related an incident told by Dr. James Craik, a boyhood and lifelong friend of Washington's who was with him at the Battle of the Monongahela. Craik was also one of the three doctors who attended to Washington on his deathbed at Mount Vernon in 1799. Craik reported that fifteen years after the Battle of the Monongahela, he and Washington

travelled together on an expedition to the western country, with a party of woodsmen, for the purpose of exploring wild lands. While near the junction of the Great Kenhawa and Ohio Rivers, a company of Indians came to them with an interpreter, at the head of whom was an aged and venerable chief. This personage made known to them by the interpreter, that, hearing Colonel Washington was in that region, he had come a long way to visit him, adding, that, during the battle of the Monongahela, he had singled him out as a conspicuous object, fired his rifle at him many times, and directed his young warriors to do the same, but to his utter astonishment none of their balls took effect. He was then persuaded, that the youthful hero was under the special guardianship of the Great Spirit, and immediately ceased to fire at him. He was now come to pay homage to the man, who was the particular favorite of Heaven, and who could never die in battle.¹⁶

Similar incidents happened to Washington during the course of the Revolutionary War. In January 1777, for example, in an effort to halt a possible American retreat at the Battle of Princeton, General Washington rode into the thick of the battle and positioned himself directly between the fighting American and British soldiers. Although he was mounted on a horse and sitting just a few dozen yards from the nearest British riflemen with "a thousand deaths flying around him,"¹⁷ he again miraculously escaped unharmed.

Recognizing George Washington as the "Father of His Country" is not simply an honorific title; it is also a statement of fact. Over a century ago, the historian Robert Thompson called Washington "God's unique gift to America."¹⁸ Contemporaries and historians alike have long noted that George Washington, more than any other individual, was responsible for the success of the American Revolutionary cause. His character, temperament, experience, and faith were uniquely suited to the heavy and almost impossible demands placed upon him; he was "called to perform a particular work, a

work allowing him to be nothing other than just what he was. His destiny . . . was, with the scanty resources furnished to his hands, and with fearful odds against him, to lay the foundations of this great American Republic.”¹⁹ Truly, “the power of God was with [him]” (1 Nephi 13:18).

Following the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, King George III of Great Britain asked Benjamin West, an American-born artist living in London, if he had heard any information regarding what George Washington might do after the war. West replied, “Oh, they say he will return to his farm.” “If he does that,” said the king, referring to the fact that Washington would voluntarily be giving up a position of great power, “he will be the greatest man in the world.”²⁰ Many generations of Americans would concur with the king’s assessment.

Wartime Weather

Nephi was shown in vision that “the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them [the American colonists] to battle” (1 Nephi 13:18). Interestingly, the first time the phrase “the wrath of God” appears in the Book of Mormon is just a few verses earlier in that same chapter when Nephi discusses the fate of his brother’s descendants (see 1 Nephi 13:11). “Wrath of God” is a thought-provoking phrase—one of the meanings of which is “divine chastisement”²¹—and it appears frequently throughout the scriptures. Echoing the words of Nephi, Elder Bruce R. McConkie observed, “In the American Revolution the Lord was with the colonists and poured out his wrath upon Great Britain and those who opposed the Americans. (1 Nephi 13:17–19).”²² One way God’s wrath was displayed was through providing difficult and challenging weather conditions when American military forces most needed them.

God controls the elements and can use them to further his purposes. Weather played a decisive and supportive role several times during the Revolutionary War, as British and Hessian forces found themselves on the receiving end of divine chastisement. Following “the shot heard ’round the world,” the first major engagements of the war took place on the hills surrounding Boston Harbor. In January 1776, General Knox decided to use sleds to transport almost fifty artillery pieces from Fort Ticonderoga in New York, where they had been captured from the British, to Boston, and it snowed sufficiently to speed the journey. Once the artillery pieces

reached Boston, Washington placed them on Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston Harbor and the British ships at anchor there. During the night of March 4, 1776, while the Americans worked feverishly on fortifications, a “ground mist completely covered their operations” from the British “while the weather was perfectly clear on the top of the hill” where they were working. At the same time, an inland breeze carried noise of the American’s actions away from the British forces.²³

Upon seeing the finished fortifications the next morning, British general Sir William Howe is quoted as having said, “The rebels have done more in one night than my whole army would have done in a month.”²⁴ Howe ordered an immediate attack upon the Heights, but a severe snowstorm arose and canceled his plans. One British soldier wrote that the storm was “more violent than any I had ever heard.”²⁵ Regarding the storm, General Washington wrote that the British made great preparations “for attacking us; but not being ready before the afternoon” the weather became “very tempestuous,” which resulted in “much Blood” being saved, “and a very important blow (to one side or the other) prevented. That this remarkable interposition of Providence is for some wise purpose, I have no doubt.”²⁶

The bid for American independence would have ended near New York City in August 1776 with the capture of the Continental Army if favorable weather had not intervened and created the means for their escape. In the summer of 1776, British forces landed on Long Island in overwhelming numbers and sought to end the rebellion quickly by capturing General Washington and his army. Washington’s forces were pushed across Long Island and into Brooklyn with their backs against the river. Rather than risk losing his entire army, Washington decided to evacuate his forces across the mile-wide East River. Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge, an American officer, explained that by ten o’clock on the night of August 29, 1776,

the troops began to retire from the lines in such a manner that no chasm was made in the lines, but as one regiment left their station on guard, the remaining troops moved to the right and left and filled up the vacancies, while Gen. Washington took his station at the ferry, and superintended the embarkation of the troops. It was one of the most anxious, busy nights that I ever recollect, and being the third in which hardly any of us had closed our eyes to sleep, we were all greatly fatigued. As the dawn of the next day approached, those of us who

remained in the trenches became very anxious for our own safety, and when the dawn appeared there were several regiments still on duty. At this time a very dense fog began to rise, and it seemed to settle in a peculiar manner over both encampments. I recollect this peculiar providential occurrence perfectly well; and so very dense was the atmosphere that I could scarcely discern a man at six yards' distance.

When the sun rose we had just received orders to leave the lines, but before we reached the ferry, the Commander-in-Chief sent one of his Aids [*sic*] to order the regiment to repair again to their former station on the lines. . . . [B]ut the fog remained as dense as ever. Finally, the second order arrived for the regiment to retire, and we very joyfully bid those trenches a long adieu.²⁷

Colonel Tallmadge noted that he was one of the last soldiers to be evacuated. As he was leaving, he remembered that he had left his horse tied to a post at the ferry. His account of that morning continues:

The troops having now all safely reached New York, and the fog continuing as thick as ever, I began to think of my favorite horse, and requested leave to return and bring him off. Having obtained permission, I called for a crew of volunteers to go with me, and guiding the boat myself, I obtained my horse and got off some distance into the river before the enemy appeared in Brooklyn.

As soon as they reached the ferry we were saluted merrily from their musketry, and finally by their field pieces; but we returned in safety. In the history of warfare I do not recollect a more fortunate retreat. After all, the providential appearance of the fog saved a part of our army from being captured. . . .

When the enemy had taken possession of the heights opposite the city, they commenced firing from their artillery, and the fleet were in motion to take possession of those waters, which, had it been done a little earlier, this division of our army must inevitably have fallen into their hands.²⁸

Samuel DeForest, a six-term Connecticut militiaman, reported that during the evacuation of Brooklyn Heights “a most wonderful thunderstorm took place. It commenced about one o'clock in the day. The thunder and the lightning were dreadful. The clouds run so low. . . . The darkness was so great

that the two armies could not see each other, although within one hundred rods of each other."²⁹ The heavy northeastern winds, rain, and fog combined to create three significant results. First, it stopped the British Navy from blocking Washington's evacuation; second, it halted attempts by the British Army to attack and capture Washington's forces; and third, it facilitated the escape of the American Army.

The oft-told story of Washington crossing the Delaware River on December 25, 1776, to attack Trenton, New Jersey, often ignores the vital role that weather played in that battle's success. The blinding snowstorm that began on Christmas Day not only convinced the British and Hessians that Washington would not attack, but also concealed noise of Washington's movement and provided frozen roads that quickened the army's approach to Trenton. The Battle of Trenton was a complete American victory.

The Battle of Princeton, a few days later, provided Washington with weather perfect for his purposes. For four consecutive nights in early January 1777, the temperature remained above freezing, which left muddy roads far too soft to move the Continental Army into position to attack the British. The fourth night, though, a hard freeze turned the roads solid, "enabling the Americans, who began to move out after midnight, to proceed with greater dispatch. Thick clouds piled high, adding to the darkness, and a cold wind blew from the northwest, carrying sounds away from the British lines."³⁰ The cold weather enabled Washington's forces to march sixteen miles in the dark in less time than it had taken the British to march just ten miles in daylight the previous day.

Weather intervened to save American forces in the southern colonies as well. On January 17, 1781, at the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina, General Daniel Morgan's soldiers soundly defeated a larger and more experienced British force commanded by the infamous Colonel Banastre Tarleton. Following the defeat, General Charles Cornwallis pursued Morgan's men in a vigorous chase. Cornwallis, after destroying his excess baggage in order to increase the speed of their march, believed that he had cornered Morgan at the Catawba River. Morgan's forces crossed the Catawba just two hours before Cornwallis arrived. Heavy rain that morning and during the next two days made the river impassable and allowed Morgan's soldiers to escape. A few days later, a similar series of events occurred when American forces under General Nathanael Greene were protected because the British Army could not cross the swollen Yadkin River.³¹

Individually, any one of these extremely fortunate bouts of weather so favorable to the American cause might be explained away as coincidence or extremely good luck. Collectively, though, they demonstrate divine interest and influence.³² The Book of Mormon includes other instances, such as the visit of the resurrected Christ to the Americas, when God has used weather—in that instance, “the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest” (3 Nephi 8:19)—to further his purposes. Several times during the American Revolution, favorable weather conditions meant the difference between victory and defeat, and the final result, being “delivered by the power of God” (1 Nephi 13:19), was exactly as Nephi prophesied.

West Point Chain

God, who knows “the end from the beginning” (Abraham 2:8), knew exactly what the American colonists would need to secure victory in the Revolutionary War in order to provide a suitable environment for the Restoration a few decades later. The final evidence discussed here of God’s prophesied hand in America’s Revolutionary victory, as recorded by Nephi in the Book of Mormon, involves a river, iron ore, a very large chain, and God’s inspiration to bring them together.

The important role that the Hudson River played in America’s Revolutionary War victory can hardly be overstated. As General Washington wrote to General Israel Putnam, the American commander in the Hudson Highlands, on December 2, 1777, “The importance of the Hudson river in the present contest and the necessity of defending it, are subjects which have been so frequently and so fully discussed and are so well understood, that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon them.”³³ If the British had retained possession of the river throughout the war, they would have effectively cut the American colonies in half. Just one month after shots were fired in Massachusetts at Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress passed its first resolution addressing the strategic importance of American forces controlling the river.³⁴ From 1776 to early 1778, the colonists failed several times to retain command of the river (using booms, chevaux-de-frise, sunken vessels, fire-rafts, and other obstacles). One of those attempts, in 1777, involved placing a heavy metal chain with links 1½ inches thick across the river between Fort Montgomery on the west and Anthony’s Nose on the east. On October 6, 1777, British forces attacked and soundly defeated the chain’s defenders.

The idea of using a chain to block the Hudson was sound, but the initial execution was flawed. At the insistence of General Washington, who was at Valley Forge, and the New York Fortifications Commission, plans were made to retry placing a chain across the river approximately fifty miles north of New York City at West Point. On February 2, 1778, a government contract was executed to forge a new chain that would stretch across the Hudson a few miles upriver from the site of the original chain. The contract was signed late Saturday night and by “daylight on Sunday morning the forges were in operation.”³⁵ West Point, the “keystone of the country,”³⁶ was the perfect location for the new chain. A double bend in the river there required sailing ships to stop and tack not once but twice as they passed West Point and nearby Constitution Island. In an engineering feat that would be difficult to duplicate even today, the chain was manufactured from start to finish in just six weeks. Creation of the chain was so important that the government’s contract specified that workmen were exempted from military duty throughout the period of its construction. When finished on April 1, 1778, the chain weighed an estimated 186 tons and was over five hundred yards long. The hundreds of individual chain links ranged from 2¼ to 3½ inches thick and from two to three feet in length; there were also eight swivels and 80 clevises.³⁷ When stretched across the river, sections of chain floated on pitch-covered logs a few feet beneath the surface of the water.

The chain was deployed on April 30, 1778. With several forts, numerous redoubts, artillery, and soldiers effectively placed on both sides of the river, the installation of the great chain at West Point ensured American control of the Hudson River until the end of the war. During the remaining years of conflict, the chain was removed from the river each winter and replaced each spring on dates chosen by General Washington. West Point became so strategically and tactically important that it was the West Point fortification plans that General Benedict Arnold gave to Major John Andre when he infamously betrayed his country. The American chain that stretched across the Hudson denied British forces access to the river north of West Point throughout the duration of the war.

While the significance of the great chain at West Point is often recognized by historians, the circumstances behind the chain’s actual construction are less widely known. How could such a massive construction project be completed by a fledgling country in such a brief period during wartime?

Simply stated, the creation of the chain at West Point was another example of Divine Providence. It was an act of Providence that one of the largest and richest iron deposits in the world is located just a few miles from West Point.³⁸ The Sterling iron works near West Point were established a few decades before the Revolutionary War.³⁹ The New York Fortifications Committee insisted that “the chain should be immediately made of the very best iron the Country afforded,”⁴⁰ and the Sterling iron works were widely recognized as producing some of the highest grade iron in the world. The government’s February 1778 contract specifically required that the chain be made of “the best Sterling iron.”⁴¹ As a New Englander noted shortly before the war, “Of all the other countries of the world, Nature has best fitted the Northern [American] Colonies for the iron manufacture.”⁴² The rich, black magnetite ore at Sterling was 60 to 70 percent pure, which meant that it was “easily broken into chunks sufficiently pure to bypass customary and time-consuming 18th century washing and drying procedures,”⁴³ enabling the chain to be completed and emplaced in record time. Seven forges and ten welding fires were kept in operation around the clock. The famously cold winter of 1777–78 that severely tested soldiers at Valley Forge proved to be a blessing at the Sterling Forge, where it alleviated the intense heat of the forges,⁴⁴ and the great chain that stretched across the Hudson contributed significantly to the ultimate American victory.

Recognizing God’s Hand

How exciting it is to be able to recognize the hand of God in the events of history and to understand the truthfulness of his words. Contemporary statements acknowledging God’s hand in the outcome of the American Revolution are too numerous to include here; a few samples will suffice. Washington was especially aware of God’s role in his victories. In May 1778, after learning that Benjamin Franklin had successfully negotiated an alliance with France, General Washington, from his headquarters at Valley Forge, noted in a general order to his soldiers that it had “pleased the Almighty ruler of the Universe propitiously to defend the Cause of the United American-States.”⁴⁵ In an August 20, 1778, letter, Washington wrote, “The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked, that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations.”⁴⁶ On October 20, 1781, George Washington urged his

soldiers to attend a special public meeting to show “gratitude of Heart” for the “astonishing interpositions of Providence.”⁴⁷ Throughout the course of the war, Washington commented a dozen times regarding the “smiles of Heaven”⁴⁸ upon the American cause. He also frequently acknowledged “the support of the Supreme power” and “the patronage of Heaven.”⁴⁹ In his Farewell Orders to the Continental Army, dated November 2, 1783, Washington wrote, “A contemplation of the complete attainment (at a period earlier than could be expected) of the object for which we contended against so formidable a power, cannot but inspire us with astonishment and gratitude. The disadvantageous circumstances on our part, under which the war was undertaken, can never be forgotten. The singular interpositions of Providence in our feeble condition were such, as could scarcely escape the attention of the most unobserving.”⁵⁰

During the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Benjamin Franklin noted that, “In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor.”⁵¹ Numerous other participants expressed their belief regarding God’s direct hand in their astonishing and highly unlikely victory. Charles Pinckney, a signer of the Constitution from South Carolina, acknowledged, “Nothing less than the superintending hand of Providence . . . miraculously carried us through the war.”⁵² James Madison, often referred to as the father of the Constitution, declared, “It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it [the Constitution] a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.”⁵³ Church leaders across the nation frequently reminded their congregations of the Lord’s hand in their affairs. During the War of 1812, a Christian minister named John Dunlap insisted:

Without presumption we may assert, that the Lord appeared in behalf of America, during the arduous struggle with her parent state, Great Britain, before her independence. . . . America was destitute of armies, munitions of war and foreign connections: she had only God and the goodness of her cause to rely upon; but these were sufficient. . . . In the short space of seven years, the most powerful and warlike nation in the world, relinquished all authority over a number of her provinces, which she had treated as rebels, and acknowledged them

sovereign independent states. This was the work of the Lord, and glorious in our eyes.⁵⁴

History bears witness to the fulfillment of the vision of the American Revolution that Nephi received and recorded two thousand years earlier.

America a Safe Haven for the Restoration

Latter-day Saint history is full of confirming testimony regarding the Lord’s hand in the establishment of the United States. As recorded in prophecy and illuminated by prophetic commentary, we understand that the “destiny of America was divinely decreed.”⁵⁵ President Brigham Young explained that the leaders of the American Revolution “were inspired by the Almighty, to throw off the shackles of the mother government, with her established religion.”⁵⁶ Elder Perry taught that “the establishment of the United States was a part of God’s plan and was brought about by men who were inspired and guided by God.” He also claimed, “One must merely study history to know that to defeat the world’s most powerful country by a group of fledgling colonies was a result of a force greater than man.”⁵⁷

For what purpose, then, did the Lord consciously intervene in the affairs of men in order to secure an American victory in the Revolutionary War? Elder Mark E. Petersen boldly proclaimed that “there was only one reason why the United States came into being—only one reason. It is a different reason from anything that we know in any other nation. There is a United States only because God planned to restore the gospel in the last days and he had to have a free country in which to do it.”⁵⁸ The establishment of the United States was “a prologue to the restoration of the gospel and the church of Jesus Christ,”⁵⁹ and the Constitution was established to maintain “the rights and protection of all flesh” (D&C 101:77). As the Reverend John Bigelow pointed out in 1861, “God’s Providence comes in among [us], disturbing and arranging to suit its own ends.”⁶⁰

Summary

Following his Resurrection, the Savior declared that “it is wisdom in the Father that they [the Gentiles] should be established in this land, and set up as a free people by the power of the Father” (3 Nephi 21:4). The American Revolutionary War “redeemed the land by the shedding of blood” (D&C

101:80) and prepared the way for the Restoration of the gospel that began in upstate New York during the spring of 1820.

In the book of Ether, Moroni briefly summarized the conditions for retaining possession of this land, “Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12). Nephi emphasized those responsibilities when he wrote, “Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever” (2 Nephi 1:7).

God’s influence and intervention in the birth of the American Republic is not discussed today as frequently or as openly as it once was. We would do well to consider and privately answer three questions that Reverend Bigelow asked his listeners in July 1861, “To what other nation has God given such a history? To none. Then are we adequately conscious of, and adequately grateful for, the signal distinction which has been vouchsafed to us? Do we appreciate the peculiarities of our past history and our present condition?”⁶¹

The United States of America was established so that the Lord would have a suitable place to restore his gospel. In 1841, George B. Cheever, an American minister, pointed out that in “every respect our origin imposes upon us vast obligations.”⁶² It is our responsibility to live worthy of our political and religious heritage and to reverence and protect what we have received.

The more we study Nephi’s vision in the Book of Mormon and compare it with the history of the American Revolution, the more we will appreciate and recognize God’s hand in assisting the American colonists to bring about their ultimate and highly improbable victory. The birth of the United States of America was truly a miracle wrought by the power of God, just as Nephi saw in vision over twenty-three centuries earlier.

Notes

1. While additional prophetic commentary may yet be added in the future, Elders Ezra Taft Benson and Marion G. Romney identified “the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:15) with

the American colonies, “their mother Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:17) with the British, the “battle against them” (1 Nephi 13:17) with the American Revolutionary War, and being “delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:19) with the American colonies winning their freedom as a result of the Revolutionary War. See Ezra Taft Benson, “God’s Hand in Our Nation’s History,” in *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year: BYU Bicentennial Devotional and Fireside Addresses* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 299, and Marion G. Romney, “America’s Fate and Ultimate Destiny,” same volume, 322–23.

2. Mark E. Petersen, *The Great Prologue* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 23.
3. Robert Ellis Thompson, *The Hand of God in American History: A Study of National Politics* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1902), 53.
4. The United States Declaration of Independence.
5. Benson, “God’s Hand in Our Nation’s History,” 301.
6. L. Tom Perry, “The Church and the American Bicentennial,” in *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year: BYU Bicentennial Devotional and Fireside Addresses* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 63.
7. Rev. John F. Bigelow, *The Hand of God in American History: A Discourse Delivered in the Baptist Church, Reeseville, N. Y., July 7, 1861* (Burlington, VT: W. H. & C. A. Hoyt, 1861), 24.
8. Bigelow, *Hand of God in American History*, 23.
9. Quotations of John F. Kennedy, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Quotations+of+John+F+Kennedy.htm>.
10. Bigelow, *Hand of God in American History*, 24.
11. Bigelow, *Hand of God in American History*, 26.
12. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 89.
13. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 604.
14. Bigelow, *Hand of God in American History*, 21.
15. George Washington to John Augustine Washington, July 18, 1755, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/mgwquery.html>.
16. Jared Sparks, *The Life of George Washington* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1843), 66n.
17. Michael Stephenson, *Patriot Battles: How the War of Independence Was Fought* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 265–66.
18. Thompson, *Hand of God in American History*, 57.
19. Bigelow, *Hand of God in American History*, 21.
20. Paul Johnson, *George Washington: The Founding Father* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 78.
21. *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., “wrath.”
22. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 827.
23. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1977), 299.

24. General Henry B. Carrington, *Washington the Soldier* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 77.

25. Marshall and Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, 300.

26. George Washington to Landon Carter, March 25, 1776, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*.

27. Benjamin Tallmadge, *Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge* (New York: Thomas Holman, 1858), 10–11.

28. Tallmadge, *Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*, 11–12.

29. Statement of Samuel DeForest in John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 43.

30. John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 184.

31. Regarding the crossing of the Catawba River, Henry Watson wrote, "Thus was Morgan's division saved, as if by the interposition of Providence. This circumstance was generally regarded by the Americans as an evidence of the justice of their cause." Regarding the incident at the Yadkin, he said, "This was regarded by the Americans as a second interposition of Providence in their behalf." See Henry C. Watson, *History of the United States of America, from the Discovery to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1854), 520–23.

32. It should be noted that the Revolutionary War was not the first time that timely weather conditions had come to the military aid of American colonists. In 1746, for example, a fleet of forty French ships of war was sailing to attack New England. Upon learning of the impending danger, many inhabitants of Boston called for a season of fasting and prayer. It is reported that while pastors were praying in Boston, "a tempest ensued, in which the greater part of the French fleet was wrecked on the coast of Nova Scotia" ending the French attempt at conquest. See E. A. Park and S. H. Taylor, eds., *The Bibliotheca Sacra and American Biblical Repository* (Andover, MA: Warren F. Draper, 1855), 12:187.

33. George Washington to Israel Putnam, December 2, 1777, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*.

34. See MacGrane Coxe, "The Sterling Furnace and the West Point Chain: An Historical Address" (New York: privately printed, 1906), 3.

35. Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1860), 1:706n1.

36. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, 1:706.

37. A devise is a U-shaped metal fastener connected by a bolt that allows portions of a chain to rotate and move freely. For additional physical details regarding the great chain at West Point, see Lincoln Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson: The Fight for the River in the American Revolution* (New York: Citadel Press, 1994), 142.

38. Coxe, "The Sterling Furnace," 51n2.

39. "Sterling" is also spelled "Stirling" in some early accounts.

40. Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 141.

41. Coxe, "The Sterling Furnace," 19.

42. Quoted in Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 145.

43. Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 142. Sterling’s igneous magnetite ore (Fe_3O_4) was much richer than the standard sedimentary hematite (Fe_2O_3) found in many other iron deposits. See Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 151.

44. Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 152.

45. George Washington, May 5, 1778, General Orders, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*.

46. George Washington to Thomas Nelson Jr., August 20, 1778, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*.

47. George Washington, October 20, 1781, General Orders, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*.

48. See, for example, George Washington to Continental Congress, August 22, 1776, and George Washington to Israel Putnam, September 10, 1777, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*. To view all instances, visit <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/mgwquery.html> and enter “smiles of Providence” as the search text.

49. George Washington, December 23, 1783, Resignation Address, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*.

50. George Washington to Continental Army, November 2, 1783, Farewell Orders, in *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799*.

51. Henry D. Gilpin, ed., *The Papers of James Madison* (Mobile, AL: Allston Mygatt, 1842), 2:984–85.

52. Charles Pinckney, *The State Gazette of South Carolina*, May 5, 1788, in E. H. Scott, ed., *The Federalist and Other Contemporary Papers on the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1894), 710.

53. Benson, “God’s Hand in Our Nation’s History,” 304.

54. John Dunlap, *The Power, Justice and Mercy of Jehovah, Exercised upon his Enemies and his People: A Sermon Delivered on Board the Fleet, at Whitehall, December 12, 1814* (Albany: Websters and Skinners, 1815), 25–26.

55. Benson, “God’s Hand in Our Nation’s History,” 298.

56. John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 359.

57. L. Tom Perry, “The Church and the American Bicentennial,” in *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year: BYU Bicentennial Devotional and Fireside Addresses* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 61, 64.

58. Mark E. Petersen, “America—World Leader,” in *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year: BYU Bicentennial Devotional and Fireside Addresses* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 348.

59. Benson, “God’s Hand in Our Nation’s History,” 315.

60. Bigelow, *Hand of God in American History*, 11.

61. Bigelow, *Hand of God in American History*, 26.

62. George B. Cheever, *God’s Hand in America* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1841), 87.