

**THE
SECOND COMING
OF JESUS THE
MESSIAH**

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**WindRiver Publishing
St. George, Utah**



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Library of Congress Control Number: 2003102367
ISBN 1-886249-04-0

First Printing, 2003

Signs: Increased Devastations 11

“For behold, and lo, vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly as the whirlwind; and who shall escape it?”

Doctrine & Covenants 97:22

The Desolating Scourge

One of the most interesting general signs of the Second Coming is described in scripture as a “desolating scourge” that will go forth upon mankind. The scourge is not portrayed as a singular event, nor is it considered a unique event in any given period of time. Indeed, it is just the opposite. It can and does take many forms. The Lord states that it will “go forth among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out [upon them] *from time to time*, if they repent not, until the earth is empty” (D&C 5:19; emphasis added).

In one section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the “desolating scourge” is defined as a “desolating sickness” which will “cover the land” (D&C 45:31), and while this may incline us to look for a specific illness to fit this description, this scripture may in fact refer to many different disorders—anything from the “black death” of the 14th century to the influenza, AIDS, or ebola epi-

demics of the 20th century. Perhaps it refers to some future scourge—or it could refer to them all! That is what makes this sign so difficult to identify.

In the 29th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the mysterious “desolating scourge” adversely affects the heavens. Because of it “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall be turned into blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and there shall be greater signs in heaven above and in the earth beneath.” It causes a great hailstorm that will be “sent forth to destroy the crops of the earth,” and it causes flies to come “upon the face of the earth,” flies “which shall take hold of the inhabitants thereof, and shall eat their flesh, and shall cause maggots to come in upon them . . . [until] their flesh shall fall from off their bones, and their eyes from their sockets.” As a result, “the beasts of the forest and the fowls of the air shall devour them up” (see D&C 29:14–21).

More devastating scourges are found in Revelation 16 wherein the great plagues of the seven angels are described (Chapter 8). These scourges include wars, pestilence, and earthquakes, and their specific purpose is to cleanse the earth for the last time in preparation for the Lord’s coming (see Joseph Smith–Matthew 1:39). Another scourge in Revelation is described as a “noisome and grievous” sore which will be inflicted upon those in the latter days who bear the mark of the beast (see Revelation 16:2). Other nonspecific scourges recorded in the scriptures are blood and fire, smoke,¹ vapors of smoke, thunder and lightning,² and famine (see D&C 29:16; Joseph Smith–History 1:45). The “desolating scourge” of famine will be the fulfillment of John’s vision of a black horseman who holds a “pair of balances in his hand:” balances which signify a famine so devastating that the value of food will be far greater than the value of money (see Revelation 6:5–6). This condition is described by Joseph Smith as having also occurred during the third thousand years of the earth’s existence—prior to Christ’s birth (see D&C 77:7).

One problem mankind has with these scourges (besides having to live through them) is recognition, since the devil uses them to deceive mankind just as the Lord uses them to remind mankind of his coming. The righteous men and women of the latter days will have to rely upon spiritual insight to recognize the difference between the normal occurrences of nature and God’s hand

moving upon the wicked. Science (or the natural man) is always ready with a plausible explanation for unusual natural occurrences—such as shifts in El Nino’s current, unusual sun spots, erosion of the ozone layer, or a new virus—and science may be right. However, scientists may fail to recognize that God also has the power to cause scourges—through natural means or otherwise.

Isaiah perceived the problem of the Lord using scourges as warnings while the devil uses them to deceive (he cannot create or cause them) as a “covenant” with death and hell. While addressing the Jewish leadership the Lord said through Isaiah, “Ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves” (Isaiah 28:15). What he is explaining is that the devil can use our own intelligence and sophistication to deceive us. Many of the “scourges” that befall mankind are just normal life’s circumstances and can be explained as such; however, because of their supposed intelligence or sophistication, mankind may also attempt to explain away those scourges that come from God, and that is the key to Isaiah’s comment. We can easily be deceived into believing that any or all of the scourges that befall mankind have a natural explanation and have nothing to do with God’s condemnation of the wicked. Conversely, we may attribute God’s vengeance to a given scourge when in reality, it is only one of life’s circumstances. This problem can subject us to one of two consequences: *first*, we may rely upon our own knowledge and scientific sophistication to explain away God’s signs as natural phenomena, thereby rejecting the possibility of God’s involvement and possibly withdrawing ourselves from his kingdom; or *second*, we may justify our own righteousness by citing the destruction of others as a scourge from God upon the wicked, when in fact they may have only fallen subject to a normal occurrence.

An interesting example of not recognizing God’s influence in our lives is found in the New Testament. Herod Agrippa had been promoted by Rome for his allegiance to the empire. He was allowed to take the title of king, and following the death of Philip

was given Philip's territory as part of his kingdom. Soon thereafter he dressed himself in formal royal attire, sat upon his throne, and delivered an oration to the people. Apparently the Spirit influenced his talk and the people listening recognized it, for his audience declared that the speech had come from God. But Herod did not recognize Deity's hand and failed to give God the glory for the speech. As a result, "the angel of the Lord [immediately] smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:21–24).

During the latter days, God will send devastating scourges through what may appear to be normal and natural processes as he changes the times and seasons and puts the general signs of the Second Coming into place. But through the self-serving, obdurate, and dishonest characteristics of humankind (the covenant with death and hell), they will reject the signs of the times and the admonitions of the prophets. Isaiah warned mankind that "your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it" (Isaiah 28:18). The scourges which will assail men and women prior to the Second Coming may have the power to destroy them physically, but their disbelief in God will have the power to destroy them spiritually.

Wars and Rumors of War

Wars and rumors of war have always been a part of earth's history. In a double-reference prophecy found in Matthew, the Lord warned his Apostles about the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the great calamities of war in the last days: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled . . . For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . . [and] . . . all these are [but] the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:6–8, see also D&C 45:26).

The last days began with the restoration of the gospel, and it is from that time forward that the double-reference portion of the prophecy applies. On Christmas day in 1832, Joseph Smith, the prophet of the restoration, received the following prophecy concerning war in the latter days: