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“The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord”: The Anatomy of an Expression

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Abstract: Speaking of the last days, the Lord declared through the ancient Israelite prophet Malachi that Elijah would return “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5). And through the prophet Joel, the Lord foretold signs in the heavens “before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come” (Joel 2:31). Jesus’ Second Coming is the “day of the Lord” referred to in these prophecies. Many Latter-day Saints interpret the phrase “the great and dreadful [or terrible] day of the Lord” to mean the Lord’s Second Coming will be “great,” or good and desirable, for the righteous, but “dreadful” for the wicked, who will be destroyed. Scripture does indicate that the righteous will rejoice at the Second Coming of the Savior, while the wicked will be filled with fear and remorse. However, interpreting the expression “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” to mean great for the righteous and dreadful for the wicked misrepresents the original meaning of this phrase. For one thing, the Hebrew language in which this expression was originally written does not support this explanation. For another, the English word “great” was not used with the modern meaning “choice” or “desirable” until long after the King James Version was translated. This study will elucidate the meaning of the expression “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” by (1) examining the Hebrew grammar and vocabulary behind the English translation of Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5; (2) considering the broader biblical context in which this expression appears; (3) highlighting modern prophetic statements that pertain to the meaning of this expression; and (4) comparing this expression with other “great and ___” formulations in scripture.



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“The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord”

The Anatomy of an Expression

Dana M. Pike

Speaking of the last days, the Lord declared through the ancient Israelite prophet Malachi that Elijah would return “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5). And through the prophet Joel, the Lord foretold signs in the heavens “before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come” (Joel 2:31). Jesus’ Second Coming is the “day of the Lord” referred to in these prophecies.¹ Many Latter-day Saints interpret the phrase “the great and dreadful [or terrible] day of the Lord” to mean the Lord’s Second Coming will be “great,” or good and desirable, for the righteous, but “dreadful” for the wicked, who will be destroyed.² Scripture does indicate that the righteous will rejoice at the Second Coming of the Savior, while the wicked will be filled with fear and remorse.³ However, interpreting the expression “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” to mean great for the righteous and dreadful for the wicked misrepresents the original meaning of this phrase. For one thing, the Hebrew language in which this expression was originally written does not support this explanation. For another, the English word “great” was not used with the modern meaning “choice” or “desirable” until long after the King James Version was translated.⁴ This study will elucidate the meaning of the expression “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” by (1) examining the Hebrew grammar and vocabulary behind the English translation of Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5; (2) considering the broader biblical context in which this expression appears; (3) highlighting modern prophetic statements that pertain to the meaning of this expression; and (4) comparing this expression with other “great and _____” formulations in scripture.

Hebrew Grammatical and Lexical Considerations

Understanding the Hebrew grammar and vocabulary of the expression “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” aids in appreciating its original meaning. In the Hebrew Bible, this expression is worded exactly the same in both Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5, even though the King James Version renders it somewhat differently.⁵

The Hebrew wording of this expression in Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5 is reproduced here in transliteration with a word-for-word English translation:

lipnê bô' yôm yhwh haggādôl wěhannôra'

before the coming of the day of the Lord the great and the dreadful.⁶

Grammatically, the phrase “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” in Hebrew and in the King James Version contains two modifiers: “great” and “dreadful/terrible.” In English, these precede the noun “day” and are separated by the conjunction “and.” In Hebrew, adjectives generally follow the noun they modify (agreeing in number, gender, and definiteness). Since ancient Hebrew used no punctuation marks, multiple terms that were functionally similar (whether nouns, adjectives, or verbs) were strung together, or coordinated, by the use of the conjunction, as is the case in this expression. Thus, the English rendition “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” generally preserves the grammar of the Hebrew form of the text, although the syntax is somewhat different.

Concerning the vocabulary of this expression, the phrase *yôm yhwh*, “day of the Lord,” consists of the Hebrew noun *yôm*, “day,” and the divine name “Yahweh” or “Jehovah,” usually rendered as “the LORD” in English translations of the Bible.⁷ The Hebrew word *nôra'*, translated “terrible” in Joel 2:31 and “dreadful” in Malachi 4:5, is a *Niph'al* (conjugation) participle of the Hebrew verb *yāre'*, which means “to fear.” It thus has the sense of “fearful,” something “to be feared or dreaded.” The Hebrew adjective *gādôl*, translated “great” in Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5, is employed in a variety of contexts, as is the English word “great.” For example, in the Hebrew Bible, *gādôl* refers to things that are large in size, weight, or number; to the height of mountains; to things of great significance or influence; to extraordinary events; and to God.⁸

The term *gādôl* is used several times in the Hebrew Bible to describe Jehovah and his accomplishments, as well as his “day.” Examples of this include:

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. (Ps. 95:3)

The Lord is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. (Ps. 99:2)

For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.

Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth.

(Ps. 135:5–6, compare verses 7–15)

In these and other passages in the Hebrew Bible that employ *gādôl* to describe Jehovah, he is depicted as “great” in the sense of being supremely powerful, a creator, deliverer, and judge without peer in heaven or on earth. And just as the Lord himself is great, so will “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” be great, since nothing that comes before it will compare to the extraordinary power and significance of this yet-future day.

Based on the variety of uses of the word *gādôl* in the Hebrew Bible, there are two ways to translate the expression “the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”⁹ One, the two modifiers can be left coordinated, as in the King James Version, in which case the meaning is “the supremely powerful and dreadful day of the Lord” or “the extraordinary and fearful day of the Lord.” Two, the Hebrew adjective *gādôl* can be rendered as an English adverb, serving to reinforce and intensify the meaning of the second modifier, as in “the extraordinarily dreadful day of the Lord” or “the significantly fearful day of the Lord.” It is not possible to ascertain which of these two options was originally intended. However, neither rendition conveys a sense of joyful. They both underscore the magnitude and the dreadful nature of “the day of the Lord.”

Contextual Analysis

Context is an important analytical tool in understanding the primary meaning of the expression “the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”¹⁰

Joel. Consider first the larger literary context of Joel 2:31. The opening lines of Joel’s prophecy indicate that something extraordinary is going to happen (Joel 1:2). He identifies his topic as the dire consequences of the last days: “Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come” (1:15).¹¹ The Lord warns the Israelites through Joel that

all the inhabitants of the land [will] tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness . . . for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? (2:1–2, 11, emphasis added)

Furthermore, the Lord will “shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come” (2:30–31; see also 3:2, 9–10, 15–16). The tenor of Joel’s prophecy is judgment, desperation, and calamity. These verses primarily warn of “destruction,” “trembl[ing],” “darkness,” “gloominess,” “thick darkness,” and “blood, and fire” prior to and at the Lord’s great day (see also Amos 5:18: “The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light”). Joel was chosen as a prophetic “watchman

unto the house of Israel” (Ezek. 33:7) to warn the wicked of the Lord’s impending judgments so that they will be left without excuse.

The answer to the Lord’s question in Joel 2:11, “who can abide” the great and terrible day of the Lord, is that no one can who does not “turn . . . to [the Lord] with all your heart. . . . And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious” (2:12–13). Thus, the promise is given that the righteous will be protected at the great day of the Lord. This blessing will happen as they repent and gather to the stakes and temples of Zion: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call” (2:32; see also 3:16). But this divine assurance does not indicate faithful Saints in the last days will experience no challenges or grief. Joel’s prophecy does not focus on the desirable conditions that will *follow* the coming of the Lord (for which see 3:18–21). Joel mentions the Lord’s protection of the righteous prior to and at “the great and terrible day of the Lord,” but he does not generally emphasize this topic.

Malachi. The larger literary context of Malachi 4:5, which foretells the return of Elijah “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord,” is similar to that of Joel 2:31.¹² The prophet Malachi rails against the rebellious Israelites of his day, both priests and laity, in Malachi 1 and 2. The consequent judgments that the Lord announces through Malachi shift the focus of the prophecy to future judgments against Israel in the last days. Malachi depicts the people of his day asking, “Where is the God of judgment?” (2:17). The answer: “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple” (3:1). This announcement is followed by a synonymous pair of questions that indicate the trials ahead: “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?” (3:2). The divine response to these questions follows, distinguishing two categories of people:

[the Lord] is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. . . . And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. (3:2–3, 5)

The Lord here promises faithful Israelites, including the sons of Levi, that they “may abide the day of his coming” if they successfully endure

refining and purifying, if they are purged of dross like fine gold and silver (3:2–3). While “abiding” the Lord’s coming is certainly desirable, enduring the “refiner’s fire” will be very challenging. In 3:5 the Lord emphatically indicates his judgments against those Israelites who are not so purified (and by extension, the wicked of the world). The Lord’s warning voice continues through Malachi:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . . . 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 their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. (4:1, 5, 6)

The significant potential of Elijah’s latter-day mission is a ray of hope in the midst of this sternly worded judgment. The Lord will save those whose hearts turn to both their recent and their ancient ancestors and to binding gospel covenants. But the descriptors in these verses—“burn as an oven,” “stubble,” “smite,” and “curse”—combine with the questions “who may abide” and “who shall stand,” and the vivid imagery of “refiner’s fire,” “judgment,” and “swift witness against,” in 3:2–5 to powerfully depict conditions leading up to and including “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” as they will be experienced by the wicked. The main purpose of this prophecy in Malachi is to warn of judgment and trials at that “dreadful day.”

Both Joel and Malachi teach that the Lord can and will deliver his faithful followers; however, the main thrust of their prophecies is to warn of the powerful judgments and dreadful manifestations prior to and at the “day of the Lord,” especially as they will be encountered by multitudes of the proud and wicked. These two prophets are not emphasizing that life will be happy for the righteous and terrible for just the wicked at that day. The righteous who are spared will be very aware of and grieved by the gross wickedness and destruction raging around them.

Prophetic Insights from the Present Dispensation

Just as the biblical context of Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5 reinforces the calamitous and purging aspects of “the great and dreadful day of the Lord,” so there is nothing “great,” in the sense of pleasant, foretold in this latter-day prophecy:

Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of

mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come *upon all the face of the earth*, saith the Lord. And *upon my house shall it begin*, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord; First, among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me. (D&C 112:24–26, emphasis added; see also D&C 97:23–27)¹³

This passage from the Doctrine and Covenants is similar in tone—despair and destruction—to the prophecies in Joel and Malachi. The designation “my house” refers to the Lord’s restored Church. The dreadful effects of the Lord’s Second Coming will impact Latter-day Saints, especially those who have been less than valiant in their faith. Chastening and purging will “begin” with those professing to be the Lord’s people.

Thus, there will be trials and turmoil aplenty for *all* people and *all* nations “upon all the face of the earth” in the last days. No wonder the Lord warned and encouraged his followers to “pray always that you enter not into temptation, that you may abide the day of his coming, whether in life or in death” (D&C 61:39). The phrase “whether in life or in death” indicates that not all the Lord’s faithful disciples will be spared the physical suffering of the last days. The Prophet Joseph Smith reiterated this point when he taught:

I explained concerning the coming of the Son of Man; also that it is a false idea that the Saints will escape all the judgments, whilst the wicked suffer; 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; yet many of the righteous shall fall a prey to disease, to pestilence, etc., by reason of the weakness of the flesh, and yet be saved in the Kingdom of God.¹⁴

Likewise, in relation to the warning in Doctrine and Covenants 112:24–26, Elder Bruce R. McConkie observed:

There is a certain smugness in the Church, a feeling that all these things are for others, not for us. But do not the same hurricanes often destroy the homes of the righteous as well as the wicked? . . . And do not atomic bombs fall on all the inhabitants of doomed cities? Where, then, shall the vengeance of the last days be found? . . . Vengeance is for the wicked, in and out of the Church, and only the faithful shall be spared, and many of them only in the eternal perspective of things.¹⁵

These two pronouncements make clear that destruction will be directed at the wicked, and the righteous will generally be protected. But some, perhaps many, faithful Saints will suffer and even die, caught in the calamities of the last days and “the day of wrath.” The Lord promises he will deliver the righteous, and he will, but that deliverance is primarily a spiritual redemption and secondarily a physical preservation.

This assessment is corroborated by an observation President Ezra Taft Benson made while discussing 3 Nephi: “The record of the Nephite history

just prior to the Savior's visit [to the Americas] reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior's Second Coming."¹⁶ Mormon reports that there was "great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people" (3 Ne. 8:23) in the Americas *who survived* the significant calamities that occurred at the time of Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem. Mormon describes those who were spared as "the more righteous part of the people" (10:12), noting that it was only after three days that "the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned to joy" (10:10). The survivors were certainly affected by this "great and terrible destruction" (8:11, 12).¹⁷

The joy of the righteous at Jesus' future return, it seems, will come not only from greeting Jesus, but also from their relief when they are delivered from the impact of the events preceding and surrounding the Lord's coming to purify the earth. Yes, the righteous will be "caught up" off the earth while it is cleansed by fire at Jesus' Second Coming (1 Thes. 4:16–17; D&C 88:95–98). But this protection is only after the terrible wars and natural disasters that will have severely wracked the earth and its inhabitants, only after "fear shall [have] come upon *all people*" (D&C 88:91, emphasis added; see also verses 88–90). Thus, both the biblical context of the expression "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" and modern prophetic statements reinforce the conclusion drawn from the grammatical and lexical analysis of Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5: the word "great" in the expression "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" helps describe the extraordinary and dreadful turmoil and destruction associated with Jesus' Second Coming as he unleashes his power to destroy and cleanse. "Great" does not here describe the joy the righteous will experience *after* Jesus has returned.

Comparison with Similar Formulations

The interpretation of the expression "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" outlined above is supported by similar expressions in scripture in which the phrase "great and" precedes a second modifier and a noun. While such expressions occur in all four Latter-day Saint standard works (see appendix), they are found mainly in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon.¹⁸ For example, Nephi records that during his father's vision, Lehi "cast [his] eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a *great and spacious building*; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth" (1 Ne. 8:26, emphasis added). Lehi (and later Nephi) did not see a building that was choice for some but spacious for others. The expression "great and spacious" indicates the building was extraordinary and large, or that it was very spacious, with abundant room for its many occupants.

Similarly, Nephi later reports, “And it came to pass that I beheld this *great and abominable church*; and I saw the devil that he was the founder of it” (1 Ne. 13:6, emphasis added). Again, no reader of the Book of Mormon would be confused about the nature of this “church.” It was not “great,” as in positive, for some, but abominable for others. It was very abominable, being the complete antithesis of everything holy.

Other examples of the form “great and ___” can be adduced from scripture to further illustrate this point:

Deuteronomy 1:19 reads: “And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that *great and terrible wilderness*, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites” (emphasis added).

Alma 34:16 states: “Therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the *great and eternal plan of redemption*” (emphasis added).

Doctrine and Covenants 6:1 proclaims: “A *great and marvelous work* is about to come forth unto the children of men” (emphasis added).

The focus of the “great and ___” phrase in each of these passages is on one event or thing (a building, church, wilderness, plan, work) in relation to one group of people (those in the building, the church, or the wilderness, those who are the beneficiaries of the plan or the work). The purpose of each expression is to emphasize one significant quality of that thing or event, be it spacious, abominable, terrible, eternal, or marvelous. There is no bifurcation of meaning in any of these passages—no “great” for some, but “spacious/abominable/terrible/eternal/marvelous” for others.

Conclusion

The Hebrew grammar and vocabulary of the expression “the great and dreadful/terrible day of the Lord” in Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5, along with the larger biblical context of these two verses and latter-day prophetic insights, indicate that this phrase means “the significantly dreadful day of the Lord.” Various other scripture passages with the expression “great and [modifier] [noun]” provide compelling support for this understanding.

Thus, the expression “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” does *not* mean “the day of the Lord” will be great for the righteous but dreadful for the wicked. Latter-day Saints should appreciate that the prophets who first used this phrase were warning all people that conditions just prior to and at the “day of the Lord” will be very dreadful indeed, filled with turmoil and calamity. The Lord himself encourages and commands, “Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord” (D&C 133:10), because of the challenges associated with this day. Fear will pervade the wicked at this significantly terrible day. However, the righteous, whether physical calamity befalls them

or not, need not fear. Righteous or wicked, all people will witness and know the extraordinary magnitude of this culminating, dreadful day. It is the subsequent, great millennial day that will be wonderful for the righteous.

Appendix

“Great and ___” in Latter-day Saint Scripture, Alphabetically Sorted by Second Modifier¹⁹

Great and Abominable 1 Nephi 13:6, 8, 26, 28; 14:3, 9, 15, 17; 22:13, 14; 2 Nephi 6:12; 28:18; D&C 29:21	Great and Important Articles of Faith 9
Great and Bitter Genesis 27:34	Great and Incessant Joseph Smith—History 1:9
Great and Coming 3 Nephi 28:31	Great and Judgment 2 Nephi 9:22
Great and Dreadful Daniel 9:4; Malachi 4:5; Alma 45:14; 3 Nephi 25:5; D&C 2:1; 110:14, 16; 128:17; 138:46; Joseph Smith—History 1:38	Great and Large Nehemiah 4:19 ²⁰
Great and Eternal 2 Nephi 11:5; Alma 34:16; 37:7; 42:26; Helaman 13:38; Mormon 5:14	Great and Last 2 Nephi 2:26; 33:12; Words of Mormon 1:11; Alma 34:10, 13, 14; Helaman 12:25; 3 Nephi 26:4; Mormon 9:6; D&C 19:32; 88:69, 75, 102
Great and Everlasting Helaman 12:8	Great and Lasting Alma 62:35; Ether 14:21
Great and Fair Isaiah 5:9; 2 Nephi 15:9	Great and Notable Acts 2:20; 3 Nephi 8:14; D&C 84:117
Great and Fenced Deuteronomy 9:1; Joshua 14:12	Great and Marvelous Revelation 15:1, 3; 1 Nephi 1:14; 14:7; 2 Nephi 1:10; 4:17; Jacob 4:8; Alma 9:6; 26: 15; Helaman 16:16, 20; 3 Nephi 3:16; 5:8; 11:1; 17:16, 17; 19:34; 21:9; 26:14; 28:31, 32; 4 Nephi 1:5; Mormon 8:7, 34; Ether 4:15; 11:20; 12:5; 13:13; D&C 6:1, 11; 11:1; 12:1; 14:1; 76:114
Great and Glorious D&C 109:23; 110:13; Joseph Smith—History 1:73	Great and Mighty Genesis 18:18; Jeremiah 33:3; Daniel 11:25; D&C 138:38
Great and Goodly Deuteronomy 6:10	Great and Noble ²¹ Ezra 4:10
Great and Grand D&C 128:11	Great and Precious 2 Peter 1:4
Great and High Revelation 21:10, 12	

Great and Small ²² Deuteronomy 25:13, 14; 2 Chronicles 34:30; 36:18; Esther 1:5, 20; Ecclesiastes 2:7; Jeremiah 16:6; 3 Nephi 26:1	Joel 2:11, 31; 1 Nephi 12:5, 18; 18:13; 2 Nephi 26:3; 3 Nephi 4:7, 11; 8:6, 11, 12, 19, 24, 25; Ether 6:6; 15:17
Great and Sore Genesis 50:10; Deuteronomy 6:22; Psalm 71:20	Great and Tremendous Mormon 8:2
Great and Spacious 1 Nephi 8:26, 31; 11:36	Great and True Helaman 13:18; 15:13
Great and Strong 1 Kings 19:11; Isaiah 27:1	Great and Walled Deuteronomy 1:28
Great and Tall Deuteronomy 9:2	Great and Wide Psalms 104:25
Great and Terrible Deuteronomy 1:19; 8:15; 10:21; Nehemiah 1:5; 4:14; Psalms 99:3;	Great and Wonderful D&C 138:3

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1. Various scriptures and statements by latter-day Church leaders make this plain. For example, see Doctrine and Covenants 34:7–9: “The time is soon at hand that I shall come in a cloud with power and great glory. And it shall be a great day at the time of my coming, for all nations shall tremble. But before that great day shall come, the sun shall be darkened.” See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 1:173, which states: “This great and dreadful day can be no other time than the coming of Jesus Christ to establish his kingdom in power on the earth, and to cleanse it from all iniquity.”

2. In addition to having personally heard this interpretation expressed numerous times in Latter-day Saint sacrament meetings and Sunday School classes, as well as by my students at BYU, it also appears in various publications by Latter-day Saint authors. I intentionally omit references to these publications.

3. Regarding the response of the righteous, see, for example, Moses 7:61–64; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:48–50. For the response of the wicked, see Moses 7:65–66; Doctrine and Covenants 1:8–10; 112:24–26.

4. This assessment is based on a review of the historical usage of “great” in three dictionaries: (1) Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Strahan, 1755; reprint, New York: AMS, 1967), which contains no definition

for “great” similar to “desirable”; (2) Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint, 1970), which defines (in definition 9) great as “vast; extensive; wonderful; admirable,” but this is hardly the meaning of “wonderful” and “marvelous” used in current slang; and (3) *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), which under definition 16 (“certain colloquial or trivial uses developed from the preceding senses”), notes some examples of this usage (“of surpassing excellence; hence, used as a (more or less) rapturous term of admiration: ‘Magnificent,’ ‘splendid,’ ‘grand,’ ‘immense’”) that come closest to the one under discussion, the earliest of which comes from 1809, and most are from the 1890s and 1960s. The King James Version, however, was originally published in 1611, undergoing several revisions up until 1769.

This general lexical data is corroborated by the use of “great” in the writings of Shakespeare (1564–1623), in which the word usually connotes high rank, power, eminence, nobility, magnanimity, pride, or largeness in size. I thank my colleague Kent P. Jackson for first suggesting to me the idea of reviewing the historical usage of the English word “great.”

5. Due to differences in the demarcation of chapters and verses, Joel 2:31 is Joel 3:4 in the Hebrew Bible, and Malachi 4:5 is Malachi 3:23 in the Hebrew Bible.

6. Compare the similar language but different syntax of Joel 2:11: *gādōl yōm yhw̄h wēnōrā’ mē’od*, “great is the day of the Lord and dreadful very.”

7. In addition to the passages in Joel and Malachi, the phrase “day of the Lord” occurs several times in the Old Testament, usually in the context of a prophetic warning. For example, see Isaiah 13:6, 9; Amos 5:18, 20. See also the Topical Guide in the Latter-day Saint edition of the Holy Bible (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), s.v. “Day of the Lord.” Even when a variation of the expression “great and dreadful day” is used in reference to a time other than the Lord’s Second Coming, as in Alma 45:14 (“But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that *great and dreadful day*, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them,” emphasis added), it is wholly negative in tone.

8. Any lexicon of the Hebrew Bible will provide an overview of the use of the Hebrew words discussed here. See, for example, Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, 5 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1994–2000); and G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 11 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975–).

9. See the discussion of *gādōl* in Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 2:392–97.

10. Quoting large blocks of scripture is too cumbersome for this brief study. I have quoted brief, representative passages in the course of summarizing the pertinent texts instead. The reader may enjoy reading all of Joel and Malachi.

11. It is generally assumed that Joel’s prophecy was intended to warn wicked Israelites of his day of impending doom in their era as well as to indicate the conditions of the last days.

12. Malachi 4:5 is probably more familiar to Latter-day Saints than Joel 2:31. The return of Elijah prophesied in this verse is also found several times in uniquely Latter-day Saint scripture: 3 Nephi 25:5; Doctrine and Covenants 2:1; 110:14; 128:17; 138:46; Joseph Smith—History 1:38.

13. There is not sufficient space here to quote or cite the many other passages in scripture that relate to the “great and dreadful day of the Lord.” Many of these are cited in the Topical Guide, s.v. “Day of the Lord” and “Jesus Christ, Second Coming.”

14. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 162. I appreciate Brent L. Top reminding me of this statement by the Prophet.

15. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 502.

16. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning: A Modern-day Prophet Testifies of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 37 (see also 20–21).

17. Nephi’s prophecy about the destructive signs that would be manifest in the Americas when Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem is pertinent in this regard: “And after the Messiah shall come there shall be signs given unto my people of his birth, and also of his death and resurrection; and *great and terrible shall that day be unto the wicked*, for they shall perish” (2 Ne. 26:3, emphasis added). His teaching that the destruction to occur in the Americas when Jesus died would be great and terrible for the wicked highlights the assertion made herein that the phrase “great and dreadful/terrible day” says something about the nature of the “day” in general, not the perception that two different groups of people will have of it. Nephi’s prophetic focus is on the wicked who will be destroyed, but as noted, Mormon’s report in 3 Nephi of the day on which Jesus was crucified indicates that the righteous were severely affected as well, though they received varying degrees of physical protection from the Lord. As President Benson teaches, the account in 3 Nephi parallels what is prophesied for Jesus’ Second Coming as well. Benson, *Witness and Warning*, 20–21, 37.

18. Clearly, Lehi, Ishmael, and their families knew Hebrew and took Israelite prophetic texts on the plates of brass with them when they left Jerusalem. I presume that various “great and ____” phrases were in the texts on the plates of brass, and that these and other biblical forms influenced how Nephite texts were worded. Similarly, I presume that “Bible language” had some influence on the inclusion of “great and ____” expressions in the scriptures of this last dispensation.

19. Four occurrences in the Hebrew Bible of the phrase “great and [modifier] [noun]” are not rendered as “great and ____” in the King James Version. These are thus not represented in this Appendix. They are Genesis 27:34; Deuteronomy 7:21; 2 Chronicles 2:9; and Esther 4:1.

20. The word “great” in this verse is a translation of a Hebrew verbal form *har-beh*, not *gādōl*. See Nehemiah 4:13 in the Hebrew Bible.

21. The word “great” in this verse is a translation of the Aramaic adjective *rabba*’.

22. The phrase “great and small” (and its reverse, “small and great”; see Genesis 19:11; 1 Samuel 5:9; 2 Kings 23:2; 25:26; Job 3:19; Psalm 115:13; Acts 26:22; Revelation 11:18; 13:16; 19:18; 20:12) is an exception to the usage analyzed in this study. This pair generally functions as a merism—the mention of two extremes, with the understanding that everything in between is intended as well (such as Jesus’ title “Alpha and Omega”). But even in the phrase “great and small,” “great” does not mean “desirable.”