

## THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16: 1-4

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting, desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites! Ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

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If we are observant at all, we each have our own pet weather signs, which we rely upon as infallible. There are such easy, everyday signs as a south wind, which usually brings warmth; a north wind, which usually brings cold; an east wind which usually brings rain or snow; and a west wind which usually accompanies a storm. There are other signs of cloud formations and sunset or sunrise colors, temperatures, atmospheric pressures, etc., which mean certain things to those who have carefully observed and studied the weather.

The Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day came to him seeking a sign. They were expert weather prophets. They were also familiar with all the old prophecies of Israel. They knew the expectation of a Messiah. Their own books told them that he was to be born of the lineage of David, in Bethlehem of Judaea. Isaiah had told of his birth, and of his works -- how he would release the captive, heal the sick, bring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. The old prophets had even foretold his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on an ass, and his subsequent death and resurrection. But all the contemporaries of Jesus save only a few of his followers, overlooked, ignored, and failed to recognize all the signs of his coming -- the signs which proved his divinity. Even John believed that Christ was the Messiah, not because Jesus told him so, but because of the signs and miracles he saw performed.

Every age of the world's history has had its seekers after signs who could not see the plain signs already before their faces. Noah prophesied 120 years of a flood to come, without getting even casual attention from anyone but his own family. Pharaoh had been warned by Moses, with plenty of signs, about what would happen if he did not let the children of Israel go -- but he failed to heed. The nation of Israel was warned again and again by prophets, who set forth certain signs indicating the coming judgments of God for their wickedness -- but every judgment found the people heedless and unprepared. Is it possible that we still have in the world today, seekers after signs who are overlooking and deliberately refusing to recognize the signs which are already plainly set before them? Is it possible that we today can discern the face of the sky, but cannot tell the signs of the times?

What Latter Day Saints habitually term the "Restoration Movement" had its official beginnings on April 6, 1830, when the church was organized with six members, after a number of religious experiences had come to Joseph Smith. We believe, with all other Protestant groups, that the middle ages saw a great apostasy or departure from the faith which Jesus gave to earth -- an apostasy which resulted in a perversion of doctrine, a changing of sacraments and ordinances, and a loss of priesthood authority. To restore the church of the dark ages to the pristine splendor it had known during the days of the Apostles, was not a work of REFORMATION. Reformation was totally inadequate. A work of RESTORATION was required.

God did not leave us without signs, either concerning the apostasy, or concerning the restoration. It is our purpose in this short talk to examine some of these signs very briefly, simply mentioning them and our belief in them in most cases, because lack of time and space forbids a more exhaustive treatment such as the subject deserves. 2 Thessalonians, Chapter 2, verse 3 and following, plainly indicate an apostasy -- a falling away. Acts 20, verses 28-30 warns against grievous wolves who were to enter the flock at Ephesus soon after Paul's departure. 2 Timothy 4: verses 3 and 4, indicates that a time will come when the church will not endure sound doctrine. There are other "signs" or prophecies of an apostasy, but letting these few suffice for not, we turn to the signs or prophecies of a RESTORATION.

The book of Daniel has enough material in it for a whole year's sermons by one who could correlate sacred and secular history and read the mysteries of Daniel's visions and prophecies. We must be content this evening to mention only a part of one of them. The second chapter of Daniel tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which he could not even remember -- and yet he demanded that his wise men and soothsayers give him an interpretation of it. Daniel saved the lives of these wise men by telling not only the dream, but the interpretation. The king had seen in his dream a great image, whose head was of gold, his breast and arms of silver, his belly and thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Then the king saw a stone cut out of the mountain without human hands, which rolled until it shattered the image, and then grew until it filled the whole earth.

Practically all bible commentators agree that this image represented the kingdoms of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, in the order named. Rome was to be divided into the northern and southern kingdom, as represented by the two legs of the image, and these in turn should divide into ten kingdoms (or toes). Now, verse 44 of this same chapter 2 contains this language: "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." When we consider the historical fact that from 147-6 B.C. when Greece was conquered by Rome, until 1829-30, there was no Grecian kingdom, and consequently the kingdom set up by God without human hands could not have been established during that long period and still be "in the days of these kings," since one was missing, the date 1830 takes on new significance. But about 1830 the independence of Greece was again recognized after more than 19 centuries, and God set up his kingdom by RESTORING his gospel and his church, his priesthood authority upon the earth -- or so we Latter Day Saints believe. Note too the 28th verse of this second chapter of Daniel, which indicates that the events foretold shall come to pass "in the latter days".

Now turn to Micah, fourth chapter, and read the first verse: "But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and people shall flow unto it.." etc. Is it unreasonable to say that in this prophecy, the "Lord's house" that is mentioned, will be his church -- his earthly kingdom?

Turn to Malachi's closing verses, which read, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; And he

shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, (or in other words, turn the hearts of the children to the promises made to their fathers) lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Elijah is also known in the Bible as Elias, and the Jews believed that John the Baptist was

was a reincarnation of Elijah. In fact, Jesus in Matthew 11:14, is reported as saying of John the Baptist, "He was the Elias, who was for to come and prepare all things." The claim and belief of the Latter Day Saints is that John the Baptist, or Elias, or Elijah -- call him as you will -- was one of the angelic messengers through whom the RESTORATION was accomplished. Note, too, that this was not to be at the time of Jesus' first coming alone, but "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord"... or again in the Latter days as it has so often been stated elsewhere.

Now turn with us to the 14th chapter of Revelation, and read a verse which could be said from memory by almost any good Latter Day Saint .. verse 6. "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people....." This event, too, was to be in the final days of the earth's history. The angel was not to bear a new gospel, but an old one which had been lost --the everlasting gospel. This prediction agrees with Jesus' prediction that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness, and then shall the end come." The gospel which would be restored by an angel flying through the midst of heaven was an everlasting gospel; but it had been lost to me, as is indicated by Revelation 13:7, which tells of the beast which was given power "to make war with the saints, AND TO OVERCOME THEM; and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations." It was to break that power, and restore the old, everlasting gospel that the angel of Revelation 14:6 flew through the midst of heaven. Daniel 7:21 indicates also that the saints shall be prevailed against until the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.

The restoration of this everlasting gospel was to be accompanied by other signs, too --including the coming forth of a book. Many times we are asked, "Does the Bible say anything about the Book of Mormon? I can't find anything about it." Yes --the Lord has not left us without some signs there, too. Turn and read carefully the entire 29th chapter of Isaiah. We have not time or space here to do more than call your attention to a few verses this evening. The chapter opens with a warning to Ariel -- or Jerusalem -- the city where David dwelt, that the Lord is going to destroy the city. We read verse 4: "And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy voice shall whisper out of the dust." Note how that phrase, "out of the ground", or "out of the dust" is repeated four times for emphasis. Part of the Book of Mormon is an account of people who fled shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, who kept their records, hid them in the ground in America, from which they spoke later at an appointed time which Isaiah had foretold.

The coming forth of this book was to be accompanied by another event, which was closely related to and connected with it. Read verses 13 and 14, telling of the condition of the people, and what was to happen among them: "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men; Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." We believe that this marvelous work and a wonder which was to be done among men at the time of the coming forth of the book, was the work of RESTORATION of the church of Christ.

Now, WHEN was this to be? Read verse 17, which gives the answer. "Is it not yet a very little while (after the voice is heard out of the dust) and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a

forest." The Book of Mormon was printed in 1829. Up until that time, the curse pronounced upon Lebanon in Deuteronomy 28:24 -- to "make the rain of thy land powder and dust" had held sway. By 1865 or "a very little while" after the words of the book spoke out of the ground, and low out of the dust, the former (fall) and latter (spring) rains had again <sup>been</sup> restored to Palestine after centuries, and many travelers have left record of the marvelous fertility of the soil, which today often produces three crops a year.

But there were still other signs which were to follow the coming forth of this book. Again from the 29th chapter of Isaiah, we read verse 19: "The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." Verse 24 is another interesting one.... "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. The Book of Mormon has brought joy to the meek of earth, to the poor men of earth. It has been the means of correcting many articles of false doctrine among those who erred in spirit, and bringing new understanding of the simple truths of the gospel which are so often incompletely treated in the Bible.

One more prophecy out of the many which we might cite as signs of the times, having to do with the Restoration movement, and we shall close. The second chapter of Zechariah presents an interesting prophecy. The prophet sees an angel with a measuring line in his hand, prepared to measure Jerusalem. Another angel goes forth to meet the first one, and commands, "Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, for the multitude of men and cattle therein." Up until about 1830, Jerusalem had remained within the old town walls. But it was not long after the angel spoke to the young man, Joseph Smith, starting the work of RESTORATION, that Jerusalem began to increase in size. Long since it has passed the old city walls, and today there is much more of the city WITHOUT the wall than within. Again we waited nearly nineteen centuries to see the fulfillment of this prophecy, and the fulfillment came soon after the angel had run to speak to the young man, as Zechariah saw it.

Occasionally, and sometimes more often than thatm we Latter Day Saints meet someone who regards us rather condescendingly, wondering why we don't forget all our nonsense about restoration and new revelation, and go back to the Bible. To any such, we merely point out the signs of the times -- signs which are in your Bible as well as in ours. We believe that they give us a good basis for our belief in the RESTORATION of Christ's church, his everlasting gospel, his kingdom. We have not brought you half the evidence along this line which could be set forth if more time were available. We pray that if our beliefs are reasonable and scriptural, the eyes of sincere and honest-hearted people might be opened to the SIGNS which bear witness of our belief. If the signs be true, they point to a marvelous work and a wonder which will be done in these days that lie ahead. If they be true, and men ignore them as they blindly did in the days of Noah and Pharaoh and Jeremiah and Jesus, only sorrow and woe can be the result.