

How Has God Intervened in History?

Roy A. Prete

The history of the earth is intimately associated with God's plan for the salvation of His children. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that God, "before [the earth] rolled into existence, . . . contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth. . . . [God] knew. . . the depth of iniquity that would be connected with the human family, their weakness and strength, . . . the situation of all nations and . . . their destiny, . . . and [He] made ample provision for [mankind's] redemption."¹ The redemption of mankind cannot be accomplished without divine intervention in human affairs. For the salvation of men and women on the earth, a Savior is required, and God must reveal His gospel to them and have priesthood holders under His authority to administer saving ordinances. The nature of God's plan for the salvation of His children helps us to understand under what circumstances and by what means God will intervene in human affairs and when He will not intervene.² Drawing in-

sights from the premortal existence, which sets the stage for man's earthly experience, this chapter will identify ways in which God has intervened in the course of history. It is thus an attempt to look at human history through a window of faith provided by scripture and latter-day revelation.

The Lord declared to Abraham, "I rule in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, in all wisdom and prudence, over all the intelligences" (Abraham 3:21; see also 2 Nephi 29:7). But to identify the hand of God in history, one needs to discover the means by which He shapes human destinies and interacts in the historical process. That is not to deny to man his innate capacities and agency, his power to act within the sphere in which he is placed, nor to deny to Satan the influence he has had in the affairs of mankind. Rather, it is to see how God, the giver of every good gift, has provided the context, has

peopled the earth, and by a variety of means has interacted to influence the affairs of mankind.

Most professional historians, imbued with the prevailing secularism and humanistic approach of their discipline, see little, if any, of the hand of God in the unfolding of historical events.³ As the writing of history involves people in the present reflecting on the past, it is apparent that historians will see only that which they have “eyes to see,” and hear only what they have “ears to hear” (see Mark 8:18). The task is thus to consider, with an eye of faith, by what means God rules on the earth in ways that are real but not visible or apparent to the unbelieving. This essay will thus attempt to appraise the means by which God has influenced human history, with particular reference to the modern period.⁴

GOD’S ETERNAL PLAN

If our journey from premortal existence through earth life to eternal rewards were a three-act play, then earth life would be the second act.⁵ Secular historians, like someone coming into the theater in the second act, have a great deal of difficulty discerning the meaning of the total drama for want of knowledge of act I, in which the setting was defined, the characters introduced, and the plot foreshadowed. Fortunately, in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we have the benefit of modern revelation to help us understand some of what took place in act I, in our pre-earthly existence, and how it may affect our lives here.

In the eternal worlds, God the Father devised a plan for the eternal progression of His spirit children. That plan entailed their leaving His presence for a time so that they could prove in mortality their true allegiance to the things of righteousness. “And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said . . . we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; and they who keep their

first estate shall be added upon . . . and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads forever and ever” (Abraham 3:24–26). The Father chose Jesus Christ as Savior and Redeemer (see Abraham 3:27–28, 4:1–2).

But Lucifer, “a son of the morning,” rebelled against the plan of God and led a “third part of the hosts of heaven” with him (D&C 76:25–27; 29:36). The issue was one of agency, a divine gift of God the Father to all His children, which Satan sought to destroy. Satan also rebelled out of pride, wanting to usurp the power of God and to take the honor to himself. As God told Moses:

That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.

But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down.

And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice. (Moses 4:1–4)

Life on this earth is thus a continuation of life in the premortal realm. The War in Heaven was not settled but just moved to a new theater on this earth, and it rages with unabated fury and will continue to do so until Satan is bound at Christ’s Second Coming (see D&C 88: 110). The conflict between the forces of good and evil, so

evident in our time, has been a fundamental element in the human experience since Adam and Eve were placed on the earth. Earth life merely provides a new venue and somewhat different conditions for the pursuit of the conflict.

Following Satan's rebellion, he and his followers were cast out of heaven and thrust down to the earth, where they would be free to tempt and try those who had followed the plan of God in their pre-earthly existence (see Revelation 12:7-9; see also D&C 76:25-29). In their second estate on earth, the spirit children of Heavenly Father would acquire physical bodies like His with the goal of forming eternal families. And, being shut out from the presence of their Father in Heaven and having temporarily forgotten their preearth life, they would have to live by faith and would learn by their own experience to choose between good and evil. Their growth and development would depend on the choices they made. Satan's enticements were part of God's plan, for, as Lehi pointed out, there must be "an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11-12).

For men and women to have meaningful growth in this life, they must be able to choose between good and evil, and as "agents unto themselves" become accountable for their own acts (see D&C 29:39; Moses 6:55-56).⁶ The Fall of Adam gave Heavenly Father's children knowledge of good and evil in this world (see Moses 3:15-17; 4:3-29), and the Atonement of Christ, freeing them from the control of Satan, has given them freedom to choose between good and evil. They are thus free "to act for themselves, and not to be acted upon" (see 2 Nephi 2:26-27). To become God's followers, we must hearken to His voice (see Moses 1:4) and become spiritually renewed in order to throw off the "natural man" (Mosiah 3:19). "Through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel" (Articles of Faith 1:3). As we are taught the truth and gain knowledge through our own experience, we

are able to progress and ultimately become like God (see D&C 130:18-19; 121:41-46; 132:19-24).

But Satan and his followers have great influence. Satan's main purposes on earth are to destroy the agency of man, "to make captive the souls of men" by enslaving them to his will, and to possess their bodies, if he can.⁷ Satan is an enemy to God and stands in opposition to everything that is good (see Moroni 7:17). His message to the children of Adam who were being taught the gospel was, "Believe it not," and by rejecting the word of God, they became "carnal, sensual, and devilish" (Moses 5:12-13). "He is the master of deceit, adulteration, and counterfeit. There is hardly a human appetite that he has not prostituted to his own evil designs; virtue he betrays into vice; and things invented and designed as benefactors to mankind he diverts to his own ends."⁸ He encourages envy, strife, hate, war, and every kind of abuse.⁹ He is the author of false political philosophies and attempts to enslave man through oppressive regimes that deny basic human rights and freedoms.¹⁰

But men and women are free to choose and have within them the capacity to do many good works of their own free will and choice (see D&C 58:26-28). As spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Father, part of their divine heritage is to retain "something of His divinity" which impels them toward self-improvement.¹¹ All of God's children of whatever race or creed are endowed with the Light of Christ, which enlightens their eyes and quickens their understandings, that they "may know good from evil" (D&C 88:11, Moroni 7:16). God has thus provided that all men and women have a conscience and that they have divine promptings to do good (see Moroni 7:13, 16).

The rules of the conflict, moreover, are carefully defined. Satan is not allowed to tempt those without knowledge, such as little children, but only has the right to tempt people as they become accountable (see D&C 29:47). Those who have a lesser law have a lesser accountability, for "where there is no law given . . . there is no con-

demnation" (2 Nephi 9:25), so that divine mercy can intercede on their behalf. And Satan can have influence over our minds only to the extent that we give it to him.¹² He cannot compel us to do evil.

The fact that man's life on earth is a continuation of the preearthly existence and, as such, is concerned with many of the same issues, has major implications for the history of mankind. The history of the world is thus to a large extent that of the conflict between good and evil, in which man, placed in an environment of God's (and his) selection (see Acts 17:24–26, Isaiah 6:8–9), responds to and interacts with the influences about him, choosing between the light and intelligence of God, the ways of men, and the evil enticements of Satan (see D&C 46:7). As people respond to each influence in varying amounts, so, individually and collectively, they are a mix of good and evil in varying proportions.

Related issues have also been clearly defined by the premortal experience. In every human society, the question of the nature of societal control and the degree of human freedom has been an issue. Likewise, societies have been affected and often their destinies determined by the degree of knowledge and skill they have possessed and the use that they have made of them. God would that His children should be free and enlightened, while Satan strives to enslave them both individually and collectively and to take away light and truth. The stage was thus set in the pre-earthly existence for the great drama of human experience. The influences of evil were arrayed before mortal man set foot on the earth, and the conflict between good and evil, in the divinely ordained scheme of things, remains at the center of the human experience. In such a world, divine influence is necessary for the triumph of good over evil.

In the premortal existence, all who followed the God's plan were not "equally valiant, there being every degree of devotion to Christ and the Father among them" (Bible Dictionary, "War in Heaven"). There were, as Elder Harold B.

Lee noted, "many spirits with varying degrees of faithfulness."¹³ In the struggle against Satan, Heavenly Father has marshaled His forces and organized them for His purposes. The noble and great were chosen to be rulers in His kingdom and were taught their first lessons in the world of spirits preparatory to their earthly labors for the salvation of men (see D&C 138:55–56). All the Lord's prophets and all those who were to hold His priesthood were foreordained to their future callings (see Alma 13:3).¹⁴ These were to be the captains in His army to help Him proclaim the gospel.

The house of Israel was appointed a foreordained mission in the work of salvation (see Deuteronomy 7:6; Romans 11:2), and Jesus Christ would be born through that lineage (see Genesis 49:10). A Savior would thus be provided. Whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ has been on the earth, the message has been the same: to have faith in Jesus Christ, to repent, to be baptized for the remission of sins, to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and to endure in righteous living to the end (see Moses 6:51–52, 64–66; 2 Nephi 31:10–16; 3 Nephi 11:31–36; Acts 2:37–39; Articles of Faith 1:4). The followers of Christ must overcome by faith (see D&C 76:53). The ultimate victory, the triumph of good over evil, will be wrought through the redeeming power of Christ and the righteousness of Heavenly Father's children.

God's plan for the salvation of His children involved the scattering and the gathering of the house of Israel, according to their faithfulness in keeping their covenants with Him (see Deuteronomy 28–30). It was the best plan God could devise, given the wayward nature of His children. The dispersion of the house of Israel among all the inhabitants of the earth and its gathering in the last days is an integral part of God's plan for the redemption of mankind (see Jacob 5).

Ultimately Christ will triumph and Satan will be bound, while all mankind, except the sons of perdition, will receive a degree of glory in

the kingdom of God according to their valiance in the cause of righteousness (see D&C 76:30–119). All people everywhere will be judged by Christ “according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts” (D&C 137:9), in relationship to the degree of truth which they possessed. And if they have not had access to the gospel and its ordinances in this life, they will have the privilege of learning about the gospel in the spirit world and through vicarious ordinances become heirs of salvation (see D&C 138:31–35, 58–59). The purposes of God for the salvation of His children will thus prevail (see Mormon 8:32), for as God has declared, “I rule in the Heaven above and in the earth beneath” (2 Nephi 29:7).

THE GUIDING HAND OF GOD IN HISTORY

One may thus inquire, in this world, away from the presence of God, in which we must live by faith, what means does God use to guide the destinies of man? Or, otherwise stated, looking at it retrospectively, how has God interacted in the historical process? Of course, God’s role in recent history cannot be related without reference to the events which have transpired beforehand. To get a correct view of times past, moreover, one must not only rely on the secular record but attempt to place it within the context of the divine plan. This may not always be easy, for according to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “From the beginning to now, the real history of the world has either been lost or so twisted and perverted that our present knowledge falls far short of the real truth about past events. When the real history of the world is written—as it will be by the spirit of inspiration—it will show God’s dealings with men, the place the gospel has played in the rise and fall of nations, and how eras of darkness and degeneracy have resulted from apostasy from the way of the Lord.”¹⁵ The day of the inspired writing of the history of the earth is yet to come. With an eye open to the record of the scriptures and the statements of modern apostles and prophets, one

may nonetheless discern, as a tentative list, at least sixteen ways in which God has intervened or does intervene in the affairs of men.

Creation of the earth. This earth is of divine origin and was created as a habitation for man in accordance with the premortal plan (see Moses 1:27–32). As God the Father informed Moses, “Worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:33). God the Father is thus the grand architect, and Jesus Christ is the organizer and creator of the earth (see John 1:1–14), assisted by others of Heavenly Father’s noble spirits (see Abraham 3:24). As Creator, He has placed the elements in their respective organization and established the natural laws which govern them (see D&C 88:7–13). In His original planning and in the governance of the universe, He has prepared the dwelling place of “all nations of men” and “determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:24–26). God controls the natural environment by the established laws and seemingly intervenes only occasionally in direct control of the elements (see 3 Nephi 9:3–12).

The lay of the land, its fertility, its relationship to the sea, the weather, the climate, the richness of the soil on the earth and the minerals in the earth, the plants and animals—in short, the geographical, geological and environmental framework—are given to man through the munificence of God as His gift to His creatures. The whole range of geopolitical and environmental factors that secular historians see as basic factors in the affairs of men are thus the heritage of the Lord that men may govern to one degree or another, according as God gives them knowledge.

Revelation. A second way in which God has worked directly among the children of men since the time of Adam has been to reveal Himself and the laws and ordinances of His gospel to them in succeeding dispensations. Adam and Eve had a personal knowledge of God the Father

and Jesus Christ, having been in their presence prior to the Fall.¹⁶ To that knowledge was added by an angel of the Lord a knowledge of the Atonement (see Moses 5:6–8). In subsequent revelations, Adam received the full plan of salvation with all the laws and ordinances, which he administered by the priesthood of God.¹⁷ In every age of the earth, the Lord has raised up men of a “strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness,” given them special knowledge by the ministering of angels, by His own voice, and by other means, to make known the coming of Christ so that faith in Him might increase in the earth (see Moroni 7:22–25, 30–31). Faith in Christ is essential for salvation, for without faith in Him none can profit from His Atonement (see Hebrews 11:6).

The Holy Ghost is the normal channel through which revelation comes from God. Many revelations come as answers to prayer. As Nephi urged, if we pray, the Holy Ghost will reveal to us “all things” which we should do (see 2 Nephi 32:2–3). For those who have been baptized and are worthy, the Holy Ghost becomes their constant companion, guiding them to all truth and bearing witness of the Father and the Son. As the principal channel of communication between God and man, the Holy Ghost may also, as occasion requires, inspire those who have not received gospel ordinances (see John 16:13; 3 Nephi 11:31). God gives to the righteous, or those who seek to be, gifts by the Spirit for the edification and blessing of one another (see D&C 46:9).

When men have had faith and have been willing to submit themselves to God’s will, God has been able to establish His kingdom among them, under His priesthood, to lead them by the light of revelation and to manifest His power for their good. The priesthood constitutes the government of God and is the channel through which He reveals His truths, guides His people, and administers gospel ordinances.¹⁸ Those who hold priesthood keys administer the affairs of His church and kingdom and receive revelation for their stewardships. His authorized servants

proclaim the gospel message. The priesthood and its keys are the principal means through which the Lord carries out His work of salvation on the earth.

But the manifestation of divine power depends on the faith of the people. God works directly among the children of men according to their faith (see Moroni 10:7). His servants work by the gifts and power of God (see Moroni 10:25), and by the spirit of revelation many mighty works are wrought (see D&C 8:2–3). It was by faith that Enoch prepared his city to be taken up and that Moses, by the power of God, delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and performed many miracles among them. Through faith Abraham obtained promises that God would remember his seed forever (see Hebrews 11; Ether 12:12–22). As the great chapters on faith, Hebrews 11 and Ether 12, make clear, it is by faith that all the mighty works of God have been wrought among the people. Faith is indeed that great principle of power by which the worlds were created (see Hebrews 11:3). Faith is the key, for without faith God can manifest no miracles among the people (see Matthew 13:54–58; Mark 6:1–5).

Covenants and covenant peoples. A third means by which God accomplishes His purposes is through covenants and covenant peoples. As people exercise faith in God, He enters into covenant relationships with them and makes promises to them according to their observance of the terms of the covenant. The gospel in its fullness is the new and everlasting covenant (see D&C 66:2; 131:1–3), and the priesthood of God which administers it is received by covenant (see D&C 84:40).

God has a special work to do through covenant peoples. The covenants which God has made with those of great faith, such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Nephi, and others, regarding their posterity have a great bearing on the unfolding of God’s plan on earth. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon was brought about by divine intervention “according

to their faith in their prayers” of the ancient Nephite prophets and disciples of Christ (Mormon 8:23–26, D&C 10:47). As “father of the faithful,” Abraham received covenant blessings from the Lord, the unfolding of which have had a major impact on modern history. The scattering and gathering of the house of Israel, so vital to the accomplishment of the Lord’s latter-day work, is according to God’s covenants with their righteous fathers.¹⁹

The relationship between the principle of faith and covenants is beautifully intertwined in the new song regarding the future redemption of Zion:

The Lord hath brought again Zion;
The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel,
According to the election of grace,
Which was brought to pass by the faith
And covenant of their fathers (D&C 84:99)

Alternate blessings and cursings come as people, both individually and as groups, are obedient to their covenants with God and keep His commandments, or fail to do so (see Deuteronomy 11:26–28; 27–30).

Scriptures. A fourth way in which God accomplishes His work is in the preservation of sacred texts of scripture. Since the time of Adam, God has provided that the knowledge of the gospel and sacred experiences should be written to preserve them for subsequent generations. Knowledge of reading and writing was taught by inspiration to the children of Adam (see Moses 6:5–6). Scriptures have been very powerful in preserving the knowledge of God, and His dealings with His children. The Bible—an ancient text of history, prophecy, laws, covenants, and commandments preserved by the Jewish people—has had a overwhelming impact. The Old Testament provides the scriptural foundation of three major religious traditions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—which together comprise 51 percent of the world’s population.

The Bible, the Old and New Testament combined, forms the basis of the Christian world’s belief in Christ and the source of its knowledge of His doctrine. The Old Testament foretells the coming of Christ, and the New Testament relates His ministry and the early days of the Christian church. Who can calculate the total effect of the Bible? It is nothing less than one of the major foundations of Western society and has been the foundation of moral principles and the laws of society for untold millions.

God in His infinite wisdom has also brought forth the Book of Mormon, an abridged text of the religious and spiritual history of the ancient inhabitants of America, who are a part of the house of Joseph. As its subtitle indicates, the Book of Mormon is *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, fulfilling the divine law of witnesses that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (see 2 Corinthians 13:1; Ether 5:3–4; D&C 6:28; see also 2 Nephi 29:7–14). The Book of Mormon teaches the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the ordinances of salvation in greater clarity than the Bible. Its purpose is “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations” (title page). Like the Bible, it reiterates most forcefully the promises made to the house of Israel regarding their gathering in the last days. The destiny of the Book of Mormon is to cover the earth as a flood, extending the gospel message to all people, in order to build up Zion and usher in Christ’s millennial reign (see Moses 7:62).

In addition, there are promised scriptures yet to come forth, particularly those of the ten tribes. Presumably they will bring this “rich treasure” with them when they come down from the north countries. The gathering of their scriptures will attend the gathering together of the house of Israel (see 2 Nephi 29:12–13; D&C 133:26–33). The witness of several nations will thus be brought together to show that God is God, that He “rule[s] in the heavens above and in

the earth beneath” and that He has remembered His ancient covenant people (2 Nephi 29:7).

In our time, several ancient texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Library, and others,²⁰ though not possessing the authority of canonized scripture, have confirmed and shed light on ancient scriptural texts. At a future date when the earth is cleansed from its great wickedness, the revelation of the brother of Jared in the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon, which contains a revelation of all things from the beginning of the world, shall be manifest (see Ether 4:4–7).

Light of Christ. A fifth major way in which God has influenced mankind is through the Light of Christ, which “giveth light to every man that cometh into the world” and thus enlightens the intelligence of every living person (D&C 84:45–46). A prime manifestation of it is in the conscience of the individual, which is universal among all cultures and peoples. The Light of Christ pervades all the creations of God and provides the laws which govern the world (see D&C 88:7–13). In conjunction with the Holy Ghost, the Light of Christ is the major source of man’s enlightenment.

Though people cannot see God with their natural eyes and may not be aware of the source of their enlightenment, they have the immediate influence of the Light of Christ to guide their lives. And all those who act in the best light and knowledge they have will ultimately be taught gospel covenants and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (see D&C 84:46–48). The Light of Christ may thus act on their hearts and minds without their awareness of it, developing their sense of equity, justice, and fair play. Feelings of compassion and acts of generosity and kindness may be prompted by the Light of Christ that is within. Its influence is often felt as flashes of intelligence or promptings for good.²¹ To gauge the influence of the Light of Christ in the works of man is to consider every principle of law, organization, learning, social organization, and intellectual thought

that has ever graced the human mind and to consider all the cultural arts, scientific knowledge, and technology that have contributed to human betterment.

“All that he seeth fit.” A sixth means by which God works among the children of men is in revealing moral and ethical truths to those who lack the fulness of the gospel. This concerns those myriads of people who have not had the opportunity to hear the fulness of the gospel in their time. A 1978 letter of the First Presidency puts several aspects of this issue in perspective, showing that God has also been working with them and has provided for their salvation.

The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.

The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel.

Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come.

We also declare that the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored to his Church in our day, provides the only way to a mortal life of happiness and a fulness of joy forever. For those who have not received this gospel, the opportunity will come to them in the life hereafter if not in this life.²²

God has thus used the philosophical and religious ideas of people for His wise purposes, even without their having the fulness of the gospel. In His wisdom He grants to every nation teachers “to teach his word, . . . all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8), according

to their state of development and their needs. The divinely ordained principle of preserving sacred texts is universal in its application and goes well beyond the revelation of scripture to various branches of the house of Israel. Nephi gave an appreciation of this wider vista in declaring that the Lord reveals His word to “all the nations of the earth” and that “they shall write the words which I shall speak to them: for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world” (2 Nephi 29:7, 11).²³

Each people receives whatever degree of light and intelligence God sees in His wisdom is best adapted to their growth and development, one principle of truth laying the foundation for the acquisition of further knowledge later until all, whether in this life or the next, will have full access to the gospel of Jesus Christ and its saving ordinances. The test of earth life can thus apply equally to all, as each is accountable only for the degree of knowledge he or she possesses, or may acquire. All people are in a state of grace if they live according to the best light they have.²⁴ They may receive the fulness of the gospel in the spirit world and receive the ordinances of exaltation vicariously (see D&C 138:57–59). So none are lost for want of access to knowledge in this life.

Secular knowledge. A seventh instance of divine intervention in human affairs may be found in the preservation and revelation of secular knowledge to people and societies who lack the fulness of the gospel. Prophets and apostles have affirmed that when peoples have fallen away from the true doctrine of the gospel, they have fallen into “eras of darkness and degeneracy,” and their secular knowledge has declined as well.²⁵ Writing is a key to maintaining revealed truth as well as secular knowledge (see 1 Nephi 3:19–20; 4:13–18). Those who have had no writing and no records, such as the Mulekites, have fallen into a dire state of spiritual darkness (see Omni 15–17). Both the Lamanites and the Nephites, following their wilful rejection of faith in Christ in the post-Christian era, descended to

unprecedented levels of depravity, becoming a people “without civilization” (Moroni 9:9). It is a sad commentary on human nature that the primitive peoples of the earth are descended from those who were once more advanced.

Many of the truths revealed in the beginning, nonetheless, have been handed down in fragmentary form from generation to generation in the tradition of the people, in their institutions, in their religious practices, in their folklore and legends, and in their poetry, literature, and legal texts.²⁶ Existing truths have been preserved and new truths in many areas have been revealed according to the wisdom and prudence of God. In the words of Joseph F. Smith, “If we find truth in broken fragments through the ages, it may be set down as an incontrovertible fact that it originated at the fountain, and was given to philosophers, inventors, patriots, reformers, and prophets by the inspiration of God.”²⁷

The preservation and accumulation of secular and technical learning through a succession of civilizations is consistent with God’s plan for the betterment of His children. The alphabet, for example, which was developed by the thirteenth century BC on the eastern rim of the Mediterranean as a shorthand form of hieroglyphic writing for commerce, has been a boon to the Western world.²⁸ The truths of science, mathematics, and medicine of the ancient Greeks after their decline were preserved by the Islamic world and introduced into western Europe by them. The knowledge of the compass, gunpowder, and printing came into medieval Europe from the Chinese.²⁹ Much of the philosophical learning of the Greeks and the Romans, preserved by the Byzantines, was revived from ancient texts in the Renaissance.³⁰ The historical record would support the view that a significant way in which God accomplishes His work is in the preservation of secular knowledge.

All truth is free to act independently in the sphere in which it is placed (see D&C 93:30) and will “greatly enlarge the soul” (D&C 121:42).

Truth begets truth, in that the possession of one truth often invites discovery of another. Such was the process of inquiry in the early modern period in Europe with the cultural awakening of the Renaissance leading to the Reformation and the scientific revolution. Joseph Smith's investigations into religious truths, prior to the Restoration, came from questions raised by a partial knowledge of the gospel gleaned from reading the Bible and from the preaching of the ministers of his day.

The cross-fertilization of ideas between different societies and civilizations may also accomplish divine purposes. The ideas of each people, such as the idea of liberty and constitutional government enshrined in the American Constitution, are the heritage of all the world (see D&C 98:5). The ideas of liberty and freedom, which have encircled the world in modern times, are of divine origin and allow for the diffusion of the gospel. With freedom also comes the greater influence of evil, so that those who have greater freedom also have a greater responsibility to choose good over evil (see D&C 101:77–80). Other forces of political, social, and economic nature, which secular historians have so emphasized, have undoubtedly been used by God in the accomplishment of His purposes.

God of the nations. An eighth means by which God has influenced human development is in His guidance of the destiny of nations. The current state of knowledge of past events does not allow more than a tentative appraisal of the divine interaction with ancient civilizations. We learn from modern revelation, however, that the time will come when the "secret acts of men . . . and the mighty works of God" in each of the seven thousand years of the family of Adam upon the earth will be revealed (D&C 88:108–09). The Father of the human family has equal regard for all His children (see 2 Nephi 27:33). As King of Kings and Lord of Lords, God has exercised his influence among people of all civilizations. In the words of Elder Henry B. Eyring, God, "not

just men, has the ultimate controls of nations."³¹ No society can long exist without at least some divine influence, for as Nephi attested, "when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction" (2 Nephi 26:11; see also Mormon 5:16–18).

While it is not possible to make close links between the patriarchal order of government revealed to Adam and ancient civilizations, except in the case of the Egyptians, whose state was founded by a descendant of Ham and patterned after the patriarchal order (see Abraham 1:21–15), it is clear that all of the most stable ancient civilizations, including the Sumerians, the Egyptians, and the Chinese, had the concept of rulers being the stewards of the gods, endowed with power from them and also with an element of accountability to them for their acts.³²

God is sovereign over all nations. Before His power and dominion, "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance" (Isaiah 40:15). The trials of Nebuchadnezzar came upon him until he learned that "the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men and giveth it to whomever he will," and as Daniel explained giveth it to "the basest of men" (Daniel 4:17, see also 4:25, 32), seemingly for the accomplishment of His purposes. In the words of Solomon, "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth" (Proverbs 8:15–16). But Solomon cautioned, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (Proverbs 29:2).

In the absence of further revelation, the precise influence of God in the rise and fall of civilizations remains hazy, although in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of succeeding civilizations, which President Kimball termed a "revelation concerning the history of the world,"³³ we are given a glimmer not only of the foreknowledge of God, but of the divine influence in the rise and fall of the nations (see Daniel 2:26–45). In

the words of Nephi, God “raiseth up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked” (1 Nephi 17:37). Elder Ezra Taft Benson elaborated on this theme in language that cannot but cause sober reflection to those living in a generation where evil is rampant:

History has shown that when individuals and nations have kept the commandments of God they have been happy, prosperous, and most blessed. When they have departed from those commandments, pride, strife, contention, and warfare have resulted. There have been times in the history of mankind when nations have brought down upon them the judgments of God, and this because they deliberately chose a course contrary to God’s purposes and their own happiness. Famine, disease, and war—that terrifying triad of human tragedy—have led many great civilizations to ruin and oblivion.³⁴

Speaking as Church President in general conference in 1989, President Benson again emphasized the pride of the nations, which he defined as their enmity toward things of righteousness, as a major cause of their downfall.³⁵ God rules among the armies of men (see D&C 60:4) and is the Lord of Hosts. “Vengeance is mine, . . . saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). While He is patient and longsuffering, His judgments when they come are “true and righteous” (Psalm 19:9).

Teacher of righteousness. While at times God may manifest His power in mighty works for the salvation of His children or as arbiter of the nations, for the most part He works quietly among the children of men as a teacher of righteousness. He distills truth upon their souls, using the means He deems best adapted to the circumstances—whether in speaking by the mouth of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, by the ministration of angels, through prophets and His Church, through His missionaries, by the promptings of the Holy Ghost or the Light of Christ; or by the accumulated wisdom of sages, the experience of parents, the literature of a soci-

ety, or a people’s own (sometimes bitter) experience.

When Jesus Christ was upon the earth, He spent most of His mortal ministry teaching people gospel principles. He was the master teacher, the greatest of all time, but note His explanation, “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28). The divine role as teacher of righteousness is best understood when one considers that the acquisition of knowledge is a key to progress, a vital part of the pathway to exaltation, which Heavenly Father desires for all His children. Joseph Smith taught that a man can progress only so fast as he gains knowledge, and “if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (D&C 130:18–19).

Part of the great test of life is what we will do with the knowledge we receive. Before the worlds were created, earth life was conceived as a place where the spirit children of Heavenly Father, out of His presence, could exercise their agency and thus learn by their own experience to know the good from the evil. The troubled state of world history which has resulted from people choosing evil over good should not be attributed to God’s lack of dominion or lack of concern but rather to the nature of the plan and to human choice. People have brought many of the calamities of the world upon themselves through violating correct principles.

Joseph Smith understood this grand principle of divine governance. “The powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness,” he wrote (D&C 121:36). When asked how he governed this “vast people,” he said, “I teach the people correct principles, and they govern themselves.”³⁶ Much evil in the world has flowed from those who have governed according to flawed, oppressive, or corrupt principles, often imposing their selfish interests by compulsion and the sword. When

Christ will come to reign on the earth, He will establish a millennium of peace and righteousness on the basis of correct principles and the establishment of just laws.³⁷

Whom He sends. A tenth means by which God has interacted in the affairs of men is in the selection of those whom He chooses to send to the earth in certain times and circumstances. Heavenly Father knows intimately the nature and tendency of each of His spirit children, and, by His foreknowledge, the conditions under which men will live in each epoch. The noble and great ones He sends for His own purposes at appropriate times (see Abraham 3:22–26). The Lord Jesus Christ, sent to earth in the meridian of time, has accomplished the greatest work of all in the example He set, in the truth He taught, in the Church He organized, and, above all, in the Atonement He wrought for the salvation of mankind and in His resurrection from the dead, which brought the victory over the grave for all mankind.

But who could doubt the influence for good of the many prophets whom God has raised up in each dispensation to accomplish His purposes; or that of a Peter or a Paul or others of His Apostles; or that of foreordained heirs to the priesthood in every age of the world, hid from the world by its wickedness? (see D&C 86:8–11). And what of Joseph Smith, the Lord’s prophet, whose family God prepared for generations,³⁸ and whom God raised up to usher in the glorious age of the last dispensation? We learn by modern revelation that all of the Lord’s prophets and all those who were to hold His priesthood were foreordained to their future callings (see Alma 13:3).³⁹ And, as modern prophets and apostles have affirmed, in this great last day of the preparation for the coming of the Son of God in which we live, many of the noble and great ones have been held back to come forth at the appropriate time to accomplish the work of God.⁴⁰

But what of all the philosophers and thinkers, the kings, queens, politicians, statesmen, and talented men and woman of every so-

ciety who have guided, directed, and managed the affairs of men? What of the poets, musicians, and painters? What of the scientists and inventors? What of Columbus, who was led by the Spirit of God to America? (see 1 Nephi 13:12). What of the religious reformers and the Founding Fathers of America, whom we know God raised up for their special tasks? (see D&C 101:80). Has God not sent each person to earth in a time and place that will benefit that person the most and in which his or her gifts and talents will contribute the most to the welfare and progress of mankind? The benefactors of mankind as well as the spiritual leaders appear to have had a preappointed mission, for as President Brigham Young observed, “From the spirit and tenor [of] the ancient Scriptures and revelations which we have received, it is plainly set forth that there are men pre-appointed to perform certain works in their lifetime, and bring to pass certain ends and purposes in the economy of heaven.”⁴¹

God works through human agents. The plan of salvation is a shared enterprise involving God and His children. “God . . . watches over us,” wrote President Spencer W. Kimball. “But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs.”⁴² The concept of a partnership between God and man for the accomplishment of divine purposes applies in both spiritual and secular realms.

Those who have had a sense of mission and accomplished great tasks have not necessarily had the full light of the gospel. Abraham Lincoln, who aspired to be a “most humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty” in the preservation of freedom in the United States,⁴³ was gravely concerned with the danger of a major defeat on northern soil in 1862 during the Civil War, and he sought the Lord in prayer. Making a solemn pledge before God that he would free the slaves if Lee were driven back, he issued the famous Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, following the Union victory at Fredericksburg.⁴⁴ Did the Lord raise up a Churchill to counter a Hitler? Winston S. Churchill was appointed British

prime minister on May 10, 1940, the same day Adolf Hitler unleashed the might of the German Army and Air Force in the invasion of Holland and Belgium. "I was conscious of a profound sense of relief," wrote Churchill. "I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour."⁴⁵ In the great plan of God, whom He "puts into the game" at any given moment may be decisive. God, the most intelligent being of the universe (see Abraham 3:18–19), is not only the great scientist but also the great manager and coach.

Migration of peoples. An eleventh means used by the Lord to accomplish His purposes is the migrations of peoples. To understand this, we must understand the covenants made to Abraham regarding his seed: that they would be holders of the priesthood and bearers of the gospel and that through them all the nations of the earth would be blessed (see Abraham 2:9–11). The children of Israel, through whom those promises continued, were warned that if they did not keep the commandments and statutes of God, they would be scattered among every nation, but they were promised that they would be gathered in, both to the knowledge of the gospel and to their lands of inheritance, in the last days (see Deuteronomy 28–30). Elder Bruce R. McConkie has stated: "If a complete history of the house of Israel were written, it would be the history of histories, the key of the world's history for the past twenty centuries' and more, for Israel has been scattered among all the nations of the earth and has acted as a leavening and enlightening influence wherever her scattered remnants have found lodgement (*Articles of Faith*, 314–27)."⁴⁶

The scattering of the house of Israel has taken place by a variety of means. The Jews mingled with neighboring people to some degree, and numerous small groups moved to near and far. As a people, the Jews were twice scattered, first by the Babylonians in about 585 BC, and then, the remnant having been reestablished in Palestine, again by the Romans with the sacking

of Jerusalem in AD 70. Expelled from parts of western Europe in the late Middle Ages, many found refuge in Poland, from which significant numbers migrated to the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century in response to Russian persecution.⁴⁷

Some parts of the house of Israel God has led away under His direct influence, including Lehi and his family (see 1 Nephi 1–18); Mulek, the son of Zedekiah, and his group, forebears of the Mulekites (see Omni 13–19; Helaman 6:10, 8:21; Mosiah 25:2–4, 13); and other groups of peoples of the house of Israel (see Jacob 5:8–25). The journey in the wilderness, as with the children of Israel from Egypt to the promised land, has often been accompanied by a manifestation of divine power and has been part of the purification process of the people incident to their founding a new colony.

The ten tribes, according to Esdra, were led away by the Lord into the north countries after their captivity by the Assyrians, passing the headwaters of the Euphrates into the Asian continent, "that they might there keep their statutes, which they never kept in their own land."⁴⁸ The wandering tribes of Europe, seemingly broken fragments of these people or a sprinkling of them, mostly of the house of Ephraim and associated tribes, have wandered into western Europe. Their descendants in turn have been led to America, many in search of religious freedom. Their role in laying the foundation of freedom in America and in providing new converts in England for the restored Church are important contributions that need to be acknowledged. The gathering of the house of Israel in our time has been largely of the house of Joseph, mostly of Ephraim and of Manasseh, and the descendants of Father Lehi. The promise to Ephraim is that his descendants and their associates would be the priesthood administrators of the gospel and carry the gospel message to the other tribes in the last days (see D&C 133:30–34).⁴⁹

Lands of freedom. A twelfth way in which God has interacted in the destinies of mankind is in the raising up of lands of freedom. For people to be able to accept or reject gospel principles—and to observe God’s laws, statutes, and judgments—they must have the right of choice. Joshua asked ancient Israel to choose whom they would serve (see Joshua 24:15–21) and in order to facilitate their choices, there followed four hundred years of relative freedom under the rule of the judges.⁵⁰ Modern prophets and apostles have indicated that the Lord has had a hand in the development of the principles of constitutional government, liberty, and freedom in Great Britain, from which many of the ideas and practices of democratic government in the world have derived.⁵¹

God has raised up other lands of liberty, particularly America, which was a land of liberty to both the Jaredites and the Nephites. The promises concerning the land are that it will be a land of liberty so long as the people serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ. When they become wicked they will be swept off (see Ether 2:10–12). Nephi foresaw the establishment of a land of liberty on this continent in the latter days. He saw that Columbus would be led out of the Old World by the Spirit of God to discover it and that the land would be redeemed from the mother gentiles by the shedding of blood (see 1 Nephi 13:10–19). Joseph Smith revealed that God guided the destinies of the land in establishing the Constitution and a free system of government (see D&C 101:77–80). All of that was preparatory to the Restoration of the gospel. As the gospel goes to all the world, barriers and limits on freedom must likewise crumble so that the gospel can be preached.

Families: fathers and mothers. A thirteenth way in which God has influenced the destinies of nations has been through good fathers, mothers, and family life.⁵² Nephi began his prophetic writings with the words, “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,” and went on to explain that

as a result he had been “taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). Several Book of Mormon prophets and righteous rulers were schooled by their worthy fathers, including Enos, Mosiah, Helaman (the son of Alma), Nephi (the son of Helaman), and Moroni (see Enos 1:1; Mosiah 1: 2–8; Alma 36–37; Helaman 5: 5–13; Moroni 8). Worthy fathers, through their teachings, by the power of their example and the expression of their love in word and deed, have a powerful impact for good on their children.

One of God’s special instruments in accomplishing His purposes in the earth, as President Heber J. Grant affirmed, is mothers, who often bear the greater responsibility in the rearing of children.⁵³ In the nurturing of children, mothers play a unique role in the divine plan. God is love (see 1 John 4:8). Wherever love is promoted in family relations, there the work of God is being accomplished. “God could not be everywhere,” goes a common saying, “so he sent mother.” President Thomas S. Monson has affirmed that the mother rocking her baby, bestowing her love and assurance, teaching correct principles according to her best light and knowledge, is an instrument of God in accomplishing His purposes.⁵⁴

The influence of good mothers is proverbial. “All that I am, all that I hope to be, I owe to my Angel mother,” said Abraham Lincoln.⁵⁵ The power of mothers in the gospel setting is shown by the experience of Helaman’s stripling Ammonite warriors. The sons of Helaman had believing mothers who imparted their faith to their sons to such a degree they said “we do not doubt our mothers knew it” (Alma 56:47–48; 57:21). Their preservation in battle was a marvel to the entire army (see Alma 57:25–26).

William Ross Wallace recognized the impact of mothers on the historical process when he penned: “For the hand that rocks the cradle / Is the hand that rules the world.”⁵⁶ President Gordon B. Hinckley quoted E. T. Sullivan in that regard:

When God wants a great work done in the world or a great wrong righted, he goes about it

in a very unusual way. He doesn't stir up his earthquakes or send forth his thunderbolts. Instead, he has a helpless baby born, perhaps in a simple home of some obscure mother. And then God puts the idea into the mother's heart, and she puts it into the baby's mind. And then God waits. . . . The greatest forces in the world are babies.⁵⁷

President Young, with prophetic utterance, said with equal force: "The mothers are the moving instruments in the hands of Providence to guide the destinies of nations. Let the mothers of any nation teach their children not to make war, the children would grow up and never enter into it. Let the mothers teach their children, 'War, war upon your enemies, yes, war to the hilt!' and they will be filled with this spirit. Consequently, you see at once what I wish to impress upon your minds is, that the mothers are the machinery that . . . guide the destinies and lives of men upon the earth."⁵⁸ President David O. McKay expressed a similar view, stating that motherhood was the "noblest calling or office in the world" and "the mightiest of all forces in human society," with "the greatest potential influence either for good or ill in human life."⁵⁹ Not only the role of mothers, but the role of women in other spheres of endeavor, particularly in the modern period, needs to be considered in the historical process.

Stable families indeed have been the foundation of many nations. God is particularly solicitous of nations who keep the law of chastity, the vital cornerstone of good family life (see Jacob 3:3–6). Societies with good family life have endured a very long while. Where the law of chastity is observed and good family life prevails, people can be saved in the family unit by redemptive vicarious ordinances performed at a later date. The blame in such societies for what is evil in their traditions falls upon their progenitors (see 3 Nephi 4:3–7; Jacob 3:5–9). When the family structures of nations fail, they are in danger. The warning by the living prophet to the current gen-

eration underlines emphatically this fact in an age of degenerating sexual morality. Wrote the First Presidency in the 1995 family proclamation, "Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets."

Science and technology. A fourteenth and very important way in which God has influenced and directed the unfolding of the affairs of man is in the technical and scientific knowledge which He has poured out, and continues to pour out, upon the human family. President Young affirmed: "The construction of the electric telegraph and the method of using it enabling the people to send messages from one end of the earth to the other, is just as much a revelation from God as any ever given. The same is true with regard to making machinery, whether it be a steamboat, a carding machine, threshing machine, or anything else . . . the Lord has revealed them to his children."⁶⁰ President Joseph F. Smith taught a similar doctrine: "I believe that the Lord has revealed to the children of men all that they know. I do not believe that any man has discovered any principle of science, or art, in mechanism, or mathematics, or anything else, that God did not know before man did. Man is indebted to the Source of all intelligence and truth, for the knowledge that he possesses."⁶¹

The laws governing the pursuit of scientific and technical knowledge are similar to those governing the pursuit of the knowledge of gospel truth and are related to the degree to which people seek the truth, for as Alma pointed out, God works among the children of men according to their desires (see Alma 29:4). Those who have made great discoveries in scientific knowledge have often reported flashes of intelligence akin to revelation—Copernicus and Einstein, for example—and some, such as James Maxwell, have even dreamed dreams.⁶² Joel prophesied of a time when the Lord would pour out His spirit upon all flesh, presumably in all

things, both secular and spiritual (see Joel 2:28). By sending the great truth seekers at a time when God wishes the knowledge to be had, He has opened the floodgates for the improvement of the human family and the accomplishment of His latter-day work.⁶³

The vast dispersion of knowledge from heaven in the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and in the Industrial Revolution, which began toward the end of the eighteenth century, and the outpouring of scientific and technical knowledge since, must thus be viewed as part of the divine plan, reserved for the latter days—the dispensation of the fulness of times. No previous generation of which we are aware has ever had so much scientific and technical knowledge. The Industrial Revolution with succeeding waves of technological change has provided for the spread of the gospel in a number of ways. It provided the necessary transportation systems of railways and steamboats for missionary travel just prior to the time of the Restoration. Modern means of transportation, particularly the automobile and airplane, have provided for a worldwide missionary program and the administration of a worldwide church. Modern means of communication—radio, television, and satellite transmissions—have facilitated the spread of the word of God. The computer and its applications, including the Internet, have been a boon in family history research beyond all expectation.⁶⁴

The Industrial Revolution has also prepared people to hear the gospel, sometimes by the unequal benefits it has provided, as in England in the late 1830s in the Preston area and elsewhere.⁶⁵ The Industrial Revolution has also led to the spread of literacy and the extension of liberty and democracy—all necessary for the spread of the gospel. It has provided families with sufficient means to allow time for Church service. Ultimately, it has led to the rise of human dignity across much of the earth. Great strides in medicine have also freed mankind from devastating

diseases and preserved the lives of God's servants. All of these things God has provided, according to His wisdom, for the benefit of His children and to advance His work. The acceleration in the divine outpouring of secular knowledge is uniquely connected with the promises of this, the dispensation of the fulness of times.⁶⁶

Joseph Smith and the Restoration. But, this glorious age has the benefit of an even greater knowledge—that of direct revelation from the heavens to living prophets. Through Joseph Smith, the great prophet of the Restoration, the knowledge of God and the saving principles and ordinances of His gospel were revealed, the Book of Mormon was brought forth, the priesthood was restored, the Lord's Church was reestablished on the earth, and work for the dead was begun. All the keys of previous dispensations were revealed, including the sealing power and that for the gathering of the house of Israel (see D&C 110).

Since the beginning, God has spoken by angels and by His own voice to certain men of great faith and “a firm mind in every form of godliness,” so that faith might increase in the earth (Moroni 7:21–25, 29–32). So it is in modern times. “Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; . . . That faith also might increase in the earth; That mine everlasting covenant might be established, that the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed . . . unto the ends of the world” (D&C 1:17, 21–23).

The glorious restoration of all the priesthood keys is preparatory to taking the gospel to the whole earth. “The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto men on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth” (D&C 65:2; see also Daniel 2:34–45). All who have faith and have

been called and given authority can receive inspiration within their jurisdiction in accomplishing this work. The standard of truth has been erected, and the gospel message will be delivered by missionaries of the Lord's true Church to the inhabitants of the entire earth.⁶⁷

Destructions. A sixteenth way God influences His children is through destructions; there is a sterner side to God, for He is a God of both justice and mercy, principles which apply not only to individuals but to groups of people. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts" (D&C 1:33). "And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction," wrote Nephi (1 Nephi 26:11; see also Mormon 5:16–18). When people become ripe in iniquity and will not hearken to the prophets and saints sent to preach repentance—but persecute them—cast them out, and kill them, they bring upon themselves His wrath and their destruction. This applies in this dispensation as well as in those past (see Helaman 13:13–14; D&C 1:7–14; 136:34–36).

God not only gives life but may also take it away. As Nephi learned, "the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes" (1 Nephi 4:13; see also Alma 19:22–23; Genesis 38:6–10). Nephi further observed, "He raises up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked" (1 Nephi 17:37). He allows, even ordains, that the wicked destroy the wicked (see D&C 63:33). As Mormon wrote, "The judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked who stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed" (Mormon 4:5). The Civil War in the United States appears to have come as the promised retribution for having "killed the prophets" and "driven" out the Saints (D&C 136:34–36). The prophecy that war and destruction would be poured out upon all nations following the American Civil War (see D&C 87:3) has been accomplished in the two World Wars⁶⁸ and in numerous other armed conflicts.

Some lands, such as the Americas, have alternate blessings and cursings upon the land. God has decreed that the Americas, "choice above all other lands," are to be a land "free from bondage, and from captivity," but if the inhabitants of the land do not serve Jesus Christ, who is the God of the land, when they are fully ripened in iniquity they shall be "swept off" (Ether 2:9–12). The latter-day inhabitants of the Americas are particularly warned against the rise of secret combinations among them, which led to the destruction of both the Jaredite and Nephite nations (see Ether 8:18–25).

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, thunderings, lightnings, tempests, and "waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds" may serve to reinforce the testimony of God's servants (see D&C 88:90). Great and terrible destructions, some by hail, some by pestilence, some by war, some by famine, are yet to be poured out upon the children of men, until the final burning preceding the Second Coming (see D&C 29:9, 14–21; 45:25–33; Joseph Smith—Matthew 28–31). Regrettably, those destructions are to begin at the Lord's house among those who professed to know Christ but "have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house" (D&C 112:24–26). The voice of warning is unto all. Members of the Church will not be exempt from either natural disasters or other destructions, but "the righteous need not fear," for, in large measure, they shall be delivered "even if it so be as by fire" (1 Nephi 22:15).⁶⁹ The future cleansing of the earth will be preparatory to the inauguration of a thousand-year reign of peace (see Malachi 4:1–3), the great millennial reign of Christ upon the earth.

THE PARADOX OF FAITH

With so many evidences of God's interaction with the human family, why is His role in the affairs of men not better understood? The Lord told Enoch that "all things are created and made to bear record of me" (Moses 6:63). But one

must see with spiritual eyes to discern the things of God (see 1 Corinthians 2:11–14). Only on rare occasions has God intervened with a manifestation of His power so overwhelming as to leave no doubt as to His interaction. Moses came with so much power that neither the Pharaoh nor the Israelites could reasonably doubt (see Exodus 3–14, particularly 14:31), and the signs in America of the Lord’s birth were so powerful that “the more part of the people did believe, and were converted unto the Lord” (3 Nephi 1:15). At the Second Coming, “every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess” that Jesus is the Christ, so great shall be the glory of His coming (D&C 88:103–4). But these are rare occurrences. God seldom intervenes directly in the affairs of men in a visible way that would prove His existence. The evidence of His presence more generally comes in the whisperings of the “still small voice” of the Spirit (see 1 Kings 19:9), in response to the fervent prayers and faith of those who sincerely seek Him.

Only rarely does God intervene directly to right human ills.⁷⁰ The “prime directive” of earth life is agency. God allows people their agency so that they can demonstrate their true tendencies outside of His presence. The evil are allowed to afflict and abuse others so that they will be fully accountable in the day of judgment (see Alma 14:10–11), while God, in His infinite mercy and grace, can heal the wounds of the afflicted, as this hymn reminds us: “Earth has no sorrow that heav’n cannot heal.”⁷¹ Because God’s intervention is rarely of a nature to be visible to the natural eye, faith remains the fundamental principle. In the absence of an overt manifestation of divine power, Heavenly Father’s children must learn to live by faith and demonstrate their true inclinations out of His presence. This, after all, is the nature of the test in this mortal probation, our second estate.

CONCLUSION

The nature of God’s plan for the salvation of His children has a major bearing on the divine role in human affairs. A kindly parent guided by eternal principles, God rules “in all wisdom and prudence” over all the intelligences (Abraham 3:21). He has created the earth as the habitation for man, and from the time of our first parents on the earth He has revealed His gospel from time to time and manifested His power according to the faith of the people. Covenants and covenant peoples play a major role in His plan for the salvation of His children. He has preserved scriptures containing His word and has revealed and preserved spiritual and secular knowledge among those who lack the fulness of the gospel. All His children have had the benefit of the Light of Christ to guide their footsteps.

He guides the destiny of the nations, but rather than awe His children by great manifestations of His power, He has mostly preferred to instruct them in correct principles. According to His wisdom, He has sent His servants to earth with preappointed missions for the salvation and progress of man. He has scattered and gathered those under divine covenant in the migrations of peoples to have the best effect. He has raised up lands of liberty. He has poured out technological and scientific knowledge with especial abundance in the latter days and has restored His gospel through Joseph Smith, the great prophet of the Restoration. His work continues with the teaching of the gospel in all the world, with the promise that truth will ultimately triumph.

But this is also a time of great turbulence with natural calamities, wars, and other kinds of destructions incident to the great winding up scenes preparatory to the Second Coming of Christ. This is the time when the great conflict between good and evil, begun in the preearthly existence, enters a final stage. As God hastens His work, His hand—which we are *urged* to “confess . . . in all things” (D&C 59:21)—has become increasingly more visible in the dynamic of

His Church and in preparing the world for the preaching of the gospel.⁷² Understanding our place in history will help us better cope with the world in which we live. To look at the history of the world, including the divine role as God has defined it, adds a new and fuller perspective. It may also help us better understand the attributes of God and our personal relationship to Him.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 220.

2. See Craig J. Ostler, "Earthquakes, Wars, Holocausts, Disease and Inhumanity: Why Doesn't God Intervene?" in this volume.

3. For a discussion of providential history against this backdrop, see Brian Q. Cannon, "Providential History: The Need for Continuing Revelation," herein. See Roy A. Prete, "Merging the Secular and the Spiritual," in this volume, for a methodological and historiographical appraisal of Latter-day Saint providential history.

4. The term *modern* as used here follows the Western designation of modern: from the end of the Middle Ages, about AD 1450.

5. See "President Packer Tells of 'Drama of All Ages,'" *Church News*, May 13, 1995.

6. See the chapter by Byron R. Merrill, "Agency and Freedom in the Divine Plan," in this volume.

7. Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 37–38.

8. Lee, *Teachings*, 39.

9. Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 4–7.

10. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 194. See also Douglas F. Tobler, "Good from Evil in the Twentieth Century: Transcending Totalitarianism, Wars, and the Holocaust," in this volume, for a further appraisal of modern oppressive ideas and regimes.

11. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Quest for Excellence," *Ensign*, September 1999, 2–5.

12. Lee, *Teachings*, 36.

13. Lee, *Teachings*, 23.

14. Smith, *Teachings*, 365.

15. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 357.

16. See N. B. Lundwall, comp., *Lectures on Faith: From the School of the Prophets at Kirtland, Ohio* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 12–32.

17. Smith, *Teachings*, 167–69.

18. Brigham Young, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 18–19, 125–29.

19. See Victor L. Ludlow, "The Scattering and Gathering of Israel: God's Covenant with Abraham Remembered through the Ages," in this volume, for a fuller treatment.

20. See James M. Robinson, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

21. See Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Sermons and Writings of President Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 65–68.

22. First Presidency Message, February 15, 1978.

23. For a more in-depth treatment, see Roger R. Keller, "Why Study World Religions?" in this volume.

24. Young, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church*, 52, 287.

25. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 357. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Progress of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 178–95.

26. See Hugh Nibley, *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled*, ed. Stephen Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991); Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992).

27. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 30.

28. See William H. McNeill, *A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 59–61.

29. For a broad sweep, see James E. McLellan III and Harold Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), reviewed by Philip F. Rehbock, "Globalizing the History of Science," *Journal of Modern History* (2001), 1:186–92.

30. Deno John Geanakoplos, *Byzantium: Church, Society and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 443.
31. Henry B. Eyring, "A Child and a Disciple," *Ensign*, May 2003, 32.
32. See McNeill, *A World History*, 11–108.
33. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Stone Cut without Hands," *Ensign*, May, 1976, 6–9.
34. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 358. (Brought to my attention by Wayne Davis.)
35. Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 4–6.
36. John Taylor, 18 May 1862, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 10:57–58.
37. Smith, *Teachings*, 248–50.
38. Young, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, 96.
39. Smith, *Teachings*, 365.
40. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, April 1970, 6; Neal A. Maxwell, *Notwithstanding My Weakness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 18–19; James E. Faust, *Finding Light in a Dark World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 107–08.
41. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widstoe (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 55.
42. Spencer W. Kimball, "Small Acts of Service," *Ensign*, December 1974, 2.
43. Abraham Lincoln, Address to the New Jersey Senate, February 21, 1861.
44. Ralph G. Lindstrom, *Lincoln Finds God* (New York: Longman, Green & Co., 1958), 22–23; Elton Trueblood, *Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 24–25; G. George Fox, *Abraham Lincoln's Religion* (New York: Exposition Press, 1959), 34, 42, 86–87.
45. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 1, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 667.
46. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 678.
47. For more details, see Victor L. Ludlow, "Jewish Migrations," *Ensign*, May 1972, 18–24; Spencer J. Palmer, "Israel in Asia," *Ensign*, January 1971, 70–75.
48. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 455–57.
49. See Victor L. Ludlow, "The Scattering and Gathering of Israel: God's Covenant with Abraham Remembered through the Ages," in this volume, for a fuller treatment.
50. In the hymn "The Spirit of God," we anticipate God "restoring" to Israel their judges "as at first," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 2.
51. Ezra Taft Benson, *This Nation Shall Endure* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 1–4; Gordon B. Hinckley, rededication prayer, London England Temple, "London Temple: Temple 'Made Even More Beautiful,'" *Deseret News*, October 31, 1992; see chapter by Robert R. Newell, Carma T. Prete, and Roy A. Prete, "European Origins of Freedom in America," in this volume, for further elaboration.
52. See David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 486; Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 207–8.
53. Heber J. Grant, *Gospel Standards: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Heber J. Grant*, comp. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1981), 150.
54. Thomas S. Monson, *Discourses of Thomas S. Monson: Pathways to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 223–30.
55. *Abraham Lincoln's Philosophy of Common Sense*, ed. Edward J. Kemp (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1965), 60.
56. "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Is the Hand that Rules the World," in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack M. Lyon and others (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 291.
57. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Behold Your Little Ones," *Ensign*, June 2001, 5, quoting E. T. Sullivan, *The Treasure Chest*, ed. Charles L. Wallis (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 53.
58. Young, *Discourses*, 199–200.
59. McKay, *Gospel Ideals*, 133, 452–53.
60. Young, *Discourses*, 40.
61. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5–6.

62. See the chapter by Sherilyn Farnes and Roy A. Prete, "The Discovery Process: Spiritual and Secular Parallels," in this volume, for fuller treatment.

63. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977–78), 1:178–81.

64. Merrill J. Bateman, "The Dawn of a New Millennium," BYU devotional address, January 11, 2000, <http://speeches.byu.edu/devo/99-00/MJBatemanW00.html>.

65. See Malcolm R. Thorp, "Appendix A, The Field Is White Already to Harvest," in *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles*, ed. James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and James J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 337–40; see also Richard O. Cowan, "'Unto Every Nation': Scenes of Church Growth Worldwide," in this volume.

66. See Farnes and Prete, "The Discovery Process," in this volume, for fuller treatment.

67. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), "Wentworth Letter," 4:535–41.

68. See the chapter by Brian Q. Cannon, "Chastisement of the Nations, 1914–45," in this volume.

69. Smith, *Teachings*, 162–63.

70. See Craig J. Ostler, "Earthquakes, Wars, Holocausts, Disease, and Inhumanity: Why Doesn't God Intervene?" in this volume for a fuller discussion.

71. "Come, Ye Disconsolate," *Hymns*, no. 115.

72. For a fuller development of this theme, see Robert S. Patterson and E. Dale LeBaron, "Preparing for Preaching the Gospel Worldwide since 1945," in this volume.