

Preface

This book, consisting mainly of articles by Brigham Young University scholars, represents an approach to world history for Latter-day Saints that recognizes the hand of God in the historical process. It views the unfolding of history within the perspective of Heavenly Father's plan for the salvation of His children. The thesis of the work is that God, working through human agents, has shaped world history for the accomplishment of His purposes. In the great work of salvation, chief among God's purposes in the modern era are the Restoration of the gospel and its dissemination to the all the world in preparation for the Second Coming of the Messiah (see D&C 1:1–23, 34–36; 65:1–6). The millennial reign will thus be ushered in and the great redemptive work of administering saving ordinances for the untold myriads who have lived on earth without a knowledge of the gospel will be accomplished.

Several major themes emerge in the blending of the history of the modern era with divine

purposes. Modern prophets and apostles have long identified the divine hand at work in several aspects of Western history, such as the intellectual awakening and flowering of the arts in the Renaissance, the discovery of America, the religious renewal of the Reformation, the development of representative constitutional government and individual rights in Britain, and the rise of freedom in America, to mention but a few. The providential rise of freedom in America has long been recognized as a necessary step in preparation for the Restoration of the gospel.

But as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints extends its reach across more and more of the earth, broader themes emerge. A theme of prime importance is the development of freedom in the Western world—the United States, in particular, but also in other countries—and its spread in one form or another to the peoples of the earth, thus facilitating the spread of the gospel across the world. A second theme that has

taken on greater importance is the unparalleled disbursement from heaven of scientific and technical knowledge in the modern era, which has blessed all of mankind and greatly accelerated the Lord's work, providing systems of transportation and communication for a worldwide church and information technology for vastly expanded family history research and temple work. A third major theme has been the rapid progress of the Church since 1945, allowing it to assume by degrees its worldwide mission of spreading the gospel "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 2:44–45). Following the turbulent events of the early twentieth century, the world has been prepared to receive the gospel through the spread of freedom and also by other means. Several themes in the preparation of the world for receiving the gospel, such as the rise of literacy, the amelioration of social and economic conditions, the intellectual preparation of the minds of the people, and the improved image of the Church, have only been lightly touched upon and invite further exploration and discussion.

As the work of the Lord's Church progresses, the gathering of the house of Israel according to God's ancient covenants is being accomplished in its spiritual dimension, while the literal gathering of the house of Israel continues to unfold. Our Father in Heaven is the God of the whole earth and has not worked with just one people but, as ancient and modern prophets have indicated, has guided the destinies of all peoples and has given them light and knowledge as He has seen fit. One may thus conclude that while God's intervention has not always been very visible, He has played a major role in guiding the affairs of men. Ever respecting the agency of man, He has nonetheless shaped to His purposes the destinies of mankind, for, as Moroni declared, "the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled" (Mormon 8:22).

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Editor