# "Wars and Rumors of Wars": A Restoration Perspective

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The present debate over the war in Iraq and the events of September 11, 2001, are tragic reminders of the prophecies concerning "wars and rumors of wars" found throughout scripture (see Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; 1 Nephi 12:2, 21; 14:15–16; 2 Nephi 25:12; D&C 45:26; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:28). The many conflicts in which the world is now engaged remind us of the sobering reality that the future will not be free from terror, destruction, and war. The words of prophets in all ages indicate that such conflicts will continue until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and will also be experienced one last time at the close of the Millennium (see D&C 63:33–36; 88:111–16; Revelation 20:7–8). Although we as Latter-day Saints have been commanded by the Lord to "renounce war and proclaim peace" (D&C 98:16), prophets have instructed us that "peace has departed from the world."[1]

The Bible provides prophetic descriptions of the events of the last days, and important counsel concerning the roles of the individual and government during time of war, but it does not contain definitive direction concerning when war is justified, when it is not, and how peace can be established. While the Bible may at one time have contained such information and direction (see 1 Nephi 13:26–29), in its present form it is often confusing to novices and biblical scholars alike concerning the many questions associated with warfare.

Although decisions about war have been and will always be difficult, as Latter-day Saints we have the advantage of additional scripture, particularly the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the

Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and the words of living prophets, to assist us as we try to understand the complicated issues related to war. More important, in addition to helping us understand the many questions associated with war, prophets have instructed us on how to obtain peace.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, in the general conference following the terrorist attacks of September 11, promised that "God our Eternal Father will watch over this nation and all of the civilized world who look to Him. He has declared, 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord' (Psalm 33:12). Our safety lies in repentance. Our strength comes of obedience to the commandments of God."[2] President Hinckley's words remind us that, as important as prudent preparations are, the ultimate answer to the question of war and the anxiety that accompanies it is not found in military might, complex negotiations, increased economic aid, or a United Nations resolution, but is found in reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even before Adam and Eve entered Eden, war troubled mankind's existence. Satan rebelled against the plan of God, and a premortal battle ensued among the spirit children of God (see Revelation 12:7; D&C 29:36–37; Moses 4:1–4). Lucifer and his followers were cast out of God's presence, and those who chose to follow God were given the opportunity to come to earth as mortals. Mortal beings, though each had initially chosen to support God's plan, were once again enmeshed in conflict. In the fourth chapter of Genesis, we read the tragic account of Cain killing his brother Abel (see Genesis 4:8), and soon thereafter "the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11). Few who come to earth can avoid the effects of war's devastation.

The Book of Mormon provides similar and even more detailed descriptions of the tragedy of war. Despite Nephi's efforts to promote peace with his brothers, he was not able to reconcile the serious differences that existed among them, and the Lord commanded him to "depart from them [Laman and Lemuel] and flee into the wilderness" (2 Nephi 5:5). The Lord then directed Nephi to craft swords for the protection of his people because their lives were in jeopardy (see 2 Nephi 5:14). Wars and contentions between the Nephites and Lamanites continued almost constantly until the coming of the Savior to America (see Enos; Omni; Mosiah 19–23; Alma 2–3, 16, 24–25, 28, 43–62; Helaman 1–4, 6, 10–11; 3 Nephi 1–4, 6–7). Even the recorded culmination of the Jaredites' history did not divert Lehi's descendants from their own march to destruction (see Ether 7–11, 13–15). Peace prevailed among the people for some two hundred years following the

Savior's ministry, but thereafter the scriptural record is rife with tension and repeated violence between and among the Nephites and the Lamanites (see Mormon 1–6; Moroni 9). In fact, chapters that speak about conflict or warfare comprise nearly one quarter (61 of the 249 chapters) of the entire Book of Mormon. Recognizing that this book of scripture was prepared and reserved for our day, we should not take lightly the symbolism of the age-old battle between good and evil or the practical lessons that it teaches about human conflict and its avoidance.

The greatest problem we face in trying to justify or condemn war is that the scriptures contain diverse teachings about the morality of conflict. That being the case, it is a simple matter to fall into partisan scholarship and to write with an agenda, quoting this and that verse of scripture or this and that authority as having declared the final word on the subject. The task becomes more difficult as we try to bring all the sources together under the same roof. To quote one authoritative source and consider the matter closed is not enough. We must struggle through both sides. We must seek to understand teachings that seem to contradict our fundamental convictions and then attempt to reconcile the two.

Another key, perhaps even more important than providing a balanced view of the various arguments for and against war, is to correctly understand the context in which the various statements on war have been given. Modern and ancient prophets often write to their times, to their people, and to their particular situations. They have had to speak specifically during times of justifiable conflict, times of questionable conflict, and times of clearly immoral conflict. At other times, the Lord has meant for their words to apply universally. Unless we read the prophets within appropriate contexts, they might seem to be contradictory.

Consequently, one concern for correctly combining all the information is the need to identify when prophets attempted to write categorically of war and when they did not. Many of the popular references about war are parenthetical or secondary to the main theme of the discourse. At other times, prophets have given pointed counsel about one aspect of war while intentionally leaving out a number of others. With these considerations in mind, then, we find the most valuable references where the prophet's intent has clearly been to comment generally on war.

This article will treat four distinct themes from scripture and from latter-day prophets. While focusing on several broad themes cannot do the issue justice, such categorization will provide the reader with information to synthesize, taking perspective from each theme and

reconciling the views for the most appropriate response to instances of war. Coupled with the Lord's own statements on the matter and with the Spirit's influence, we can choose to act in informed and congruent ways. Also, by understanding these different aspects of the Lord's discourse on war, we will better comprehend the various contexts in which the restored gospel serves as a critique of war. The four themes we propose are (1) the origins of war, (2) God's condemnation of war, (3) God's limited justification for war, and (4) overcoming war and pronouncing peace in God's way.

## The Origins of War

President David O. McKay echoed the Apostle James (see James 4:1–2) when he stated, "The seeds of war lie in man's nature. These seeds germinate at the first natural urge for self-preservation, self-perpetuation or a desire for conquest."[3] Mankind's tendency has often been to accuse God for the suffering occasioned by war, when war is actually a ruinous extension of the natural man. In fact, King Benjamin's



*"I Even Remain Alone,"* by Walter Rane

description of one who "becometh a saint," the opposite of "the natural man" (Mosiah 3:19), includes characteristics that, if practiced by all, would put a definitive end to human conflict. It is difficult to imagine a man or woman who fully embodies being "submissive, meek, humble, patient, [and being] full of love" (Mosiah 3:19), harming or even quarreling with a neighbor. Elder Russell M. Nelson explained that "peace can prevail only when that natural inclination to fight is superseded by self-determination to live on a loftier level."[4]

One of Satan's most subtle influences is to manipulate mankind, including members of the Church, to blame God for evils that are, in fact, the adversary's handiwork. Many use the existence of war and its accompanying evils to challenge the existence of God. Any loving God, they claim, would have both the power and the inclination to intervene on behalf of the innocent. To these Elder Neal A. Maxwell answers, "Can we presume to lecture the Lord on war? Or dare to use war as an argument against His existence or His Lordship? Do we need to warn Him about how the earth can be destroyed by fire?"[5]

Others falsely reason that the Lord should interfere with our moral agency during times of conflict. They consider the avoidance of suffering to take precedence over God-given choice. Surely the Lord is not pleased with nor indifferent to man's suffering, but even needless suffering cannot jeopardize man's moral agency. Enoch bears record of the Lord's weeping over "the residue of the people," an event that apparently surprised him enough that he asked, "How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?" (Moses 7:28–29). The Lord's plaintive answer speaks volumes about the human situation: "Unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood" (Moses 7:33). Clearly, natural man's disobedience and malice lie at the heart of the age-old problem of war.

On the other side, many use the Lord's "man of war" title (Exodus 15:3) to erroneously conclude that the Lord has brought about or encouraged those wars. It is true that the Lord has, as President Ezra Taft Benson said, "turned disasters—war, occupation, and revolution—into blessings,"[6] but that is not to say He is the source of such evils. We may say, more accurately, that the Lord works to turn evil situations to our good without violating individual agency. When men hate their brothers and act accordingly, God allows their choices to occur while eternally promising eventual relief for the righteous. Though such promises may seem shallow or facile without eternal perspective, they can provide

much needed hope to those who are in the midst of conflict.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said of the time to precede the Second Coming: "Truly, in the last days men 'shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine.' (Isaiah 49:26) All these things have begun; they are now underway, and they shall increase in intensity and in horror until that dreadful day when the God of battles himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the trump of the archangel."[7] Tempting as it may be for some to dismiss such language, the scriptures do not equivocate about the reality of armed conflict to precede the Second Coming. A few lines later, Elder McConkie outlines a basic truth: "It seems clear that we are here in mortality to gain experiences that could not be gained in any other way."[8] The need for opposition, earthly experience, and the opportunity to exercise our moral agency does not necessarily explain all the perplexities of war, but it does provide perspective as to why God may allow conflict even when He does not desire it.

Elder B. H. Roberts writes similarly about the origins of war and further explains an exception to the rule, recognizing times when the Lord allows war and other evil to exist as a response to the collective misuse of agency:

> I know there is one passage that, perhaps, might be quoted against my contention, that God does not create evil. It occurs in the writings of Isaiah, it is said—and it is the only place in Scripture where it is said, so far as I have been able to learn— "I [God] make peace," and "I create evil." "I create"—what? "Evil," such as the opposite of peace, such as war, famine, and the like. But to what end does God cause war, or famine? For corrective purposes only, to chastise men, to bring them to a realization of wrong-doing, or national transgression. For these ends God has, sometimes, brought to pass these conditions that we recognize as evil. But that class of evils is quite a distinct thing from moral [individual] evil.[9]

Apparently, Elder Roberts wants us to understand that while God may occasionally allow a war for corrective purposes, He does so only because the people have sinned, calling God's punishment upon themselves. An historical example of this shows in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. God had given ample opportunity for mercy, sending Jesus Christ Himself to preach repentance to the Jews; but they did not listen, so the Lord allowed the Romans to conquer them. King Nebuchadnezzar and other pagan rulers from the time of the Old Testament served as the instruments of the Lord, waging war to humble Israel for its unrighteousness (see 1 Kings 11:14; 1 Chronicles 6:15; 2 Chronicles 36:14–17). Consider Mormon's commentary on the

ebb and flow of the Nephites' interaction with the Gadianton robbers: "Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror . . . they will not remember him" (Helaman 12:3). Understanding such instances invites us to carefully consider the origins of our modern conflicts and what part the Lord may be playing in each.

As we recognize this exception, clearly most wars do result from human misuse of moral agency. Elder James E. Talmage wrote these comments about the First World War: "I cannot look upon the frightful carnage and inhuman atrocities of the world war as a manifestation of the direct will of God. This dreadful conflict was brought on through lust of power and greed of gain. It sprang from an unholy determination to rob mankind of God-given rights, and to subject the race to autocratic domination. It is a repetition of the issue at stake in the primeval struggle, when Michael, the champion of free agency, led his hosts against Lucifer's myrmidons [unscrupulously devoted followers], who sought to rule by might."[10]

President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and subsequent military action, stated, "Now, all of us know that war, contention, hatred, suffering of the worst kind are not new. The conflict we see today is but another expression of the conflict that began with the War in Heaven."[11] He repeated the counsel during the American invasion of Iraq in April 2003: "War, of course, is not new. The weapons change. The ability to kill and destroy is constantly refined. But there has been conflict throughout the ages over essentially the same issues."[12]

Considering war in this light—as a fundamental misuse of agency and an affair inspired by the devil—leads us to see why the Lord condemns war so strongly and why we, accordingly, should consider it with the same sorrow as our Heavenly Father.

## God's Condemnation of War

President Spencer W. Kimball sharply rebuked those with mean-spirited attitudes that run contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ when he said: "Warlike people pervert patriotism. We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner

of Satan's counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior's teaching."[13] We accept that the Lord allows war to happen and even uses war occasionally for His purposes, but our reactions to the enemy often lead to serious sin. President James E. Faust once counseled, "Your criticism may be worse than the conduct you are trying to correct."[14] By understanding first that the Lord abhors war and its attendant evils, we will be much less accepting of hateful behavior, especially from ourselves. Men such as Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni are important examples of men who were willing to "defend [their] families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:47), but who did not "delight in bloodshed" (Alma 48:11). These were men who fought for right causes but who also fought reluctantly, saddened by the necessity of martial defense.

A First Presidency message issued in October 1939—following the German invasion of Poland that marked the beginning of World War II—states, "We condemn all war's foul brood—avarice, greed, misery, want, disease, cruelty, hate, inhumanity, savagery, death."[15] The list leaves no room for any misplaced admiration of war, and it supports the notion that the Lord Himself condemns war and all its subordinate evils. He may regretfully allow war, but He absolutely prefers peaceful means. Another First Presidency message issued in April 1942—following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States' subsequent entry into World War II—states unequivocally, "The Church is and must be against war. The Church itself cannot wage war, unless and until the Lord shall issue new commands. It cannot regard war as a righteous means of settling international disputes; these should and could be settled—the nations agreeing—by peaceful negotiation and adjustment."[16] It is easy to glorify war, the groups that wage it, and the motives that drive it. But the Lord has condemned it consistently, especially in the latter days as it has increased in intensity and scope. The twentieth century saw more than ninety-eight million people killed as a result of war, "a number which is more than six times that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries *combined*!"[17] Never has the world seen so many killed and affected by war as in the last century, when not a single generation escaped its ravages.

As a part of our responsibility to "[count] the cost" (see Luke 14:28), the Lord would have us remember the real cost of what happens when "nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (see Matthew 24:7). With each bomb that falls or each city that is taken, do we consider the innocent lives that are affected? Do we see them as the Lord sees them, many of them innocent of any serious offense? Elder McConkie has characterized war as "the crowning evil

on earth,"[18] for of the many evils and sins that we find close to home, war makes use of them all, amplifying and extending them throughout its sphere.

## God's Limited Justification for War

Despite the Lord's constant counsel against war and the similarly constant call for peace, times arise when waging war becomes necessary. Speaking to the Saints in general conference in April 2003, President Hinckley said, "There are times and circumstances when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty, and against tyranny, threat, and oppression."[19] Captain Moroni said similar things to a similar audience (see Alma 46:12–14). Appropriate justification is the most difficult part of any gospel study of war. The Lord has revealed criteria, admonishing that the guidelines be carefully followed. After stating that "war is incompatible with Christ's teachings," and that "it is vain to attempt to reconcile war with true Christianity," President David O. McKay went on to outline the Lord's requirements for engaging in war:

> Notwithstanding all this, I still say that there are conditions when entrance into war is justifiable, and when a Christian nation may, without violation of principles, take up arms against an opposing force. . . .
>
> There [is no] justifiable cause found in a desire or even a need for territorial expansion. . . .
>
> Nor is war justified in an attempt to enforce a new order of government . . . however better the government . . . may be. . . .
>
> There are, however, two conditions which may justify a truly Christian man to enter—mind you, I say enter, not begin—a war: (1) An attempt to dominate and to deprive another of his free agency, and (2) Loyalty to his country. Possibly there is a third—defense of a weak nation that is being unjustly crushed by a strong, ruthless one.[20]

President McKay is simply restating principles that Restoration scriptures clearly set forth. Because the Book of Mormon was written for our day, the clarification it provides on the morality of war is invaluable. Book of Mormon prophets practiced and preached correct principles for Latter-day Saints. Their examples define when the Lord allows His people to fight "as if with the strength of God" (see Alma 56:56). Likewise, the Doctrine and Covenants, given specifically for the instruction of the Latter-day Saints, provides specific counsel about when the Lord will "justify them in going out to battle" (D&C 98:36).

The principle of justified war is repeated throughout the Book of

Mormon, but one of the most striking examples comes from Mormon's description of the battle between Captain Moroni's forces and the Lamanites led by Zerahemnah: "The Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion" (Alma 43:46–47).

This Book of Mormon passage and the teachings of President McKay go hand in hand. Both teach that defense against unrighteous domination is acceptable and even necessary in the Lord's plan. Similarly, Elder B. H. Roberts taught that while peace is desirable, some things are more important than peace. Justice is one of these, for without justice there can be no enduring peace. The deprivation of the God-given rights of life and liberty is worse than war with its attendant evils.[21]

In any discussion about war, it is imperative to recognize the different motives of those who engage in conflict. Elder Orson F. Whitney said, "Some wars are righteous and just; others wrong and unjust. All depends upon the purpose for which they are waged, and whether or not the Lord sanctions them."[22] Again, this position does not serve to excuse all wars but shows a legitimate distinction between the two types: righteous and unrighteous (see Alma 43:30; Alma 46). Elder Whitney goes on to say that many were engaged righteously in the premortal war against the dragon and that "the conduct of those who make such wars necessary, is not to be compared with the acts of those who rise up to vindicate right and vanquish wrong."[23] This is not to suggest that every war has a righteous and an unrighteous side. It is entirely possible, and even common, to find conflicts where neither side can righteously claim justifications for involvement.

Almost as important as understanding the motives behind war is acknowledging that nations, not individuals, must declare, prosecute, and end wars. The scriptures, and the writings of our latter-day prophets, clearly speak of nations—not their respective constituents—as the only legitimate actors in the martial sphere. The New Testament teaches that we are to "submit [ourselves] to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them *that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers*, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:13–14; emphasis added). According to the Lord's criteria, sovereign nations exist and

act as permitted by God, and individual citizens are obliged by their very citizenship to obey their rulers (see Articles of Faith 1:12). President Hinckley declared emphatically, "I believe that God will not hold men and women in uniform responsible as agents of their government in carrying forward that which they are legally obligated to do."[24] In the end, governments are responsible for waging war, and individuals are responsible for their own conduct within those wars.

Scripture also contains prophecies and descriptions of many of the wars in which the world has been engaged. In 1 Nephi 13, more than two thousand years before the Founding Fathers gathered in Philadelphia, the Lord described these patriots to the ancient prophet Nephi: "The power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle. . . . [They] were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations" (1 Nephi 13:18–19). President Brigham Young also said of the American Revolution, "[The Almighty] moved upon the signers of the Declaration of Independence; and he moved upon Washington to fight and conquer."[25] President Hinckley, in the October 2001 general conference, said of the then-beginning Afghanistan conflict, "Those of us who are American citizens stand solidly with the president of our nation. The terrible forces of evil must be confronted and held accountable for their actions. . . . It is the terrorist organizations that must be ferreted out and brought down."[26]

We cannot imply that the Lord uses war as a first option. Indeed, it is a last resort when His purposes require the final, unfortunate recourse. The Lord condones armed conflict when the cause is just, for, as Elder John A. Widtsoe said, "When human rights and freedom, the plan of salvation itself, are the issues, the raging battle becomes the battle of the Lord."[27] It always has been and always will be the priority of the Lord to protect human agency, and as a last resort, He will use warfare to bring about His purposes.

Most dangerous in this matter of justifying war is the potential for misuse of even the appropriate criteria outlined earlier by President McKay. Few armies in any century, and especially the twentieth, have gone to war without the conviction that their cause was somehow justifiable and even righteous. *Wehrmacht* soldiers of Hitler's conquering Third Reich wore the motto "Gott mit uns," or "God with us," emblazoned on their belt buckles.[28] Meanwhile, their American opponents had in their pockets coins bearing the motto "In God We Trust." This comparison serves as an important reminder that good people can be deceived, and that Latter-day Saints in positions of authority along

with the general Church body should rely much more on the Lord's counsel through His prophets than on human or "official" reasoning about the ethics of any given conflict.

Many argue that the Lord *never* justifies war. They cite New Testament teachings, often saying that going to war flagrantly defies the Savior's commandment to turn the other cheek (see Matthew 5:39). Elder Widtsoe said of this: "Contrary as it may be to righteous feeling, in the fight for the right, cannon must often be used to meet cannon. Certainly, every means must be used to protect truth from the domination of untruth. The injunction of the Savior to turn 'the other cheek,' does not mean surrender to untruth, but patience, long suffering, before entering into controversy with one's fellow man."[29]

Elder Widtsoe continues by quoting section 98 of the Doctrine and Covenants, perhaps the most detailed scriptural treatment on the subject of war. In that section, the Lord says that we should "renounce war and proclaim peace" (v. 16); that we must bear patiently when enemies smite us the first, second, and third times (see vv. 23–26); that if we will spare our enemies, it will be rewarded as righteousness (see v. 30); that we "should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, *save* . . . the Lord commanded" (v. 33; emphasis added); and that we should "first lift a standard of peace" (v. 34). If, after all these requirements are met, the other side does not accept the offering of peace, "then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people" (v. 36). Even such a brief look at section 98 is enough to convince everyone that though the Lord does justify battle, He does not do so lightly. War is the opposite of peace, and Elder Ezra Taft Benson said that "the only real peace—the one most of us think about when we use the term—is a peace with freedom. A nation that is not willing, if necessary, to face the rigors of war to defend its real peace-in-freedom is doomed to lose both its freedom and its peace! These are the hard facts of life. We may not like them, but until we live in a far better world than exists today, we must face up to them squarely and courageously."[30] The Lord weeps at our conflicts and loves His children on both sides, but until that "far better world" comes, war is occasionally necessary. For those wars that currently rage, we could pray with President Hinckley for "an end that will result in a better life for all concerned."[31]

### Overcoming War and Pronouncing Peace in God's Way

In the end, the simple but correct way to banish the specter of war is to live the gospel fully and to proclaim peace. In this section, we will

look at some specific principles that will promote peace in the world.

The usual response to war is summed up in President Spencer W. Kimball's words from before: "When threatened, we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan's counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior's teaching."[32] Humans often make the fundamental mistake of becoming antienemy first, a natural-man reaction. It is man's survival instinct that values one's own life above anything else. The fastest, surest way to preserve life is to eliminate the threatening party. Simple? Yes. Righteous? No.

The Lord's answer to the problem is also simple, but we need to move beyond the natural man to find its merit. Being "pro-kingdom of God" is what the Anti-Nephi-Lehies did in response to Lamanite aggression—with startling results. Having repented of their lust for blood, they feared to jeopardize their standing before the Lord by taking up arms against their fellow Lamanites, even when their lives were threatened. "And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin" (Alma 24:19). After the attacking Lamanites saw this peaceful resolve in their Anti-Nephi-Lehi brothers, a remarkable thing happened—they were converted. "The people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain" (Alma 24:26; emphasis added). In other words, peace proved more powerful than war in the lives of the Lamanites, more compelling than their thirst for revenge. The meek reaction of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies pricked the collective conscience of their Lamanite brothers. Lives were lost, it is true; but souls were gained because of these simple Saints who saw more than an immediate defensive necessity. They saw that some things were more important than their own lives. It is a difficult jump for the natural man, but the Savior required it when He taught, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

The world suggests many solutions to the problem of war: mutual deterrence, economic initiatives, and pacifism are a few. Mutual deterrence, which maintains itself because two technologically matched forces are afraid to attack and destroy each other, rests on tension that is unsustainable over long periods. Economic initiatives are certainly positive, but they do not eliminate the "lusts that war" in mankind's members (see James 4:1). Even pacifism, seemingly the most promising solution to war, proves ultimately ineffective. Elder Neal A. Maxwell teaches that mere pacifism, will ultimately fail for "any people

who are not otherwise righteous and therefore unable to rely on the Lord to bless them."[33] The world's solutions prove ultimately ineffective because they are not ambitious enough to invade the heart, the only place where war can finally be quelled.

President Benson taught that "*only* true repentance [could] stay the destructive forces of war and calamity."[34] That answer seems too simplistic to many. Most consider repentance an impossibly idealistic and eventually ineffective goal. Even members of the Church are tempted to say, "Yes, of course, repentance is the way; however . . ." The "however" clause that we are so quick to add shows where our outlook differs from the Lord's. He recognizes that the whole world will not be converted soon, but His injunction since the time of the New Testament has been, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. . . . Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20; see also Luke 24:47; D&C 18:28; 58:64; and 133:37). He, of course, encourages us to preach His gospel because He knows that "the preaching of the word . . . [has a] more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them" (Alma 31:5).

The Lord is eager to see all His children hear the gospel and live by its principles (see Acts 10:34–35). In both Christ's dispensation and this final dispensation, the Church has held preaching the gospel to all as a primary goal that thereby the Lord's peace might fill the world. President Benson completes his thought by saying, "I fervently hope and pray that a spirit and influence will come into the lives of the Latter-day Saints which will enable them to be a leaven, as it were, to raise the spirituality and faith of the people amongst whom they live."[35] Elder Russell M. Nelson expresses an almost identical sentiment: "We should be personal peacemakers. We should live peacefully—as couples, families, and neighbors. . . . We should bring divine love and revealed doctrines of restored religion to our neighbors and friends."[36] Peace spreads not only through proselytizing and conversion but also by the Saints' righteous political and social influence on their neighbors.

President Spencer W. Kimball asked the specific question, "How can war be eliminated from the earth?" His reply was the same as President Benson's and Elder Nelson's: "*The answer is simple but hard to realize. Let the people of this world live the gospel. Before peace can come to the world around us, it must come into our hearts.*"[37] We will not escape the reality of war in our time, but in every instance we can promote the gospel, allowing the Spirit to work first in us and then on the rest of the world. Now that Latter-day Saints are in nearly every nation, the

Lord's charge to "renounce war" (D&C 98:16) in order to bring peace to the whole earth is much more immediate than it would have been to the small body of American Saints of 1833. Ultimately, as we "cleanse first" that which is inside by coming to a correct understanding of the Lord's will concerning war, the outside world will gradually "be clean also" (Matthew 23:26, see also Alma 60:23).

President George Q. Cannon was perhaps most concise when he said, "War is one of the scourges which man, by his sinfulness, has brought upon himself. There is one way—and but one way—to avert it and that is for the people to obey God's commands, through whose power alone can this and other threatened evils be stayed. This is too simple for the great men of the earth to believe. Like their class in every preceding generation, they view such a proposition as ridiculous and treat it with contempt, practically asserting by their actions that they consider their wisdom and plans as being infinitely superior to the Lord's."[38]

The Latter-day Saints, of all people, should practice the faith in God's promises that is necessary to sustain and protect them in their righteousness. The problem we confront is that most of us have spent so much time worrying about the world's problems in the world's terms that we forget the higher covenants of God, dismissing them as "unrealistic" or "impractical." The human tendency is to assume that humans alone must solve the world's problems. While it is true that we must solve these problems, we are anything but alone in the endeavor. **RE**

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**Notes:**

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, April 1937, 59; see also D&C 1:35.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," *Ensign*, November 2001, 74.

3. David O. McKay, *True to the Faith: From the Sermons and Discourses of David O. McKay*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 276.

4. Russell M. Nelson, "'Blessed Are the Peacemakers,'" Ensign, November 2002, 39.

5. Neal A. Maxwell, *Even As I Am* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 105.

6. Ezra Taft Benson, "A World Message," *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 96.

7. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 374.

8. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 374.

9. B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 2:508.

10. James E. Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Boston: Gorham, 1919), 316–17.

11. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," 74.

12. Gordon B. Hinckley, "War and Peace," *Ensign*, May 2003, 78.

13. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 417.

14. James E. Faust, "The Great Imitator," *Ensign*, November 1987, 35.

15. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 91.

16. Clark, *Messages*, 158.

17. Vincent Kavaloski, "Movement Toward Peace in the Twentieth Century: Internationalists and Transnationalists," *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict*, 1999; http://jspc.library.wisc.edu/issues/1999-2000/article2.html (accessed August 13, 2003).

18. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 370.

19. Hinckley, "War and Peace," 80.

20. McKay, *True to the Faith*, 278–79.

21. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith*, 521.

22. Orson F. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts: A Series of Dissertations on Spiritual, Historical and Philosophic Themes* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1921), 194.

23. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts*, 195.

24. Hinckley, "War and Peace," 80.

25. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young: Second President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 359.

26. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," 72.

27. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations: Aids to Faith in a Modern Day* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 269.

28. Thomas Flynn, in "Letters to the Editor," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2003, 23–24.

29. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 269.

30. Ezra Taft Benson, *An Enemy Hath Done This*, comp. Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Parliament, 1969), 161–62.

31. Hinckley, "War and Peace," 81.

32. Kimball, *Teachings*, 417.

33. Neal A. Maxwell, *Sermons Not Spoken* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 33.

34. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 706; emphasis added.

35. Benson, *Teachings*, 706.

36. Nelson, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*, 41.

37. Kimball, *Teachings*, 414; emphasis added.

38. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Zion's Book Store, 1957), 57.