

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

### Blessed are the peacemakers

Among the most memorable of all our family activities have been trips to the Holy Land. For us, visits to that part of the world have been life changing. But now the Holy Land is a cauldron of turmoil and off-limits to those who would like to go there for spiritual enrichment. Virtually all parts of the world are plagued by acts of terror previously unknown. Confusion comes to many who pray for peace but fearfully face this foe of terror.

### Peace versus contention

The perilous times in which we live have been prophesied in the scriptures. Our day has been foreseen as one with "fires, and tempests, and vapors of smoke in foreign lands; . . . wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes in divers places . . . great pollutions upon the face of the earth; . . . and all manner of abominations."<sup>1</sup>

That prophecy echoes an earlier scriptural account of the second generation of human life<sup>2</sup> upon the earth: "In those days Satan had great dominion among men, and raged in their hearts; and from thenceforth came wars and bloodshed; and a man's hand was against his own brother, in . . . seeking for power."<sup>3</sup> From the days of Cain and Abel,<sup>4</sup> Esau and Jacob,<sup>5</sup> and Joseph who was sold into Egypt,<sup>6</sup> the flames of hostility have been fueled by family feuding.

Hatred among brothers and neighbors has now reduced sacred cities to sites of sorrow. When I think of the plight of such places, I am reminded of an ancient proverb: "Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath."<sup>7</sup>

### Doctrinal direction for bringing peace

Scripture sheds light on both the cause of and the cure for the sickness of human

hatred: "The natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ."<sup>8</sup>

Peace can prevail only when that natural inclination to fight is superseded by self-determination to live on a loftier level. Coming unto Jesus Christ as the "Prince of Peace"<sup>9</sup> is the pathway to peace on earth and goodwill among men.<sup>10</sup> He made a promise to us: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."<sup>11</sup>

Jesus taught people how to live with one another. He declared the two great commandments: first, to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,"<sup>12</sup> and the second, to "love thy neighbour as thyself."<sup>13</sup>

Then He added, "Love your enemies, [and] bless them that curse you."<sup>14</sup>

He taught the Golden Rule, saying, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."<sup>15</sup> This principle is found in nearly every major religion. Others such as Confucius and Aristotle have also taught it.<sup>16</sup> After all, the gospel did not begin with the birth of the Babe in Bethlehem. It is everlasting. It was proclaimed in the beginning to Adam and Eve. Portions of the gospel have been preserved in many cultures. Even heathen mythologies have been enriched by fragments of truth from earlier dispensations.

Wherever it is found and however it is expressed, the Golden Rule encompasses the moral code of the kingdom of God. It forbids interference by one with the rights of another. It is equally binding upon nations, associations, and individuals. With compassion and forbearance, it replaces the retaliatory reactions of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."<sup>17</sup> If we were

to stay on that old and unproductive path, we would be but blind and toothless.<sup>18</sup>

This concept of treating others as one would like to be treated is easy to understand. And it acknowledges the precious nature of each of God's sons and daughters.<sup>19</sup> Scripture asks parents to teach their children not to "fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin." Instead, we "teach them to love one another, and to serve one another."<sup>20</sup>

Jesus taught the importance of reconciliation and resolution of dispute on a personal basis. He said:

"Whosoever is angry with his brother . . . shall be in danger of the judgment. . . .

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

"Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."<sup>21</sup>

The Master Teacher taught us to "forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

"But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."<sup>22</sup>

Jesus declared that a day of judgment would come. All individuals will give an account of their mortal lives and of how they have treated other people.<sup>23</sup>

### Civic obligations

The commandments to love God and neighbor are interrelated. We cannot fully love God without loving our neighbor. We cannot fully love our neighbor without loving God. Men really are brothers because God really is our Father. Nevertheless, scriptures are studded with stories of contention and combat. They strongly condemn wars of aggression but sustain obligations of citizens to defend their families and their freedoms.<sup>24</sup> Because "we be-

lieve in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law,"<sup>25</sup> members of this Church will be called into military service of many nations. "We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society."<sup>26</sup>

During the Second World War, when members of the Church were forced to fight on opposing sides, the First Presidency affirmed that "the state is responsible for the civil control of its citizens or subjects, for their political welfare, and for the carrying forward of political policies, domestic and foreign. . . . But the Church itself, as such, has no responsibility for these policies, [other] than urging its members fully to render . . . loyalty to their country."<sup>27</sup>

### Peace is possible

Because of the long history of hostility upon the earth, many feel that peace is beyond hope. I disagree. Peace is possible. We can learn to love our fellow human beings throughout the world. Whether they be Jewish, Islamic, or fellow Christians, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or other, we can live together with mutual admiration and respect, without forsaking our religious convictions. Things we have in common are greater than are our differences. Peace is a prime priority that pleads for our pursuit. Old Testament prophets held out hope, and so should we. The Psalmist said, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."<sup>28</sup> "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth."<sup>29</sup>

### Abraham's example of peace

Father Abraham was uniquely called a "Friend of God."<sup>30</sup> Peace was one of Abraham's highest priorities. He sought

to be a “prince of peace.”<sup>31</sup> His influence could loom large in our present pursuit of peace. His sons Ishmael and Isaac, though born of different mothers, overcame their differences when engaged in a common cause. After their father died, they worked together to bury the mortal remains of their exalted father.<sup>32</sup> Their descendants could well follow that pattern.

Abraham’s posterity has a divinely decreed potential. The Lord declared that Ishmael would become a great nation<sup>33</sup> and that the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would bless all the nations of the earth.<sup>34</sup>

So the descendants of Abraham, entrusted with great promises of infinite influence, are in a pivotal position to emerge as peacemakers. Chosen by the Almighty, they can direct their powerful potential toward peace.

Resolution of present political problems will require much patience and negotiation. The process would be enhanced greatly if pursued prayerfully.

#### *Fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecies of hope*

Isaiah prophesied of hope for our day. Speaking of the gathering of Israel and the Restoration of the Church through the Prophet Joseph Smith, Isaiah wrote:

“It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people. . . .

“And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”<sup>35</sup>

These prophecies of hope could materialize if leaders and citizens of nations would apply the teachings of Jesus Christ. Ours could then be an age of unparalleled peace and progress. The barbarism of the past would be buried. War with its horrors would be relegated to the realm of maudlin memory. Aims of nations would be mu-

tually supportive. Peacemakers could lead in the art of arbitration, give relief to the needy, and bring hope to those who fear. Of such patriots, future generations would shout praises, and our Eternal God would pass judgments of glory.

#### *Follow the pathway of the Prince of Peace*

The hope of the world is the Prince of Peace—our Creator, Savior, Jehovah, and Judge. He offers us the good life, the abundant life, and eternal life. Peaceful—even prosperous—living can come to those who abide His precepts<sup>36</sup> and follow His pathway to peace. This I declare to all the world.

#### **Church members should proclaim peace**

Now, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what does the Lord expect of us? As a Church, we must “renounce war and proclaim peace.”<sup>37</sup> As individuals, we should “follow after the things which make for peace.”<sup>38</sup> We should be personal peacemakers. We should live peacefully—as couples, families, and neighbors. We should live by the Golden Rule. We have writings of the descendants of Judah as now merged with writings of the descendants of Ephraim.<sup>39</sup> We should employ them and expand our circle of love to embrace the whole human family. We should bring divine love and revealed doctrines of restored religion to our neighbors and friends. We should serve them according to our abilities and opportunities. We should keep our principles on a high level and stand for the right. We should continue to gather scattered Israel from the four corners of the earth and offer the ordinances and covenants that seal families together forever. These blessings we are to bring to people of all nations.

As we so live, our Master will bless us. He provided this promise: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea,

I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”<sup>40</sup>

Ours is His supernal cause. Ours is the cause of eternal glory for all human-kind. And as peacemakers, we shall be called the children of God. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. Mormon 8:29–31; see also 2 Timothy 3:1–7, 12–13; Doctrine and Covenants 45:26–27.
2. Dating back to the time of Seth, son of Adam and Eve.
3. Moses 6:15.
4. See Genesis 4:8–10.
5. See Genesis 27:41.
6. See Genesis 37:28.
7. Proverbs 29:8.
8. Mosiah 3:19.
9. Isaiah 9:6.
10. See Luke 2:14.
11. Matthew 5:9; see also 3 Nephi 12:9; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 5:11.
12. Matthew 22:37.
13. Matthew 22:39; see also Luke 10:27; Doctrine and Covenants 59:5–6.
14. Matthew 5:44.
15. Matthew 7:12; see also Luke 6:31; 3 Nephi 14:12.
16. See B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (1909–11), 3:492–93.
17. Matthew 5:38; see also Exodus 21:24–27; Leviticus 24:20.
18. See Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), 142.
19. See Matthew 25:40; Doctrine and Covenants 18:10.
20. Mosiah 4:14–15.
21. Matthew 5:22–24; see also 3 Nephi 12:22–24; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 5:24–26.
22. Mark 11:25–26; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 11:27–28.
23. See Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:10–12; 1 John 4:16–21; Alma 41:3; 3 Nephi 27:16–22.
24. See Alma 43:45–47; 46:11–12, 19–20; 48:11–16.
25. Articles of Faith 1:12.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 134:1.
27. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 6:155–56.
28. Psalm 46:1.
29. Psalm 46:9.
30. James 2:23; see also 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8. Long ago our Creator made a covenant with Abraham which was to apply to “a thousand generations” (Deuteronomy 7:9; see also 1 Chronicles 16:15; Psalm 105:8). It is to be fulfilled in the latter days (see 1 Nephi 15:13, 18; D&C 124:58; 132:30).
31. Abraham 1:2.
32. See Genesis 25:9. Abraham’s original name, Abram, means “exalted father” (see Bible Dictionary, “Abraham,” 601).
33. See Genesis 21:13, 18.
34. See Genesis 17:19, 21; 21:12; 22:18; 28:13–14; 35:9–12; Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:5; Abraham 2:11; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 17:25.
35. Isaiah 11:11–12; see also Romans 15:12.
36. See 2 Chronicles 20:20; Matthew 6:24–33; John 10:10; 1 Nephi 2:20; 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:9, 20; 4:4; Jarom 1:9; Mosiah 1:7; 2:22, 31; Alma 9:13; 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1; 48:25; 50:20; Helaman 3:20; Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.
37. Doctrine and Covenants 98:16.
38. Romans 14:19.
39. See Ezekiel 37:16–19; 2 Nephi 3:12.
40. Isaiah 41:10.

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The choir sang “Oh, What Songs of the Heart.”

Elder Athos M. Amorím offered the benediction.

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