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“These Are [Your] Days”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

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After reciting a litany of social ills during his time, Mormon consoled his son, Moroni, suggesting that somber world conditions could unnecessarily “weigh thee down” (Moroni 9:25).¹ Today, I write to the young men and women of the Church, lest you be unnecessarily “weighed down.” What follows will include several stern but needed prophecies, yet my comments will mostly be about some very reassuring and positive things. Though I write primarily to the youth of the Church, these assurances have ready application to all gospel teachers who have been entrusted with nurturing this royal generation.

My text is later Nephi’s phrase about his own time and season on earth. As he became less nostalgic for an earlier time and more submissive as to doing his duty in his particular season, he said, “I am consigned that these are my days.” I invite young men and women to do likewise by accepting your discipleship in “these . . . [your] days” (Helaman 7:9) in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Societies, as well as individuals, can “sleep,” cushioned and unawares, especially if sedated by materialism and ease. Those who remain sedated will fail to meet their rendezvous. Events can, however, constitute a wake-up call. In secular history, for instance, the summer and early autumn of 1939 brought the most beautiful weather in memory to England. Haunting remembrances of the terrible devastation of World War I along with the hovering prospects of

a new war made appeasement so attractive to so many. Awakened, however, the British later rallied to their “finest hour.”

Likewise illustrative of that same period is a movie, *Empire of the Sun*. British citizens partied in their upscale, sequestered Shanghai colony largely unaware of impending events—portrayed in the movie as being ominously just over the hill. These events quickly brought on World War II with its grimness, shattering Shanghai’s sequestered “fools’ paradise.”

Lest young disciples, too, “sleep,” I will now note several prophecies, putting your own times in needed perspective.

The last days will certainly be more challenging to young disciples than simply coping with sharp economic downturns. In these, your days, “the love of many shall wax cold,” resulting in various and serious social consequences (Matthew 24:12). Widespread despair caused by iniquity is prophesied, too (see Moroni 10:22). Hence, you young disciples need to keep the two great commandments so that those two lamentable conditions do not characterize you. No wonder personal righteousness is so vital!

If your humility is “because of the word,” it will not be fleeting! In contrast, compelled humility often fades quickly (see Alma 32:13–16).

Various forms of help are near at hand, including many of the Church’s stakes that are to be “for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm”—a real blessing! (D&C 115:6).

Furthermore, in the last days, you will hear “of wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men’s hearts shall fail them” (D&C 45:26; see also 88:92).

Such failing hearts suggest not cardiac arrests but a loss of will and hope. But again, such symptoms need not characterize you, as young disciples, nor your responses to life. You will see such things, of course, but, if managed in a framework of faith, these need not “weigh [you] down.”

Even the prophesied global commotion will include a dimension of redemptive turbulence—for “the kingdom of the devil must shake” in order that some therein will be “stirred up unto repentance” (2 Nephi 28:19). The Lord has His own unique way of getting good things out of bad situations, again and again.

In the days of young disciples, the nations of the earth will be in “distress . . . with perplexity,” foretelling a time of unusual perplexity and bewilderment (Luke 21:25). There will be so many rocks and so many hard places for some to get between. No wonder we

rightly and reassuringly sing, “We thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days.”² Young disciples will have the blessed, ongoing direction of the Lord, through His prophets.

After all, the restored gospel includes the reassuring truths most needed in any age. Proximate and tactical troubles do not, for instance, diminish from such reassuring strategic truths. For example, we all are spirit sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, an encouraging genealogy without temporal and national borders. Additionally, there is a redeeming plan of salvation that provides the ultimate security for the righteous. We likewise can receive the relevant and saving gospel ordinances, another great source of strength for us as individuals!

Meanwhile, don’t worry if you cannot give glib explanations as to the meaning of all things happening to you or around you. The Lord loves you, His children, just as Nephi wrote (see 1 Nephi 11:17). Spiritual certitude can exist amid distress and perplexity. So many positive and prophetic promises are there to help latter-day disciples to cope.

The Lord counseled, “Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along,” and He said comfortingly, “I am in your midst” (D&C 38:7; 78:18). “And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours” (D&C 78:18).

God watches the times and seasons. He knows your individual bearing capacities. In the very, very last days, for example, He will display His mercy in an unusual way: “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:22).

Thus, you can have full faith and trust in God, His mercy and goodness. As the Psalmist wrote, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7).

We should not trust too much in modern weaponry either.

God has transcending capacities: “I am able to do mine own work. . . . I will show unto the children of men that I am able to do mine own work” (2 Nephi 27:20–21). Is He ever! He not only urges us to trust Him but invites us to “[cast] all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Remember, too, that your faith covers all portions of life’s trail. You can have clear faith in the ultimate outcomes at the end of

the trail but still find vexing uncertainties in the steps immediately ahead. The Lord knows the end from the beginning and everything in between. You, however, function in the muddled, mortal middle. The help and comfort of the Holy Ghost are thus much needed for the short run, too!

Hence, you are to proceed with your lives within what is allotted to you, while letting adversity highlight any need for some personal and individual course corrections (see Alma 29:3). Happily, discipleship carries within itself its own witness that it is the true way of living; it is self-reinforcing.

The very first verse of the Book of Mormon is also very instructive concerning another blessing given to most all of you: being “born of goodly parents.” In the unfolding of your lives, you, too, may see “many afflictions,” though having also “been highly favored of the Lord.” You, too, can be blessed by relying on your “knowledge of the goodness . . . of God” (1 Nephi 1:1). By understanding that God is perfect in His goodness, Nephi kept his afflictions and trials in perspective, which is the challenge of discipleship in any age and any circumstance, including “these . . . [your] days.”

Prophetically, President Gordon B. Hinckley said to us at a recent general conference that current events in the world did not constitute the “all-consuming calamity.” President Hinckley also cautioned: “Peace may be denied for a season. . . . We may even be called on to suffer in one way or another. . . . Our safety lies in repentance. Our strength comes of obedience to the commandments of God. . . . This is the crux of the entire matter—obedience to the commandments of God.”³

Given that important, prophetic guidance, consider these earlier assurances from President George Q. Cannon: “God has reserved spirits for this dispensation who have the courage [and] determination to face the world. . . . He has sent these spirits . . . to raise up a seed that will be righteous, and that will honor God, and honor him supremely, and be obedient to him under all circumstances.”⁴

President Cannon’s words contain soaring and positive promises that include you and your generational cohorts! The obedience President Cannon foresaw is a trait that, to the degree there developed, comes with us from the premortal world.

President Lorenzo Snow further reassured us as to such inborn, spiritual momentum, saying: “We are here because we are worthy to be here, and that arises, to a great extent at least, from the fact that we kept our first estate. I believe that when you and I were in

yonder life we made certain covenants . . . that in this life, when we should be permitted to enter it, we would do what we had done in that life—find out the will of God and conform to it.”⁵

We thus come to this life, to borrow Wordsworth’s phrase, “trailing clouds of glory” but also “trailing” traits developed in the premortal world.

Pay heed, therefore, to your inborn spiritual reflexes. Use, even more, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, who can fill you with “hope and perfect love” (Moroni 8:26; emphasis added). He can “enlighten your mind, . . . [and] shall fill your soul with joy” (D&C 11:13; emphasis added). How precious and relevant these gifts of hope, love, and joy are in any age, but certainly in yours, when so many feel unloved, hopeless, and sad!

The foregoing is just a small sample of positive promises! Hence, while we are clearly instructed to notice the leaves on the fig tree to know when “summer is nigh,” we are not to sit around moodily staring at the fig trees (see Matthew 24:32). There is so much work to be done in the Lord’s vast vineyard!

Many in the world, at the time of our “all-consuming calamity,” will be taken by total surprise—like a thief in the night. Others, however, will be “like a woman . . . in travail” where the pains of labor are foretelling, “even [in] the days of sorrow” (D&C 136:35). Still others, the “poor and the meek,” without being preoccupied, will be looking for the signs (see D&C 45:39; 35:15).

Back to where we began. Paul wrote: “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. . . . But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. . . . Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:2–6).

Cautioned the Prophet Joseph Smith, however: “It is a false idea that the Saints will escape all the judgments, . . . for all flesh is subject to suffer, and ‘the righteous shall hardly escape’; still many of the Saints will escape, for the just shall live by faith.”⁶

Amid all this, God, who lives in “eternal now,” is relentlessly and lovingly accomplishing His work, using His unique foreknowledge to ensure that all His purposes will prevail—not just some of them. The Prophet Joseph said: “The great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence, or ever ‘the morning stars sang together’ for joy. . . . He knew . . . of the depth of iniquity that would be connected with the human family, their weakness and strength, their power

and glory, apostasies, their crimes, their righteousness and iniquity. . . . He was acquainted with the situation of all nations and with their destiny. . . . He knows the situation of both the living and the dead, and has made ample provision for their redemption.”⁷

His “ample provision” is more than adequate! But faith is not built in a wordless vacuum. Instead, it takes hearing, pondering, believing, behaving, and likening the word to ourselves! (see 1 Nephi 19:23). The Restoration has given us the vital “key of knowledge” that Jesus said had been lost. It is “the fulness of the scriptures” that includes many plain and precious things to anchor and guide us as disciples (JST, Luke 11:53). “For they will hear my voice . . . and shall not be asleep” (D&C 35:21).

God has a timetable for this planet and for each person: “But all things must come to pass in their time” (D&C 64:32).

Within all of the drama cited are many individual dramas, making it imperative for you to allow the Lord to tutor you amid your discipleship.

Enoch rejoiced, and so can you over the grand, consoling reality regarding God: “And yet thou art there” (Moses 7:30). Privileged Enoch even saw the God of heaven weep! (7:29). Yet Enoch was very discouraged by the gross wickedness anciently. He said he would “refuse to be comforted” (7:44). The mentoring Lord, however, told Enoch to “lift up your heart and be glad; and look” (7:44). Then revealed to Enoch was Jesus’ Atonement in the meridian of time and also the latter-day Restoration. Enoch, who had been so distraught, now rejoiced!

May you not “refuse to be comforted.” Let the revelations comfort you. Let the scriptures refresh you!

Finally, think of some things that are special to your times. How many generations before yours, for instance, have lived in a time when there were so many operating temples? None! How many generations before yours have lived in a time when the gospel was spread to so many nations? None!

You young disciples are so privileged, and though the times in which you will live will be turbulent, there will be glorious accomplishments, too.

Thus, I have desired to place some perspective on these, your days, and I salute you for what your generation and its generational cohorts represent and the divine compliment God has given you by placing you here—now.

Make use of these, “your days,” for as you become more like

Notes

1. This essay is based on a series of firesides delivered in Salt Lake and Utah Counties in late 2001 and early 2002.

2. “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” Hymns (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 19.

3. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Times in Which We Live,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 73–74.

4. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 11:230.

5. Lorenzo Snow, in *Collected Discourses Delivered by President Wilford Woodruff, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, comp. and ed. Brian H. Stuy, 5 vols. (Burbank, California: B. H. S. Publishing, 1988), 4: 55.

6. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 162.

7. *Ibid.*, 220; emphasis added.