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Their Greatest Tragedy

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Abstract: This article states that the greatest tragedy that happened to the Jews was the rejection of their King, Jesus Christ. Likewise, the people of the modern world may reject his Second Coming. Signs described in the Book of Mormon show that the Second Coming will not be unexpected.

that he may not aspire to? If within the short space of mortal life there are men who rise up out of infancy and become masters of the elements of fire and water and earth and air, so that they well-nigh rule them as Gods, what may it not be possible for them to do in a few hundreds or thousands of millions of years? . . . To what heights of power and glory may they not ascend?" (B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity*, 1903, pp. 33-35.)

Certainly one of the greatest concepts of holy scripture is this great truth wherein speaking of our potentiality God himself has proclaimed, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High." (Ps. 82:6.)

May God bless our lives that through our understanding, our faith, and our good works we may reach the glorious destiny which he has ordained. For this I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

It predicted the betrayal of the Savior, actually mentioning the price to be paid: thirty pieces of silver, and revealed that this money would be used to buy a potter's field.

The prophets also predicted that at his crucifixion the soldiers would divide his clothing among them and explained that his bones would not be broken, but that his body would be pierced so that his blood would be shed, as with a sacrificial lamb.

All these marks of identification of the true Messiah were known in that day. For years they had been familiar to those who read the scriptures.

But they were ignored.

The Savior was rejected, and the world went back into the oblivion of its traditions.

Great as was this tragedy for the people of that generation, we of today are in danger of making a similar mistake. The Savior will come again in a glorious second advent, and definite signs are given in Holy Writ to presage this event also.

These signs are shown as clearly in scripture as were those of his mortal ministry. They are unmistakable. They are about us today and readily may be seen now.

Will our generation recognize them and wisely give heed to them? Or will these modern signs be rejected with all that they imply as were those of nearly two thousand years ago when the people of that generation failed to identify their Lord?

Let us review some of these modern signs, remembering that there are many more than the often-mentioned wars and rumors of wars and seas heaving themselves beyond their bounds.

The gathering of the Jews to Palestine is one of the most outstanding and significant of all the signs of the times. The Lord said through Jeremiah: ". . . I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it." (Jer. 30:3.) Isaiah indicated that Palestine, long languishing in the grip of the desert, was destined to be turned into a fruitful field in connection with the gathering of the Jews to their homeland.

Have these predictions been fulfilled?

Today the nation of Israel, with a population of two and a half million people, occupies the land which the Lord gave to their fathers. It is a direct fulfillment of prophecy. It is a sign of the near approach of the Lord.

With their return the land has been revitalized. Palestine today is a fruitful field. We who live in England know how fruitful it is, for there we receive its oranges, its grapefruit, and other produce, which are likewise shipped to many parts of the world.

On August 15 of this year, the *London Times* reported that the nation

Their Greatest Tragedy

Mark E. Petersen

Of the Council of the Twelve

● We Latter-day Saints believe in the Lord Jesus Christ wholeheartedly and without reservation.

He is the Savior of the world, the Redeemer of all mankind. He is the Son of Almighty God. He is divine.

All power was given to him in heaven and on earth. He is the Creator. He made this planet on which we live and all other heavenly bodies.

As the scriptures say, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:3.)

He became flesh and dwelt among mankind, some of whom beheld his glory, even the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. His mortal advent was accompanied by much sorrow and suffering, but the greatest tragedy of his coming was that the people generally, and more particularly their leaders, did not—or would not—either recognize or accept him.

His coming was not unexpected.

Quite the contrary.

The people of that day were anxiously looking for their Messiah, whose advent was clearly foretold in the scriptures with which they were well familiar. Particularly were the scribes, the lawyers, the high priests, and the learned members of the Sanhedrin well informed. They knew what the prophets had said about the expected Savior, but these self-centered leaders were so steeped in their traditions that they would not admit what they must have known to be true.

They were so jealous of their own positions that they were not willing to give way to the new King of Israel. This jealousy was so deep and bitter that it bred thoughts of murder in their hearts. They determined to kill him and on many occasions tried to trap him. At last, by the use of false witnesses, they condemned and crucified him.

It was the greatest tragedy of their lives.

Their God came among them, and they would not receive him. When he revealed his true identity, they said he blasphemed. They preferred not to associate him with the scriptures which so unerringly designated him as the Christ, and there were many such scriptures.

Let us briefly review some of the prophecies by which he could have been identified by any open-minded person.

Isaiah gave the first sign when he said: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isa. 7:14.)

And did it not come to pass just as the prophet said?

Was not this virgin birth heralded among the shepherds who watched their flocks that night and by the angelic hosts who sang their hosannas? Did not even the wise men, far away in the East, recognize it? And was not Herod so frightened by it that he killed the little children in an effort to destroy the newborn King?

The scripture was so detailed in describing the coming of the Lord that it predicted the flight into Egypt to escape Herod's wrath, as it also foretold the king's destruction of the little babies in Bethlehem.

It said that Jesus would be reared in the village of Nazareth. It indicated that he would perform many miracles and that he would teach in parables. It forecast his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and said: "Thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, the foal of an ass." (See Zech. 9:9.)

It told of the disbelief with which most of the people would regard him and of their hatred toward him, saying that he would be smitten, despised, and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

of Israel had awarded contracts for the construction of thirty new cargo ships to be added to its already large and prosperous merchant marine to handle the agricultural exports of this little nation. So productive has Israel become.

The land has blossomed as the rose in fulfillment of prophecy.

But there is another sign closely allied to it which Isaiah said would precede Palestine's renewed fertility.

A sacred book was to come forth before that time—one which was new to the world, one that told of a fallen nation which was destroyed suddenly—a book to be offered in the latter days to a learned man who would reject it, but to be given by divine means to an unlettered man through whom it was to be given to the world.

Isaiah said that the book would be of such spiritual importance that it would cause many to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. "And in that day," he said, "shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness." (Isa. 29:18.) It shall cause the meek to "increase their joy in the Lord. . . ." (*Ibid.*, 29:19.)

Ezekiel spoke of the same book, explaining that it is the sacred record of the descendants of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, and that it would stand side by side with the Bible as a new volume of scripture. (Ezek. 37.)

Where is that book? It is one of the signs of the times.

Not only did the prophets predict its appearance, but Isaiah set a limit on the time of its publication. That time limit was related to the period when fertility would return to Palestine. Isaiah said that the book would come forth first, and then added that in "a very little while . . . Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest." (Isa. 29:17.)

The time limit has expired. This new volume of scripture must have come forth before now or Isaiah was not a true prophet, for Palestine is fruitful again.

Where is that book?

Let us consider still another sign: The Apostle Peter taught that before the second coming of Christ there will be a restoration of all things religious, whatsoever ". . . God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21.) A new revelation of God was promised for the latter days—restoring the complete gospel to mankind.

The scripture teaches that this restoration would be accompanied by heavenly manifestations, including the ministry of angels. The prophet said that one of these angels must fly from the heavens in the latter days bringing back to earth the everlasting gospel to be preached anew to every nation,

tongue, and people.

His coming is related to the new book of scripture mentioned by both Isaiah and Ezekiel. Has this angel come? Is the book available?

As part of this restoration the prophet also said that Elijah of old must come again to earth shortly before the great and dreadful day of the Lord in another modern revelation of heavenly power. Has Elijah come in this modern assignment? What was the purpose of his coming?

Do we believe the prophets?

Is the Bible true?

If Elijah has come, to whom did he come, and where?

Who saw him?

Who talked with him, and when?

His modern appearance is given as one of the signs of the near approach of the Lord.

The Prophet Daniel also knew of these events. He predicted that in the latter days God would establish his kingdom once more upon the earth, this time never to be destroyed nor given to another people.

Has that prophecy been fulfilled?

Has there been a new and modern



establishment of God's kingdom on earth?

If so, is it related to the restoration of all things formerly revealed through the ancient prophets, as indicated by the Apostle Peter?

How could it be otherwise?

These inspired men spoke of the same thing: God's advance preparation for the second coming of Christ.

Where is that divinely established kingdom of modern times?

Isaiah even tells us where to look for it. He said that in the latter days God would establish his kingdom in the tops of the mountains, and that a temple would be built there in a high place, exalted above the hills, and that people from all nations would flow to it.

Where in a high mountain area has God thus erected his temple as he

built his latter-day kingdom?

Look for it. It is one of the signs of the times.

Will we who live today be willing to accept these signs as we see them, or will we reject them in a spiritual and temporal tragedy like that of nearly two thousand years ago?

Will the marvels of our so-called enlightened age blind us to the events foretold in prophecy or convince us that they are unreal or that they are but myths and superstitions as some already say?

Will mankind once again deny their Lord?

We Latter-day Saints testify that these important signs, telling of the near approach of the second coming of Christ, have taken place and may be examined by any interested person.

The physical restoration of Palestine is a fact that no one can deny. It is part of our current history.

The book destined to precede renewed fertility in the Holy Land is also a reality. It is now in publication. It is the Book of Mormon, the sacred scripture of ancient America. It has taken its place by the side of the Bible as Ezekiel said it would. Let no one ridicule it nor ask if any good can come out of Nazareth. The book is true, and it is here for all to read.

Elijah has made his second appearance, and the results of his work may be seen and examined on every hand. The scripture says that the purpose of his mission was to turn the hearts of the present-day generation to their forefathers. This has been done through a worldwide interest in ancestry on a scale never before known.

Today there are many genealogical libraries and associations in different parts of the world, and literally millions of people of various religious denominations are tracing their ancestry, many of them not knowing why. Each one of them is direct evidence of the present-day ministry of Elijah.

Daniel's prophecy also has been fulfilled.

The Lord's kingdom has been established in the midst of the greatest mountain chain on earth, with headquarters nearly a mile above sea level, here in Salt Lake City.

The temple foreseen in scripture has now been built and is in daily use.

The kingdom of God has been re-established on the earth.

As Peter predicted, the time of the restoration of all things revealed by ancient prophets has now come.

The Church of Jesus Christ has been restored with its full organization, headed by prophets and apostles who, as Paul explained, form the foundation of the Church, with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

Acceptance of these vivid signs of the times can lead mankind back to God in this day of widespread unbelief.

Ignoring them may bring a tragedy like that of two thousand years ago.

It is true that we are living in a marvelous age of intellectual and scientific development. But this, too, is one of the signs of the times and supports, rather than obscures, the prophecies of which we have spoken.

Let us not misunderstand our situation. Let us not suppose that our own wisdom is so great that we can ignore the handiwork of God.

As truly as that we are in a space age, as truly as that we can fire missiles into orbit, just that truly will the

events spoken of in the scriptures come to pass.

The greatest miracle of the present day is not that we can send a spaceship to photograph the planet Mars.

The greatest miracle is that God has spoken in our time and has appeared in person to modern man, to be seen, and heard, and understood. He has restored his gospel in its fullest detail. This he has done in preparation for the glorious second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose holy name we give this as our solemn testimony. Amen.

children what they never had, and a starry-eyed little boy are determined to make the effort.

A year has passed eventfully. It is a summer day, and the wind in whirling cones picks up trash and tumbleweeds and dances across the valley. Two fair and well-groomed young men are walking toward the hogan. Father Begay is fixing his wagon, and Mother Begay sits under the gnarled, weathered cedar, weaving her blanket.

"*Yatehee*," they say in greeting as they wipe the sweat from their brows and introduce themselves as missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Begays have heard about the elders whom they called *gamalii*. They become interested as they listen. From the briefcase comes a little black book, and in spite of the Navajo-English language barrier, John and Mary Begay seemed to understand that the book was a history of their "old people" back for ages. It seemed that the spirit which accompanied the strange mixture of words and signs was like a "familiar spirit." Curiosity, genuine interest, and the pleasing personalities of the teen-age ministers brought about many hours of learning, and then one day it happened. The Begay family members were baptized in the little pond some distance away, and when they had returned to the hogan, the young men laid their hands on their heads and conferred upon each the Holy Ghost. The Begays were members of the far-away Salt Lake City church, in which they now had confidence and a warm feeling of belonging. The missionaries returned frequently and taught them. Sundays, the family drove the wagon to the little branch many miles away to meet with the other Indians who were also joining the Church.

Time moves on. The Mormon elders have moved a trailer house near the school, and Barry attends the seminary they are teaching. It is crowded, but the elders tell the little red men stories about their forebears and teach them honesty and kindness and goodness and of the big, wide world "out there" where Indian children may have all that non-Indian children have. The little Indians have found real friends in the young elders as they learn English, ethics, and doctrine not taught in the secular school.

Barry is ten years old now, husky, laughing, running, and joking. He is summer-herding the sheep. The missionaries have announced a fantastic program. Barry may go to faraway Utah and live in a good home, attend a superior school, and be given advantages not afforded on the reservation. "Unthinkable," his parents feel at first, to send their little boy so far away for so long a time, but the Little-

Saturday Afternoon Session, October 2, 1965

A Changing World for the Barry Begays

Spencer W. Kimball

Of the Council of the Twelve

● My brothers and sisters: I desire today to emphasize our responsibility to the children of Father Lehi. In preface may I present this human drama composed of several acts and a number of scenes.

The time: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The place: the world. The performers: flesh and blood and spirit people, awakening from the centuries' long sleep of their ancestors.

There he is running like the wind, barefoot, hatless, long hair in flight, in worn overalls and ragged shirt, his face brown, not only by the Arizona sun and wind, but from his parents, themselves brown-skinned. Barry and his little brother and sisters are a lively group, playing around the rock, pole, and dirt hogan. As we approach they scamper to cover in the hogan. Timidly in the doorway he peeks out as we approach. The Begays, sitting on the dirt floor, are eating their meal.

There is a leg of mutton. There is fry bread. There are no spoons nor forks. There is no milk; they have no cow. There is no salad; they have no garden. Their fare is scant.

Barry is seven. His little brother has no clothes on his little brown body. The little sisters have long, full skirts like their mother's, some silver coins sewed to their blouses.

The mother wears a worn, purple, velveteen skirt, reaching nearly to her ankles and a waist of greenish hue. Out here styles change slowly if at all. Her shoes are high-laced ones, her hair in a bob at the back tied with white wool yarn. The father is thin and tall. He wears his curled-up hat even while he eats. They are not demonstrative, but it is evident that pride and affection are in these humble quarters.

A few days pass. It is bright and summery. Barry Begay is herding the

few sheep. There is little fat on their bones, for this pasture is overgrazed and is dry and dusty. The scraggly dog also shows malnutrition. But as he barks and bites hind legs, the woolly animals heed direction. The little boy has a man's responsibility, for there are coyotes and other predatory animals also starving in this barren valley, and the sheep are precious. The lamb furnishes meat for the table; the pelt covers the cold ground in their hogan, being at once rug, chair, bed, cover. The fleece is sold at the trading post or saved to cord and spin and weave into rugs to exchange for flour and cloth and food.

Under the shade of the lone cedar tree, Mother Begay, an expert in her field, sits on the ground and laboriously works into an intricate design the yarns she has dyed in brilliant colors.

A mile away is another hogan and a little farther another and another. There is no school in reach. How wonderful it would be, the loving parents think, if their own little ones could go to school! But how and when? Maybe someday "Washington" would take them to the distant government school. But how could they part from them?

Two years have passed. Nine-year-old Barry may now go to the new government school only three miles away. How they want education for their children! Little Susie can now herd the sheep and drive away the predatory thieves. John Begay hitches up the hungry-looking horses to the light spring wagon; and they all drive to the school near the trading post, the mother and the children sitting on the floor, the father driving. For Barry it will be a long walk, and at times the wind will be merciless, the sun will beat down like a blowtorch, and the snow will be wet and freezing; but loving parents, ambitious to give their