



Del'Parson, First Vision, © 1987 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

While the lengthening shadow of worldwide calamities continues to creep over the world, the promise is sure that the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a permanent miracle, a message of lasting good news for all.

“The Calamity That Should Come”

RICHARD E. BENNETT

Richard E. Bennett (richard_bennett@byu.edu) is a professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU

Speaking at Brigham Young University in 1981, Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, remarked as follows:

I realize this is an unpleasant topic on which to dwell. I take no delight in its portrayal, nor do I look forward to the day when calamities shall come with increasing number upon humanity. But these words are not my own; the Lord has spoken them. Knowing what we know as his servants, can we hesitate to raise a warning voice to all who will listen that they may be prepared for the days ahead? Silence in the face of such calamity is sin! But to an otherwise gloomy picture there is a bright side—the coming of our Lord in all his glory. His coming will be both glorious and terrible, depending on the spiritual condition of those who remain.¹

The “Divine Pulley” of the First Vision

With all the renewed attention now being devoted to the study of Joseph Smith’s First Vision of almost two hundred years ago, what remains missing is a careful consideration of those other factors in play besides Joseph Smith’s personal desires.² In what we might call the “divine pulley” of the First Vision, the Doctrine and Covenants makes plain that God called upon

the prophet of Palmyra as much as Joseph Smith called upon heaven. His vision was a two-way movement of symbiotic purposes. Well known is the question the Prophet Joseph sought to have answered; but if, as President Gordon B. Hinckley once observed, young Joseph was “permitted” to enter the grove that fateful spring morning in 1820, what then were heaven’s interests in sponsoring so rich and powerful a theophany?³

The answers to this question are recorded in the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants. “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” (D&C 1:17; emphasis added).⁴ What follows in the succeeding verses is nothing less than the DNA of the Restoration and a clear explanation of God’s purposes in bringing it forward when he did and why. They read as follows: “That every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world”; “that faith also might increase” in what today we see as an increasingly faithless world; “that mine everlasting covenant might be established”; “that the fullness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world”; that “inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; and inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed”; that “inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent”; and that the Book of Mormon and the restored church might come forth “out of obscurity and out of darkness.” In fine, God’s purposes were that the fullness of the gospel might be restored against “the day [that] speedily cometh . . . when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion” prior to the Second Coming of Christ, who “shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world” (D&C 1:20–23, 25–27, 30, 35–36).

Heralded in the First Vision, therefore, was the restoration of gospel truths, covenants, divine purposes, and authority against the backdrop of an ever-intensifying, worldwide apostasy and flight to sin, a “calamity” of such proportions that it will take the return of Christ, the Savior of the world, to save the world from itself.

Nothing that follows is meant to imply that the restored church itself will fall away. Such will not be the case, as the Doctrine and Covenants makes abundantly clear. “The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man 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. . . . Wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come” (D&C 65:2, 6). Furthermore, the Lord declared at the time of the establishment of the First Presidency in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1832: “Verily I say unto you, the keys of this kingdom shall never be taken from you, while thou art in the world, neither in the world to come; nevertheless, through you shall the oracles be given to another, yea, even unto the church” (D&C 90:3–4). Thus from the earliest days of the Restoration, a pattern of apostolic succession was laid down to ensure the continuation of prophetic leadership over the Church.

However, if the term *apostasy* is taken in its literal sense of “a complete forsaking of one’s religion, faith, political party, or principles,”⁵ and applied on a worldwide scale, then clearly modern scripture foretells a deepening and intensifying universal calamity that the angel Moroni referred to in his second appearance to Joseph Smith on the night of 21 September 1823. “He informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence; and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation” (Joseph Smith—History 1:45). Considering the fact that the Napoleonic Wars had barely ended in a terrifying bloodbath that had stained Europe from Moscow to Waterloo at the cost of millions of lives, Moroni’s sobering prophecies take on even greater seismic proportions.

Although it is true that “the church of the Lamb of God” will go forward throughout the world, “terrible as an army with banners,” it will never win any sort of popularity contest. Rather, its numbers are destined to be relatively “few” and “small” because of the wickedness throughout the world (1 Nephi 14:12). The fact is, the gathering of the Saints of God “upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes” will be “for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth” (D&C 115:6). Thus the Restoration is not a promise of man’s turning to righteousness but an ensign to the nations—a preparation for, and to some extent, an inoculation against, the increasing tide of wickedness now enveloping the world.

Such dire prophecies should not obscure the wonderful good or downplay the incredible advances humankind has accomplished over the almost two hundred years since Moroni’s vision. If so, what are we to make of the enormous progress in the fields of science and technology, health and medicine, transportation and communication, agricultural production and human

equality, to name but a few? Thanks to William Wilberforce, Hannah More, Abraham Lincoln, and countless others, slavery has largely been abolished in the Western world. Civil rights have been extended and enshrined. The impending destructions must, therefore, be tempered by the recognition that in so many ways life today is so much fuller, richer, and more enjoyable than at any other time in the history of the world. And much bodes well for the future. One might almost conclude that a utopia is within our grasp and that humankind is in an ascendancy, in a continuing revolution of scientific, technological, and cultural improvement.

And yet Restoration scripture persists in speaking of “walking in darkness at noon day”—a contrasting action of righteousness on the one hand and iniquity on the other—and of an ever deepening calamity in a day of undeniable improvement. Christ’s parable of the wheat and the tares, so well explained in the Doctrine and Covenants, lends prophecy to this competing action of good versus evil.

But behold, in the last days, even now while the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word, and the blade is springing up and is yet tender—

Behold, verily I say unto you, the angels are crying unto the Lord day and night, who are ready and waiting to be sent forth to reap down the fields;

But the Lord saith unto them, pluck not up the tares while the blade is yet tender . . . , lest you destroy the wheat also.

Therefore, let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest is fully ripe; then ye shall first gather out the wheat from among the tares, and after the gathering of the wheat, behold and lo, the tares are bound in bundles, and the field remaineth to be burned. (D&C 86:4–7)

Of all Christian peoples, Latter-day Saints should be conversant with the signs and coming wonders of the last days. Not only do we embrace the writings of Isaiah and John the Beloved’s book of Revelation, both of which find abundant commentary in Latter-day Saint scripture, but we also claim allegiance to Joseph Smith’s many revelations that speak volumes concerning the conditions of a dying world leading up to Christ’s millennial return. So much of the early history of the Church played out in Missouri and Ohio in a climate of the imminent expectation of Christ’s Second Coming. While it still remains true that no man—or angel for that matter—“knows the hour” when Christ will return, the surprising thing is how much has been revealed on the topic. And although one does not want to risk being on the wrong side of future history, modern prophecies are very clear. A careful reading of the Doctrine and Covenants shows that it speaks apocalyptically, as did the

Apostle John, of “the calamity of the wicked” and of the need of preparing God’s servants “against the day of burning” (D&C 109:46). Much of it reads like a modern extension of John’s book of Revelation. If so, what might these calamities be?

At the risk of simplifying a great complexity, this paper will attempt to divide these pending calamities into four distinct, though interrelated, categories and will do so not to deny the power of biblical prophecy but to emphasize what modern scripture brings to bear on the topic. Structured in a modern equivalent of the ancient four horses of the Apocalypse, these calamities are henceforth referred to as first, the calamity of sin; second, the calamity of faithlessness; third, the calamity of disease; and fourth and last, the calamity of fear and despair. Our purpose is not to raise fears or to speak pessimistically about the end times. We know that Christ will eventually return in great glory and “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). He is “mighty to save” (Alma 34:18), and his plan of salvation will neither be interrupted nor foiled. Nevertheless, his prophecies are sure. What follows is a reexamination of those prophecies in light of the coming calamities upon the earth.

The Calamity of Sin

The Apostle Paul speaks of the “mystery of iniquity” at work in the latter days, when “that Wicked [one]” shall be revealed, “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all powers and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2: 7–10). Defining such wickedness defies easy explanation, as King Benjamin learned over a lifetime of experience. “And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them” (Mosiah 4:29). Nor is it always easy to distinguish the good from the evil. “Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (2 Nephi 15:20).

The Doctrine and Covenants speaks repeatedly not of a static, sinful state but of a world “ripening in iniquity” (D&C 18:6), an age of progressive deterioration in moral and ethical behavior and of almost irreversible decline in human virtues. Repentance is always enjoined, but if one were to distill the many faces of iniquity into their lowest common denominator, those most

calamitous sins would be pride and its twin evil, prejudice. “Beware of pride” is almost as constant a warning in the Doctrine and Covenants as it is in the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery, Emma Smith, William E. McLellin, Ezra Thayre, and even Joseph Smith himself, who was roundly chastised for “suffer[ing] the counsel of [his] director to be trampled upon from the beginning” (D&C 3:15), are warned of the consequences of this deadly contamination, which C. S. Lewis calls “enmity toward God.”⁶ “For verily I say, tomorrow all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn them up, for I am the Lord of Hosts; and I will not spare any that remain in Babylon” (D&C 64:24; see also 29:9). Martin Luther summed it up well: “The god of the world is riches, pleasure, and pride.”⁷

If under the rubric of pride we can include such related deadly sins as jealousy, envy, strife, enmity, contention, covetousness, rebellion, stiff-neckedness, stubbornness, and the refusal to forgive, then the Doctrine and Covenants has little else to condemn. The Doctrine and Covenants is, as it were, a modern Book of Mormon in which is written: “Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction except they should repent” (Moroni 8:27). If one can also include under the heading of pride the recurring commitment to going one’s own way, relying upon the arm of flesh, and leaning upon mere human understanding rather than obeying the counsels of God, then the lack of such obedience is a prevalent cause of the world ripening in sin. “O ye nations of the earth,” the Lord warned in 1832, “how often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not! How often have I called upon you by . . . the voice of thunderings . . . lightnings . . . tempests . . . earthquakes . . . but ye would not! Behold, the day has come, when the cup of the wrath of mine indignation is full. . . . For the great Millennium . . . shall come” (D&C 43:24–26, 30).

Section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants speaks of this increasing proclivity towards sinning in the latter days. “And calamity shall cover the mocker, and the scorner shall be consumed”—warnings, almost, against those who dismiss such talk as meaningless religious gibberish. “And they that have watched for iniquity”—perhaps in reference to those who watch and wait for the opportunity to sin without fear of legal or moral consequence or punishment—“shall be hewn down and cast into the fire” (D&C 45:50). One perceives from such a warning a falling away from those legal, social, and

cultural restraints on ill behavior that have protected the rights and privileges of so many for so long.

Summing up the calamity of a world apostatizing into foolishness, filthiness, and sin, the Doctrine and Covenants is unequivocal: “And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin . . . because they come not unto me” (D&C 84:49–50). Put succinctly another way, “as it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be also at the coming of the Son of Man” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:41).

The Calamity of Faithlessness and Disbelief

We now come to the calamity of faithlessness and disbelief and with it the loss of a belief in and a love for the Savior of the world and for others. Some Latter-day Saints may be disposed to dismiss the teachings of other Christian faiths as misleading falsities worthy of all condemnation and to believe virtually all faiths other than their own are abominations from which little or no good was ever derived. In doing so, they may fail to realize that Roman Catholic and Protestant faiths served as fire walls for centuries against the oncoming tide of secularism that today seems poised and primed to engulf the “post-Christian” world.

Yet, on the other hand, who would want to revert to the state-supported inquisitions of earlier centuries or established state religions that for so long throttled the introduction of contrary points of view, freedom of thought, and religious expression? As much as some might condemn the excesses of the French Revolution and the ego of Napoleon Bonaparte, he did abolish much religious totalitarianism and freed tens of thousands of Jews and other persecuted religious minorities. Much of so-called secularism has been extremely beneficial in insuring a modern pluralistic religious age where many faiths, including our own, are free to teach their views without fear of recrimination or persecution. To dismiss modern secularism, therefore, as an inevitable enemy of faith, is both naïve and shortsighted.

The provenance of modern secularism is difficult to determine. The abolition of the Christian calendar and the simultaneous transformation of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris into a “Temple of Reason” during the height of the French Reign of Terror in the late eighteenth century might well have contributed to the start of the modern secular age—retaliations to the dominance of what many then perceived as a corrupt, uncaring, and unforgiving clerical aristocracy. And it is likewise impossible to gauge to what

extent Charles Darwin's 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species*, with its attendant doctrine of the survival of the fittest, paved the way for the rise of scientific evolutionary theory at the expense of religious dogma. The Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, most will remember, played out against this intensifying argument over the seat of all truth. One might well argue, however, that the authority of the Holy Bible and its creation account have been on the wane ever since.

The noted academic Charles Taylor, in his highly acclaimed *A Secular Age*, argues that the place of religion in modern society has profoundly changed in the last few centuries. Tracing the decline of religion from a former age when belief in God was virtually axiomatic through the Renaissance, the Reformation, and scientific revolutions, Taylor argues that Christianity must today allow for "a purely self-sufficient humanism" where a disbelief in God has become not merely possible but "inescapable."⁸ It is not that Christianity has eroded to the point of irrelevancy or is without defense or that atheism has replaced it as the dominant new anti-faith. Secularism does not necessarily mean a belief in the death of God. Rather, it has created a new philosophical "background" in which not to believe in God has become increasingly defensible and acceptable. A belief in Deity is only one human possibility among many others. Such a new philosophical paradigm, an ever-changing marketplace of what determines truth, has enormous ramifications, many of which are now playing out in an increasingly pluralistic, multicultural, and sometimes antireligious society.

Of this enveloping secularism, Elder Dallin H. Oaks had this to say:

Evil that used to be localized and covered like a boil is now legalized and paraded like a banner. The most fundamental roots and bulwarks of civilization are questioned or attacked. Nations disavow their religious heritage. Marriage and family responsibilities are discarded as impediments to personal indulgence. The movies and magazines and television that shape our attitudes are filled with stories or images that portray the children of God as predatory beasts or, at best, as trivial creations pursuing little more than personal pleasure. . . . An increasing number of opinion leaders and followers deny the existence of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and revere only the gods of secularism. Many in positions of power and influence deny the right and wrong defined by divine decree. Even among those who profess to believe in right and wrong, there are "them that call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20; 2 Ne. 15:20). Many also deny individual responsibility and practice dependence on others, seeking, like the foolish virgins, to live on borrowed substance and borrowed light.⁹

And if faith in God declines in this increasingly secularist world, surely the love for him will dissipate in equal proportions. For without faith in him it seems almost academic to talk of either loving him or worshipping the Almighty. And with the decline of affection for Deity, will there not follow a corresponding decline in love for one another? Modern scriptures indicate that "the love of men shall wax cold" (D&C 45:27) in the last days, that there will be a diminishment of familial affection, and that hatred and perversion will largely replace natural affections. And as in the days of Noah, the earth will be "filled with violence" (Moses 8:28). "For all flesh is corrupted before me," the Lord reveals in the Doctrine and Covenants, "and the powers of darkness prevail upon the earth, . . . which causeth silence to reign, and all eternity is pained, and the angels are waiting the great command to reap down the earth" (D&C 38:111-12).

The Calamity of Disease

The third calamity repeatedly spoken of in modern scripture and more particularly in the Doctrine and Covenants is the calamity of disease. The irony is that we live in a day and age of remarkable scientific breakthroughs in so many different fields of medical research. Smallpox—that dreaded, infectious disease caused by the variola virus—once had a mortality rate of as much as 30 percent. In the Americas it killed millions, as many as 90 percent of the indigenous populations, after contact with Europeans introduced this dreaded disease. Today smallpox has been eradicated after a highly successful worldwide vaccination program. Likewise, poliomyelitis, a viral infection spread from person to person and which permanently crippled millions of children as late as the 1950s, has been all but erased as a public health problem, at least in industrialized nations. The availability of new and stronger antibiotics has likewise dramatically reduced the incidence of scarlet fever and tuberculosis. Cases of scurvy, another once-dreaded disease, have dramatically decreased due to our knowledge of the remedial power of citrus fruits, with their abundant vitamin C. So, too, the incidence of diphtheria, a very serious bacterial disease that affects the respiratory system or the skin, has dramatically decreased, with less than one case reported each year in the United States since 2000.¹⁰ The rate of childbirth deaths in America has likewise dramatically declined by over 95 percent since 1930, with fewer than eight women dying for every one hundred thousand live births—one of the greatest health achievements of the twentieth century.¹¹

The result of these steady improvements in agricultural production, food preservation, health education, and public sanitation has dramatically increased the life expectancy of both men and women. In fact, since 1850 the life expectancy in the United States has doubled from 38.3 years to 76.7 in 1998.¹² Meanwhile society continues to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into the fight against heart disease and cancer in all their deadly varieties. One can only hope and pray for cures and contribute to support those tireless efforts of intrepid researchers at the forefront of medical research who, with new and advanced computer technology, are improving the lot of millions of afflicted, handicapped, and injured people. We look forward to the continued elimination of some of life's greatest physical ills.

These medical advances notwithstanding, public health and wellness officials continue to warn against increasing and alarming trends in diabetes, alcohol consumption, drug addiction, and tuberculosis. And such river-borne diseases as cholera, a bacterial infection of the intestine, continue to decimate populations where modern sewage and water-treatment systems are lacking. The horrible global pandemic of HIV/AIDS continues to ravage large parts of the world. Since AIDS was first recognized in 1981, it has caused nearly 30 million deaths, almost three times the total numbers who died during the First World War. As of 2010, approximately 34 million people were infected with this disease worldwide, with sub-Saharan Africa being by far the worst-affected region, with an estimated 22.9 million infected, or 68 percent of the global total. While the rate of new infections has fallen significantly since 2005, this dreaded disease continues to depopulate entire towns and villages, with more women now being infected than men.¹³ And there still remains the very real concern that another flu epidemic, not unlike that of the “mother of all pandemics”—the so-called Spanish Flu, which claimed the lives of fifty million people in 1918 and 1919—will somehow be transmitted so quickly and with such devastation as to cause panic in the far reaches of the world. To sense the danger, the twenty-first-century reader need only recall the outbreak of the H1N1 virus in 2009 and how far and fast that contagion spread.

For all the advances modern science has made in agriculture, famine persists in far too many parts of the world, with thousands dying daily from malnutrition and hunger, most needlessly. It is estimated that 795 million people go to bed hungry every day.¹⁴ Little wonder Pope Francis pleaded, “You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That’s how prayer works.”¹⁵

Despite these marvelous improvements and hoped-for medical breakthroughs, the signs of the times spoken of in modern scripture almost reluctantly give place to a return of ancient Egypt’s “angel of death” and on a scale so terrifying as to stun the world. According to section 97, “The Lord’s scourge shall pass over by night and by day” (D&C 97:23). And the Doctrine and Covenants says elsewhere: “And there shall be men standing in that generation, that shall not pass until they see an overflowing scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land” (D&C 45:31). And what precisely is the “abomination of desolation,” as referred to repeatedly in modern holy writ, is not clear, but it bears all the characteristics of yet another universal and deadly contagion. Whether or not current diseases figure into this prophetic picture, the message remains: “Plagues shall go forth, and they shall not be taken from the earth until I have completed my work” (D&C 84:97).

The Calamity of Fear and Despair

The Doctrine and Covenants tells of a fourth and final form of calamity, one that will destroy humankind’s confidence and peace, leading to distress, disquiet, and profound hopelessness and despair. This is the calamity of fear and despair, of increasingly harmful natural disasters, climaxing with the catastrophe of war.

In consequential terms foreign to most modern scientific ears, the God of the Restoration often endows natural disasters with signs-of-the-times, supernatural meanings. “For not many days hence and the earth shall tremble and reel to and fro like a drunken man,” says the Lord in section 88.

And the sun shall hide his face, and shall refuse to give light; and the moon shall be bathed in blood; and the stars shall become exceedingly angry, and shall cast themselves down as a fig tree falleth from off a fig tree.

And after your testimony cometh wrath and indignation upon the people.

For after your testimony cometh the testimony of earthquakes, that shall cause groanings in the midst of her, and men shall fall upon the ground and shall not be able to stand.

And also cometh the testimony of the voice of thunders, and the voice of lightnings, and the voice of tempests, and the voice of the waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds.

And all things shall be in commotion; and surely, men’s hearts shall fail them; for fear shall come upon all people. (D&C 88:87–91)

Such devastating events as earthquakes, tsunamis, ocean surges, hurricanes and cyclones, volcanic eruptions, and other forms of natural disasters

have been with us since time immemorial. Nevertheless, this cannot take away from the fact that they have always owned special scriptural meaning, portending impending events of enormous significance. Such was the case with the birth and crucifixion of the Savior, as indicated both in the Holy Bible and more dramatically in the Book of Mormon. Whether the difference in the last days be the increasing frequency, deadlier intensity, and universality of disaster or the fact that humans, in their sprawling cities and habitants, have built in harm's way, the result inevitably will be a calamity of fear and deepening despair.

Not only will the end-times see such calamities of nature, they will also witness human-made ecological disorders and disruptions. "Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth" (Mormon 8:31). What, precisely, these "great pollutions" might be are not itemized, but to the modern observer they might point to contaminations of all kinds on the land, in the atmosphere; in the rivers, lakes, streams, and oceans; and in a climate of global warming.

The hard truth is that all these events will occur in an age of early warning signs, rapid satellite observations and transmissions, and instant worldwide communications that can predict and warn millions against another Pompey, another San Francisco earthquake and fire, another 2004 Indian Ocean/Indonesian tsunami, or another Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Harvey.

The final source of fear will stem from intensifying, ruinous war. Echoing the words of Moroni spoken just eight years before, section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants speaks of an impending time "when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion" (D&C 1:35). Section 87 likewise anticipates war being "poured out upon all nations," beginning with the American Civil War, after which "war shall be poured out upon all nations" (D&C 87:2, 3). Other prophecies indicate that in the latter days "shall be heard of wars and rumors [news] of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men's hearts shall fail them, and they shall say that Christ delayeth his coming until the end of the earth" (D&C 45:26).

Although the Congress of Vienna had convened just a few years before Moroni's visit—where Great Britain's Lord Castlereagh, Austria's Klemens von Metternich, and Russia's czar Alexander I had hammered out a remarkable "lasting peace" and a Holy Alliance that would endure for a century—modern scripture affirms that, tragically, it would eventually surrender to a worldwide conflagration. The Great War of 1914–1918 ended in the staggering

loss of over nine million lives. Its vindictive Treaty of Versailles led inexorably to the Second World War, with its death toll perhaps as high as sixty million, including racial genocide of staggering proportions. Today, in fear of a nuclear holocaust, wherein "all men are cremated equal" (to borrow Dexter Gordon's famous phrase), the modern man and woman live in an age of "wars and rumors of wars" and of terrorism on a worldwide scale, wondering if and when an even greater, more horrible conflict awaits. "Watch, for the adversary spreadeth his dominions, and darkness reigneth; And the anger of God kindleth against the inhabitants of the earth; and none doeth good, for all have gone out of the way" (D&C 82:5–6).

Though Latter-day Saints applaud every effort at forging peace in our time, Restoration scriptures predict that wars will end the political world's state as we now know it.

And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations. (D&C 87:6)

In terminology that repeatedly refers to people's kindling the "wrath of God," the Doctrine and Covenants nevertheless lays responsibility for the increasing tempo of war not at the throne of heaven but at the feet of humankind. "Man's inhumanity towards man" and the vengeful nature of so many are the causes of God's withholding his Spirit of peace.

Conclusion

To summarize, taken in their aggregate, the calamities spoken of above leave little doubt that unless the world repents of its evil ways, sin will abound, faith in Christ and love of God will dissipate, deadly diseases and famine will become ever more rampant, natural disasters and human-made pollutions will abound, and war will be waged on so grand and punishing a scale as to instill an appalling fear and jeopardize the very future existence of the planet. Christ's Second Coming, though signifying the end of the world as we now know it, will save the world from itself. "And except those days should be shortened, there should none of their flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake, according to the covenant, those days shall be shortened" (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:20). And again, "And plagues shall go forth, and they shall not be taken from the earth until I have completed my work, which shall be cut short

in righteousness” (D&C 84:97). And elsewhere the Lord speaks of “hastening his time” and of coming “quickly,” perhaps another way of saying “just in time” (D&C 39:24). Speaking of this ultimate ecological miracle at a time of almost universal apostasy, the Doctrine and Covenants puts it this way: “I am holding my Spirit from the inhabitants of the earth. I have sworn in my wrath, and decreed wars upon the face of the earth, and the wicked shall slay the wicked, and fear shall come upon every man; and the saints also shall hardly escape; nevertheless, I, the Lord, am with them, and will come down in heaven from the presence of my Father and consume the wicked with unquenchable fire” (D&C 63:32–34).

The purpose of this paper has not been to enthrone evil at the expense of good, to destroy faith in the presence of fear, or to downplay the affirmative in the face of the coming negative. So much of a positive, constructive nature has occurred in the world since the First Vision in almost all walks of life that one marvels. In the divine pulley of the Restoration, Joseph Smith surely had much in mind when he entered the grove that spring morning in 1820. But so, too, did the Father of Lights, who, “knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth called upon [his] servant Joseph Smith, Jun. and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments.” While the lengthening shadow of worldwide calamities continues to creep over the world, the promise is sure that the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a permanent miracle, a message of lasting good news for all. As an ancient Old Testament prophet phrased it: “For the Lord will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3:31–33). Good will ultimately prevail, and Christ will yet come with healing in his wings. ■

Notes

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “Prepare Yourselves for the Great Day of the Lord,” *BYU Speeches*, 14 April 1981, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/ezra-taft-benson_prepare-great-day-lord/.

2. For the past forty years, the standard work on the First Vision has been Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: The First Vision in Its Historical Context* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971). More recent studies include Steven C. Harper, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: A Guide to the Historical Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), and Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Exploring the First Vision* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2012).

3. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 227.

4. The verb *should* is used in its imperative, prophetic sense as it is regularly used elsewhere in the early sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.
5. *The World Book Dictionary* (Chicago: World Book, 2000), 1:98, s.v. “apostasy.”
6. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 124.
7. Martin Luther, *The Familiar Discourses of Dr. Martin Luther*, comp. Antonius Lauterbach, trans. Henry Bell (London: Sussex Press, 1818), 71.
8. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), flyleaf, 13, 18, 25, 61.
9. Dallin H. Oaks, “Preparation for the Second Coming,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 9–10.
10. Emily Jack, “Diseases: A Brief Guide to Causes, Symptoms, History, and Treatment,” <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4067?style=print>.
11. “Exceptionally Deadly,” *The Economist*, 16 July 2015.
12. Richard H. Steckel, “A History of the Standard of Living in the United States,” uoregon.edu.
13. Myron S. Cohen, Nick Hellmann, Jay A. Levy, Kevin DeCock, and Joep Lange, “The Spread, Treatment, and Prevention of HIV-1: Evolution of a Global Pandemic,” *Journal of Clinical Investigation* 118, no. 4 (April 2008): <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2276790/>. See also *UNAIDS World Aids Day Report* (UNAIDS, 2011), 1–50.
14. <http://www.worldhunger.org/2015-world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics/>.
15. *Pope Francis’ Little Book of Compassion: The Essential Teachings*, comp. Andrea Kirk Assaf (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2017), 88.