

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ROBERT L. MILLET

Robert L. Millet is the Richard L. Evans Professor of Religious Understanding and former dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

The Doctrine and Covenants is a sacred book of scripture that provides literally thousands of answers—answers to questions that have plagued the religious world for centuries. It is a treasure-house of doctrinal understanding.

WHAT IS THE SECOND COMING?

Jesus came to earth as a mortal being in the meridian of time. He taught the gospel, bestowed divine authority, organized the Church, and suffered and died as an infinite atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. He stated that He would come again, would return not as the meek and lowly Nazarene but as the Lord of Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Armies. His Second Coming is thus spoken of as His coming “in glory”—meaning, in His true identity as the God of all creation, the Redeemer and Judge. His Second Coming is described as both *great* and *dreadful*—great for those who have been true and faithful and therefore look forward to His coming, and dreadful to those who have done despite to the spirit of grace and who therefore hope against hope that will never return. The Second Coming in glory is in fact “the end of the world,” meaning the end of worldliness, the destruction of the wicked (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4, 31).¹ At this coming the wicked will be destroyed, the righteous quickened and caught up to meet Him, and the earth trans-

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formed from a fallen teletial orb to a terrestrial, paradisiacal sphere. We will live and move about among new heavens and new earth. The Second Coming will initiate the millennial reign.

DOES CHRIST HIMSELF KNOW WHEN HE WILL COME?

This question comes up occasionally, perhaps because of what is stated in the Gospel of Mark: "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *neither the Son*, but the Father" (Mark 13:31–32; emphasis added). The phrase "neither the Son" is not found in Matthew or Luke. Christ knows all things; He possesses the fulness of the glory and power of the Father (see D&C 93:16–17). Surely He knows when He will return. If He did not know the exact day or time of His return in glory when the Olivet prophecy was uttered, then certainly after His Resurrection and glorification He came to know. It is worth noting that the Joseph Smith Translation of this verse omits the disputed phrase.

WILL ALL BE SURPRISED AND CAUGHT UNAWARE?

The scriptures speak of the Master returning as "a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). It is true that no mortal man has known, does now know, or will yet know the precise day of the Lord's second advent. That is true for prophets and apostles as well as the rank and file of society and the Church. The Lord did not reveal to Joseph Smith the precise day and time of His coming (D&C 130:14–17). Elder M. Russell Ballard, speaking to students at Brigham Young University, recently observed: "I am called as one of the Apostles to be a special witness of Christ in these exciting, trying times, and I do not know when He is going to come again. As far as I know, none of my brethren in the Council of the Twelve or even in the First Presidency knows. And I would humbly suggest to you, my young brothers and sisters, that if we do not know, then *nobody* knows, no matter how compelling their arguments or how reasonable their calculations. . . . I believe when the Lord says 'no man' knows, it really means that no man knows. You should be extremely wary of anyone who claims to be an exception to divine decree."² On the other hand, the Saints are promised that if they are in tune with the Spirit, they can know the time and the season. The Apostle Paul

chose the descriptive analogy of a pregnant woman about to deliver. She may not know the exact hour or day when the birth is to take place, but one thing she knows for sure: it will be soon. It *must* be soon! The impressions and feelings and signs within her own body so testify. In that day, surely the Saints of the Most High, the members of the body of Christ, will be pleading for the Lord to deliver the traveling earth, to bring an end to corruption and degradation, to introduce an era of peace and righteousness. And those who give heed to the words of scripture, and especially to the living oracles, will stand as the “children of light, and the children of the day,” those who “are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:2–5). In a modern revelation the Savior declared: “And again, verily I say unto you, the coming of the Lord draweth nigh, and *it overtaketh the world as a thief in the night*—therefore, gird up your loins, that you may be the children of light, and that day shall not overtake you as a thief” (D&C 106:4–5; emphasis added).

To certain brethren who would soon be called to the first Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in this dispensation, the Lord said: “And unto you it shall be given to know the signs of the times, and the signs of the coming of the Son of Man” (D&C 68:11). As we move closer to the end of time, we would do well to live in such a manner that we can discern the signs of the times; we would be wise also to keep our eyes fixed and our ears riveted on those called to direct the destiny of this Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith pointed out that a particular man who claimed prophetic powers “has not seen the sign of the Son of Man as foretold by Jesus. Neither has any man, nor will any man, till after the sun shall have been darkened and the moon bathed in blood. For the Lord hath not shown me any such sign, and as the prophet saith, so it must be: ‘Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.’”³

IS IT TRUE THAT NOT EVERYONE WILL KNOW WHEN THE SAVIOR HAS COME?

Once in a while we hear something in the classes of the Church to the effect that not all people will know when the Lord returns. Let us be clear on this matter. There may be some wisdom in speaking of the second *comings* of the Lord Jesus Christ, three of which are pre-

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liminary appearances, or comings, to select groups, and one of which is to the whole world. The Lord will make a preliminary appearance to His temple in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri. This seems to be a private appearance to those holding the keys of power in the earthly kingdom. Elder Orson Pratt, in speaking of this appearance, said: "All of them who are pure in heart will behold the face of the Lord and that too before he comes in his glory in the clouds of heaven, for he will suddenly come to his Temple, and he will purify the sons of Moses and of Aaron, until they shall be prepared to offer in that Temple an offering that shall be acceptable in the sight of the Lord. In doing this, he will purify not only the minds of the Priesthood in that Temple, but he will purify their bodies until they shall be quickened, renewed and strengthened, and they will be partially changed, not to immortality, but changed in part that they can be filled with the power of God, and they can stand in the presence of Jesus, and behold his face in the midst of that Temple."⁴ Charles W. Penrose observed that the Saints "will come to the Temple prepared for him, and his faithful people will behold his face, hear his voice, and gaze upon his glory. From his own lips they will receive further instructions for the development and beautifying of Zion and for the extension and sure stability of his Kingdom."⁵

The Lord will make an appearance at Adam-ondi-Ahman, "the place where Adam shall come to visit his people, or the Ancient of Days shall sit" (D&C 116). This grand council will be a large sacrament meeting, a time when the Son of Man will partake of the fruit of the vine once more with His earthly friends. And who will be in attendance? The revelations specify Moroni, Elias, John the Baptist, Elijah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Adam, Peter, James, John, "and also," the Savior clarifies, "all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world" (D&C 27:5-14), multitudes of faithful Saints from the beginning of time to the end. This will be a private appearance in that it will be unknown to the world. It will be a leadership meeting, a time of accounting, an accounting for priesthood stewardships. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that Adam, the Ancient of Days, "will call his children together and hold a council with them to prepare them for the coming of the Son of Man. He (Adam) is the father of the human family, and presides over the spirits of all men, and all that have had the keys must stand before him in this grand council.

. . . The Son of Man stands before him, and there is given him [Christ] glory and dominion. Adam delivers up his stewardship to Christ, that which was delivered to him as holding the keys of the universe, but retains his standing as head of the human family.”⁶

President Joseph Fielding Smith observed: “This gathering of the children of Adam, where the thousands, and the tens of thousands are assembled in the judgment, will be one of the greatest events this troubled earth has ever seen. At this conference, or council, all who have held keys of dispensations will render a report of their stewardship. . . . We do not know how long a time this gathering will be in session, or how many sessions will be held at this grand council. It is sufficient to know that it is a gathering of the Priesthood of God from the beginning of this earth down to the present, in which reports will be made and all who have been given dispensations (talents) will declare their keys and ministry and make report of their stewardship according to the parable [the parable of the talents; Matthew 25]. Judgment will be rendered unto them for this is a gathering of the righteous. . . . It is not to be the judgment of the wicked. . . . This will precede the great day of destruction of the wicked and will be the preparation for the Millennial Reign.”⁷

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has likewise written: “Every prophet, apostle, president, bishop, elder, or church officer of whatever degree—all who have held keys shall stand before him who holds all of the keys. They will then be called upon to give an account of their stewardships and to report how and in what manner they have used their priesthood and their keys for the salvation of men within the sphere of their appointments. . . . There will be a great hierarchy of judges in that great day, of whom Adam, under Christ, will be the chief of all. Those judges will judge the righteous ones under their jurisdiction, but Christ himself, he alone, will judge the wicked.”⁸

The Savior will appear to the Jews on the Mount of Olives. It will be at the time of the battle of Armageddon, at a time when His people will find themselves with their backs against the wall. During this period, two prophets will stand before the wicked in the streets of Jerusalem and call the people to repentance. These men, presumably members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or the First Presidency—holding the sealing powers—“are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration,” and

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will “prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem in the land of their fathers” (D&C 77:15; see also Revelation 11:4–6).⁹ They will be put to death by their enemies, their bodies will lie in the streets for three and a half days, and they will then be resurrected before the assembled multitude (Revelation 11:7–12).

At about this time, the Savior will come to the rescue of His covenant people: “Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south” (Zechariah 14:3–4). Then shall come to pass the conversion of a nation in a day, the acceptance of the Redeemer by the Jews. “And then shall the Jews look upon me and say: What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet? Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God. And then shall they weep because of their iniquities; then shall they lament because they persecuted their king” (D&C 45:51–53; see also Zechariah 12:10; 13:6).

Finally, and we would assume not far removed in time from His appearance on the Mount of Olives, is Christ’s coming in glory. He comes in glory. All shall know. “Be not deceived,” the Master warned in a modern revelation, “but continue in steadfastness, looking forth for the heavens to be shaken, and the earth to tremble and to reel to and fro as a drunken man, and for the valleys to be exalted, and for the mountains to be made low, and for the rough places to become smooth” (D&C 49:23). “Wherefore, prepare ye for the coming of the Bridegroom; go ye, go ye out to meet him. For behold, he shall stand upon the mount of Olivet, and upon the mighty ocean, even the great deep, and upon the islands of the sea, and upon the land of Zion. And he shall utter his voice out of Zion, and he shall speak from Jerusalem, and *his voice shall be heard among all people*; and it shall be a voice as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a

great thunder, which shall break down the mountains, and the valleys shall not be found" (D&C 133:19–22; emphasis added).

WHEN THE LORD COMES, WHO WILL COME WITH HIM?

The righteous dead from ages past—those who qualify for the First Resurrection, specifically those who died true in the faith since the time the First Resurrection was initiated in the meridian of time—will come with the Savior when He returns in glory. The Prophet Joseph corrected a passage in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians as follows: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that they who are alive at the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent [precede] them who remain unto the coming of the Lord, who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then they who are alive, shall be caught up together into the clouds with them who remain, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we be ever with the Lord" (Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17).

WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE LIVING ON EARTH WHEN HE COMES?

Those who are of at least a terrestrial level of righteousness shall continue to live as mortals after the Lord returns. The Saints shall live to "the age of man"—in the words of Isaiah, the age of one hundred (see Isaiah 65:20)—and will then pass through death and be changed instantly from mortality to resurrected immortality. "Yea, and blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, . . . when the Lord shall come, and old things shall pass away, and all things become new, they shall rise from the dead and shall not die after, and shall receive an inheritance before the Lord, in the holy city. And he that liveth when the Lord shall come, and hath kept the faith, blessed is he; nevertheless, it is appointed to him to die at the age of man. Wherefore, children shall grow up until they become old"—that is, no longer shall little ones die before the time of accountability; "old men shall die; but they shall not sleep in the dust, but they shall be changed in the twinkling

of an eye" (D&C 63:49–51). President Joseph Fielding Smith pointed out that "the inhabitants of the earth will have a sort of translation. They will be transferred to a condition of the terrestrial order, and so they will have power over disease and they will have power to live until they get a certain age and then they will die."¹⁰

IS THE BURNING SPOKEN OF IN SCRIPTURE LITERAL?

Malachi prophesied that "the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Malachi 4:1; see also 2 Nephi 26:4; D&C 133:64). In 1823 Moroni quoted this passage differently to the seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith: "And all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble; for *they that come* shall burn them, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Joseph Smith—History 1:37; emphasis added). In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord of Armies declares: "For the hour is nigh and the day soon at hand when the earth is ripe; and all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and *I will burn them up*, saith the Lord of Hosts, that wickedness shall not be upon the earth" (D&C 29:9; emphasis added), "for after today cometh the burning," a day wherein "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; emphasis added).

The Second Coming of Christ in glory is a day in which "every corruptible thing, both of man, or of the beasts of the field, or of the fowls of the heavens, or of the fish of the sea, that dwells upon all the face of the earth, shall be consumed; and also that of element shall melt with fervent heat; and all things shall become new, that my knowledge and glory may dwell upon all the earth" (D&C 101:24–25; see also 133:41; 2 Peter 3:10). President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: "Somebody said, 'Brother Smith, do you mean to say that it is going to be literal fire?' I said, 'Oh, no, it will not be literal fire any more than it was literal water that covered the earth in the flood.'"¹¹

WHY WILL THE SAVIOR APPEAR IN RED APPAREL?

Red is symbolic of victory—victory over the devil, death, hell, and endless torment. It is the symbol of salvation, of being placed

beyond the power of all one's enemies.¹² Christ's red apparel will also symbolize both aspects of His ministry to fallen humanity—His mercy and His justice. Because He has trodden the winepress alone, “even the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God” (D&C 76:107; 88:106), He has descended below all things and mercifully taken upon Him our stains, our blood, or our sins (see 2 Nephi 9:44; Jacob 1:19; 2:2; Alma 5:22). In addition, He comes in “dyed garments” as the God of justice, even He who has trampled the wicked beneath His feet. “And the Lord shall be red in his apparel, and his garments like him that treadeth in the wine-vat. And so great shall be the glory of his presence that the sun shall hide his face in shame, and the moon shall withhold its light, and the stars shall be hurled from their places. And his voice shall be heard: I have trodden the wine-press alone, and have brought judgment upon all people; and none were with me; and I have trampled them in my fury, and I did tread upon them in mine anger, and their blood have I sprinkled upon my garments, and stained all my raiment; for this was the day of vengeance which was in my heart” (D&C 133:48–51).

WHEN DOES THE MILLENNIUM BEGIN? WHY WILL IT BEGIN?

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ in glory ushers in the Millennium. The Millennium does not begin when Christ comes to His temple in Missouri, when He appears at Adam-ondi-Ahman, or when He stands on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The Millennium will not come because men and women on earth have become noble and good, because Christian charity will have spread across the globe and goodwill is the order of the day. The Millennium will not come because technological advances and medical miracles will have extended human life or because peace treaties among warring nations will have soothed injured feelings and eased political tensions for a time. The Millennium will be brought in by power, by the power of Him who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Satan will be bound by power, and the glory of the Millennium will be maintained by the righteousness of those who are permitted to live on earth (see 1 Nephi 22:15, 26).

WHAT ARE THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES? THE FULNESS OF THE GENTILES?

In the meridian of time, by command of the Savior, the gospel of Jesus Christ was delivered first to the Jews and then later to the Gentiles. In our day, the gospel was delivered first to Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints, those of us who are “identified with the Gentiles” (D&C 109:60), those who are Israelite by descent (see D&C 52:2; 86:8–10) and Gentile by culture. The gospel is given to us, and we bear the responsibility to take the message of the Restoration to the descendants of Lehi and to the Jews (see 1 Nephi 22:7–11). We therefore live in “the times of the Gentiles.” “And when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of my gospel” (D&C 45:28). It is a time, in the words of President Marion G. Romney, in which “in this last dispensation, the gospel is to be preached primarily to the non-Jewish people of the earth.”¹³

In a day yet future, a time when the Gentiles—presumably those outside the Church as well as some from within the fold—sin against the fulness of the gospel and reject its supernal blessings, the Lord will take away these privileges from the Gentile nations and once again make them available primarily to his ancient covenant people (see 3 Nephi 16:10–11). This will be known as the fulfillment, or the “fulness of the times of the Gentiles,” or simply the “fulness of the Gentiles.” Because the people of earth no longer receive the light of gospel fulness and turn their hearts from the Lord because of the precepts of men, “in that generation shall the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (D&C 45:29–30). In the purest sense, this will not take place until Jesus sets His foot upon Olivet and the Jews acknowledge their long-awaited Messiah. Thus the fulness of the Gentiles is millennial.¹⁴

WHAT ARE WE TO EXPECT ABOUT THE RETURN OF THE TEN TRIBES?

As we all know, there have been numerous legends, traditions, vague reminiscences, and a myriad of folktales that deal with the location and eventual return of the ten lost tribes, those from the northern part of Israel who were taken captive by the Assyrians in 721 BC. During my youth in the Church, I was brought up to believe a whole host of things: that the lost tribes were in the center of the

earth, on a knob attached to the earth, on another planet, and so forth. Each of these traditions had its own source of authority. Since that time, and particularly since I discovered the Book of Mormon, I have concluded simply that the ten tribes are scattered among the nations, lost as much to their identity as to their whereabouts (see 1 Nephi 22:3–4). Thus it seems to me that the restoration, or gathering, of the ten tribes consists in scattered Israel—descendants of Jacob from such tribes as Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun, and, of course, Joseph—coming to the knowledge of the restored gospel, accepting Christ’s gospel (see 1 Nephi 15:14), coming into the true church and fold of God (see 2 Nephi 9:2), congregating with the faithful, and receiving the ordinances of the house of the Lord.¹⁵ That is to say, the ten tribes will be gathered as all others are gathered—through conversion.

The risen Lord explained to the Nephites that after His Second Coming, once He has begun to dwell on earth with His faithful, “then shall the work of the Father”—the work of the gathering of Israel—“commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem” (3 Nephi 21:25–26). It will commence in the sense that its magnitude will be of such a nature as to cause earlier efforts at gathering to pale into insignificance. The return of the ten tribes is spoken of in modern revelation in majestic symbolism: “And the Lord, even the Savior, shall stand in the midst of his people, and shall reign over all flesh” (D&C 133:25). Further, those who are descendants of the northern tribes shall respond to the gospel message, come under the direction of those prophets or priesthood leaders in their midst, traverse that highway we know as the “way of holiness” (Isaiah 35:8), and eventually participate in those temple ordinances that make of us kings and queens, priests and priestesses before God; they will “fall down and be crowned with glory, even in Zion, by the hands of the servants of the Lord, even the children of Ephraim,” those who are entrusted with the keys of salvation (D&C 133:26–32).¹⁶ In addition to that portion of the record of the ten tribes in our possession that we know as the Doctrine and Covenants—the record of God’s deal-

ings with modern Ephraim—we thrill in the assurance that other sacred volumes chronicling our Redeemer’s ministry to the lost tribes shall come forth during the Millennium (see 2 Nephi 29:13).

MUST EVERY PERSON LIVING ON EARTH HEAR THE GOSPEL BEFORE THE LORD CAN COME?

In November 1831 the early elders of the Church were authorized to preach the gospel: “Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, acting in the authority which I have given you, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 68:8). “For, verily, the sound must go forth from this place into all the world, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth—the gospel must be preached unto every creature, with signs following them that believe” (D&C 58:64). It is true that every person must have the opportunity to hear the gospel, either here or hereafter. Eventually “the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”¹⁷

Not all, however, will have that privilege as mortals, and not all will have that privilege before the Second Coming. Jesus had spoken to the Twelve about the last days as follows: “And again, this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come, or the destruction of the wicked” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31). As we have seen, the great day of gathering—the day when millions upon millions will come into the true fold of God—is millennial. But there is more. Elder McConkie explained that before the Lord Jesus can return in glory, two things must take place: “The first . . . is that the restored gospel is to be preached in every nation and among every people and to those speaking every tongue. Now there is one immediate reaction to this: Can’t we go on the radio and preach the gospel to . . . the nations of the earth? We certainly can, but that would have very little bearing on the real meaning of the revelation that says we must preach it to every nation, kindred, and people. The reason is the second thing that must occur before the Second Coming: The revelations expressly, specifically, and pointedly say that when the Lord comes

the second time to usher in the millennial era, he is going to find, in every nation, kindred, and tongue, and among every people, those who are kings and queens, who will live and reign a thousand years on earth (Revelation 5:9–10).

“That is a significant statement that puts in perspective the preaching of the gospel to the world. Yes, we can go on the radio; we can proclaim the gospel to all nations by television or other modern invention. And to the extent that we can do it, so be it, it’s all to the good. But that’s not what is involved. What is involved is that the elders of Israel, holding the priesthood, in person have to trod the soil, eat in the homes of the people, figuratively put their arms around the honest in heart, feed them the gospel, and baptize them and confer the Holy Ghost upon them. Then these people have to progress and advance, and grow in the things of the Spirit, until they can go to the house of the Lord, until they can enter a temple of God and receive the blessings of the priesthood, out of which come the rewards of being kings and priests.

“The way we become kings and priests is through the ordinances of the house of the Lord. It is through celestial marriage; it is through the guarantees of eternal life and eternal increase that are reserved for the Saints in the temples. The promise is that when the Lord comes He is going to find in every nation and kindred, among every people speaking every tongue, those who will, at that hour of his coming, have already become kings and priests. . . . All this is to precede the Second Coming of the Son of Man.”¹⁸

The revelations declare: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight, for the hour of his coming is nigh—when the Lamb shall stand upon Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having his father’s name written on their foreheads” (D&C 133:17–18). This group of 144,000 are high priests after the holy order of God, men who have themselves received the promise of exaltation and godhood and whose mission it is to bring as many as will come into the Church of the Firstborn, into that inner circle of men and women who have passed the tests of mortality and have become the elect of God.¹⁹ I have often thought that the 144,000 high priests called in the last days to bring men and women into the Church of the Firstborn (see D&C 77:11) is a symbolic reference: in that day of division, of unspeakable wickedness and con-

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summate righteousness, temples will dot the earth, be accessible to the Lord's covenant people everywhere, and thus the fulness of those temple blessings will be sealed upon millions of the faithful Saints worldwide by those holding those transcendent powers.

IS THE TIME OF CHRIST'S COMING FIXED, OR MAY IT BE ALTERED BY US?

We hear once in a while the plea for us as Latter-day Saints to repent and improve so that the Lord may come quickly to us. It is true that we are under obligation to be faithful to our covenants, to deny ourselves of every worldly lust and cross ourselves as to the pulls of a decaying society, and to live as becometh Saints. It is true that our labor is to build up the kingdom of God and establish Zion, all in preparation for the Second Coming. The full redemption of Zion depends on the urgency with which the Saints of the Most High pursue their sacred duty. Further, our righteous obsession to be a light to a darkened world assures our own readiness to receive the Savior. But the time of His coming is a constant, not a variable. It may not be postponed because of the Saints' tardiness or sloth any more than it can be hastened through a burst of goodness. The Father and the Son know when the King of Zion (see Moses 7:53) shall return to earth to assume the scepter and to preside over the kingdom of God. As was the case with His first coming to earth in the meridian of time, so it is in regard to His Second Coming. The Nephite prophets, for example, did not encourage the people to be faithful so that the Lord could come; rather, they stated forthrightly that in six hundred years He would come (see, for example, 1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19)—ready or not! It will be a time. It will be a specific day, a designated hour. That day and that hour are known. The time is set. It is fixed.²⁰

HOW CAN WE KNOW WHO ARE FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS?

We must keep our eyes fixed on those charged with the direction of this Church, the prophets, seers, and revelators of our day. What they stress in their instruction to us should be what we stress. Any who come before the Saints claiming some special insight, gift, training, or commission to elucidate detail concerning the signs of the

times beyond that which the Brethren have set forth is suspect, is running before his or her leaders. Their teachings are not to be trusted or received. Truly, "it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church" (D&C 42:11).

With the exception of those few deluded persons who claim to be Jesus, when we speak of false Christs we speak not so much of individuals as of false spirits, false doctrines, false systems of salvation. Latter-day Saints who "stick with the Brethren," who study and teach from the conference reports, the official pronouncements and proclamations, and the monthly First Presidency messages in the *Ensign*—these are they who treasure up the word of the Lord, who will not be deceived or led astray at the last day (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37). President Boyd K. Packer declared: "There are some among us now who have *not* been regularly ordained by the heads of the Church and who tell of impending political and economic chaos, the end of the world. . . . Those deceivers say that the Brethren do not know what is going on in the world or that the Brethren approve of their teaching but do not wish to speak of it over the pulpit. Neither is true. The Brethren, by virtue of traveling constantly everywhere on earth, certainly know what is going on, and by virtue of prophetic insight are able to read the signs of the times."²¹

WHAT ARE THE BEST SOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE EVENTS INCIDENT TO THE SAVIOR'S COMING?

At the October 1972 and April 1973 conferences of the Church, President Harold B. Lee warned the Latter-day Saints about what he called "loose writings" by members of the Church in regard to the signs of the times. "Are you . . . aware of the fact," President Lee inquired, "that we need no such publications to be forewarned, if we were only conversant with what the scriptures have already spoken to us in plainness?" He then provided what he termed "the sure word of prophecy on which [we] should rely for [our] guide instead of these strange sources." He instructed the Saints to read the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 24 (what we have in the Pearl of Great Price as Joseph Smith—Matthew), and also sections 38, 45, 101, and

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133 of the Doctrine and Covenants.²² It is of interest to me that President Lee cited primarily the revelations of the Restoration. He did not refer the Church to Isaiah or Ezekiel or Daniel or Revelation. In 1981 President Romney explained: "In each dispensation, . . . the Lord has revealed anew the principles of the gospel. So that while the records of past dispensations, insofar as they are uncorrupted, testify to the truths of the gospel, still each dispensation has had revealed in its day sufficient truth to guide the people of the new dispensation, independent of the records of the past.

"I do not wish to discredit in any manner the records we have of the truths revealed by the Lord in past dispensations. What I now desire is to impress upon our minds that the gospel, as revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, is complete and is the word direct from heaven to this dispensation. It alone is sufficient to teach us the principles of eternal life. It is the truth revealed, the commandments given in this dispensation through modern prophets by which we are to be governed."²³

Even given the divine direction of living oracles and the words of sacred scripture brought forth in this final age, we really cannot plot or calculate the signs of the times or lay out a precise scheme of events. That is, as one Apostle pointed out, "It is not possible for us . . . to specify the exact chronology of all the events that shall attend the Second Coming. Nearly all of the prophetic word relative to our Lord's return links various events together without reference to the order of their occurrence. Indeed, the same scriptural language is often used to describe similar events that will take place at different times."²⁴

CONCLUSION

We obviously could go on and on. But these feeble efforts at providing answers point us to the glorious reality that modern revelation, especially the Doctrine and Covenants, represents, in the language of Parley P. Pratt, "the dawning of a brighter day."²⁵ The Doctrine and Covenants is indeed, as President Ezra Taft Benson explained, the "capstone" of our religion.²⁶ It is truly "the foundation of the Church in these last days, and a benefit to the world, showing that the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of our Savior are again entrusted to man" (D&C 70, headnote).

The early elders of the Church were instructed: “Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come” (D&C 68:6). Answer after answer after divine answer concerning such matters as the divine sonship of Christ, His infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice, the principles of His eternal gospel—these things are made known with great power and persuasion. In addition, the revelations testify—that He will come again to reign among the Saints and to come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world (see D&C 1:36); that He will gather His faithful as a mother hen and enable them to partake of the waters of life (see D&C 10:64–66; 29:2; 33:6); that Satan and the works of Babylon will be destroyed (see D&C 1:16; 19:3; 35:11; 133:14); that this dispensation of the gospel represents His last pruning of the vineyard (see D&C 24:19; 33:2–3; 39:17; 43:28); that the elect in the last days will hear His voice; they will not be asleep because they will be purified (see D&C 35:20–21); that we will have no laws but His laws when He comes; He will be our ruler (see D&C 38:22; 41:4; 58:22); that from the Lord’s perspective, according to His reckoning, His coming is nigh (see D&C 63:53); He comes tomorrow (see D&C 64:24); He comes quickly, suddenly (see D&C 33:18; 35:27; 36:8; 39:24; 41:4; 68:35).

Mine is a certain witness as to the divine calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of the keys of authority that have continued in rightful apostolic succession to our own day. I know as I know that I live that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, in the language of the revelation, “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30). Truly, “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” (D&C 65:2).

That we will follow the Brethren, search the scriptures, pray mightily for discernment and for awareness and understanding of the signs of the times is my hope. That we will be wise, receive the truth, take the Holy Spirit for our guide, and thereby have our lamps filled (see D&C 45:56–57) is my prayer. “Wherefore, be faithful, pray-

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ing always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom—for behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly” (D&C 33:17–18). In harmony with the soul cry of John the Revelator, we exclaim, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 101.
2. M. Russell Ballard, *When Shall These Things Be?* Brigham Young University devotional address, Provo, Utah, March 12, 1996, 2.
3. *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1843, 113.
4. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 15:365–66.
5. *Millennial Star*, September 10, 1859, 582–83.
6. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 157.
7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Progress of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 481–82; see also Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 288–91.
8. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 582, 584.
9. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 3:509.
10. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Signs of the Times* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1942), 42.
11. Smith, *The Signs of the Times*, 41.
12. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 297, 301, 305.
13. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, October 1971, 69.
14. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 241.
15. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 307.
16. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 214–17, 325–26.
17. 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, 1972), 4:540.
18. Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 141–42.
19. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:242–43; 16:325; 18:25.
20. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 26–27, 405.
21. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1992, 102.
22. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1972, 128.

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23. Marion G. Romney, "A Glorious Promise," *Ensign*, January 1981, 2.
24. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 635.
25. *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 1.
26. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 30–31.