

“The Lord’s Hand”
President M. Russell Ballard
DCU Center
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My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful for this opportunity to join you in this historic gathering with community leaders, friends of the Church, and those who are watching. I thank Elders Christofferson and Bennett for their words of counsel and encouragement.

As you may remember, New England played a key role in the history of this country. The native people, English settlers, founding fathers and mothers, and children of God from around the world who found a home here have all, in their own ways, written themselves into the story of this nation.

As I prepared to address you, I thought how looking for the Lord’s hand in the early history of the United States might help us recognize His hand in our own lives, no matter when or what country we call home.

About 2,600 years ago, the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi recorded a remarkable vision in which he saw the Savior’s birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. As the vision continued, Nephi also saw Christ’s disciples establishing the Lord’s Church in the Old World.

Eventually, the Church faded into the night with the loss of priesthood authority, although many people kept the flame of faith burning bright by copying and preserving the holy scriptures.

Nephi saw the Lord reach out again by restoring His Church, this time among a people in the New World. In preparing for the Restoration of Christ’s gospel and His Church, Nephi saw the hand of the Lord working among the Gentiles. He saw how they discovered a New World—a world already known by native people who called it home.

In the wake of European discovery, Nephi saw the Gentiles settle the Americas and establish a form of government that provided liberty and freedom for many of the Anglo-American inhabitants. Eventually, through a civil war, struggle, and determination, the freedom and liberty they planted continued to bless many others.

This past summer, I visited Plimoth Plantation, about 80 miles from here, with my son Craig, son-in-law Brad, and family friend, Tim Ballard.

A wonderful thing happened the first day we were there. As we walked down Leidel Street and glanced across the road, we saw a familiar sight: two handsome young men in white shirts and ties. We love our missionaries, and I welcome any chance to work with them one-on-one. So we motioned for them to join us.

About halfway across the street, one of them stopped and looked at me, and it suddenly dawned on him that an Apostle had called them over. After we got them calmed down, we invited them to spend that day and the next exploring the wonders of Plymouth with us.

As you may know, this “living history museum” re-creates the original 17th-century settlement of the Plymouth Colony established by the English Separatists, men and women who had separated themselves from the Church of England. You will also find a replica of the homesite of the native people who lived along the coast before European settlement and who are the descendants of those, including the family of Lehi and Sariah, who also made a long journey to settle the New World.

This was my first visit to Plymouth, and I was thrilled to walk in the footsteps of the Pilgrims and native people who lived there. They were brave, courageous, creative, and ordinary in their own ways as they attempted to create a life for themselves.

Because of my own DNA connection to the British Isles, I was particularly interested in the English men, women, and children who made the long voyage on the *Mayflower* to the New World, where they hoped to retain their English identity, enjoy the same degree of religious freedom they had found as strangers in the Dutch Netherlands, and earn a better living.

Among them was a young, single man, an indentured servant to John Carver, and my ninth great-grandfather, John Howland.

The ocean voyage across the Atlantic took 66 days before the Pilgrims, literally “ones who came from afar,” arrived off the coast of New England on November 11, 1620.

During that historic voyage, the crew and passengers of the *Mayflower* encountered many turbulent storms. In the middle of one storm, young John fell overboard. By all accounts, that should have been the end of John Howland. However, the Lord had other plans for him. William Bradford, also a passenger on the *Mayflower*, reported:

“In these storms the winds were so fierce and the seas so high the Pilgrims were forced to remain below deck. And one of them John Howland came above and, with a roll of the ship, he was thrown into the sea; *but it pleased God* that he caught hold of a rope that was trailing in the water and held on though he was several fathoms under water till he was hauled up by the same rope to the brim of the water, and then with a boat-hook and other means got him into the ship again and *his life was saved*; and though he was something ill with it, yet he lived many years after, and became a profitable member both in church and commonwealth.”

When the *Mayflower* finally arrived in the New World, they discovered they were more than 250 miles north of their intended location. Because of the lateness of the season and lack of supplies, they decided to stay there.

When they explored their new home, they found land already cleared, corn supplies, and an abandoned village whose inhabitants had died in the disease epidemic of 1616 to 1618.

Later, a leader of one of the villages arrived in the struggling settlement to help the Pilgrims. They formed an alliance, and during the second fall after their arrival in the New World, 52 colonists and some 90 natives celebrated Plymouth's first successful harvest—the first “Thanksgiving” in Plymouth.

At the time, John Howland was not as famous as fellow passengers William Bradford, John Carver, and Myles Standish. However, standing where we now stand, with nearly 400 years between us and these courageous Pilgrims, he may have had a greater impact on the history of the United States than any of them.

About four years after they arrived in the New World, John married fellow *Mayflower* passenger Elizabeth Tilley, a brave and committed daughter of God. They eventually had 10 children and nearly 90 grandchildren. But that is not where the story ends.

Today, an estimated 2 million Americans trace their roots to John and Elizabeth. Their descendants include three U.S. presidents—Franklin D. Roosevelt, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush; American poets Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; and two influential 19th-century American religious leaders—the prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum Smith.

Think about it for a moment—the existence of these political leaders, poets, and prophets hinged on this one young man finding and grabbing a rope in the ocean and holding on tight to be saved.

It was a miracle!

I see the hand of the Lord in John Howland's life. I stood in reverence at his headstone next to William Bradford's at the Burial Hill in Plymouth. The headstone has a picture of the *Mayflower* and reads:

Here ended the Pilgrimage of JOHN HOWLAND who died February 23, 1673, aged above 80 years. He married Elizabeth daughter of JOHN TILLEY who came with him in the Mayflower Dec. 1620. From them are descended a numerous posterity.

Hee was a godly man and an ancient professor in the ways of Christ. Hee was one of the first comers into this land and was the last man that was left of those that came over in the Shipp called the Mayflower that lived in Plymouth.

Brothers and sisters, please look for the Lord's hand in your lives and in the lives of your family, as I do in the lives of my ancestors and family. Expect it. Do not dismiss it. Do not relegate the experiences in your lives to coincidences.

As you see the hand of the Lord in your lives, thank Him for it. Please record and share your stories. The more you recognize the Lord's hand in your lives, the more you will see it in your lives today.

Let's return to Nephi's vision to see how the hand of the Lord helped the European settlers.

After describing what he saw regarding the Pilgrims, Nephi continues: "And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them. And I beheld that the power of God was with them and the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God."

As I traveled north to Boston from Plymouth this past summer, I stood upon the high grounds just south of Boston, at Dorchester Heights, which has a commanding view of downtown Boston and its harbor.

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in the spring of 1775, the British army occupied the city of Boston, and British warships filled the harbor.

During this visit, Tim told the story of Henry Knox, a 25-year-old bookseller in Boston who joined the American Revolution and played a key role in forcing the British military out of Boston and New England. Knox convinced General George Washington, the leader of the American Continental Army, to move the artillery recently captured at Fort Ticonderoga, a fort at the south end of Lake Champlain in northern New York, to Boston.

Reaching the fort on December 5, Knox built oxen-drawn sleds to move 60 tons of cannons and armaments back to Boston, though there was no snow on the ground yet. He prayed for snow.

Knox's prayers were answered Christmas morning 1775, when the snow fell. At last, there was a 300-mile road covered with snow and the newly frozen-over Hudson River so he could carry the guns back to Washington on the sleds he had built.

When the artillery arrived, Washington ordered his troops to take the cannons to the top of Dorchester Heights.

Apparently, Washington's advisors said when the British saw their movement, they would immediately attack. Without any other alternatives, Washington ordered the cannons and armaments in place. A thick layer of fog separated the American and British troops.

As Reverend William Gordon observed, "A finer night for working could not have been taken out of the whole 365. It was hazy below the Heights so that our people could not be seen, tho' it was a bright moonlight night above on the hills."

When the British woke the next morning, at least 20 cannons were looking down on them, along with thousands of troops for support. One British officer declared that it all had been done "with an expedition equal to that of the genie belonging to Aladdin's wonderful lamp."

In the face of superior firepower perched above them, the British abandoned Boston and New England to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Similar miracles repeated themselves over and over again throughout the war. It seemed that in the most desperate hours, the hand of the Lord intervened to deliver the colonists out of the hands of their enemies.

Nephi observed that “the power of the Lord was with them” after they “did humble themselves before the Lord.”

Washington relied upon divine providence again and again. For example, he issued a general order asking his men to fast and pray:

“Thursday ... being set apart ... as a day of fasting and prayer ... to implore the Lord, and Giver of all victory, to pardon our sins and wickedness’s, and that it would please him to bless the Continental [Army], with his divine favour and protection—All Officers, and Soldiers, are strictly enjoined to pay all due reverence, and attention on that day, to the sacred duties due to the Lord of hosts, for his mercies already received, and for those blessings, which our Holiness and Uprightness of life can alone encourage us to hope through his mercy to obtain.”

Washington acknowledged the hand of the Lord in the War of Independence, “Providence has heretofore saved us in a remarkable manner, and on this we must principally rely.”

From the signing of the Declaration of Independence in July 1776 through the signing of the U.S. Constitution in September 1787, the “wise men” whom the Lord “raised up unto this very purpose” relied upon divine providence.

My dear friends, I invite you to consider how your ancestors came to this country and how they found the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Look for the hand of the Lord in their lives.

If you are a first-generation emigrant or convert, look for the hand of the Lord in your own life and acknowledge, like General Washington, how the Lord has saved you and how you should rely upon Him each day.

I do not believe that you are here this Sunday afternoon by accident or coincidence. The Lord’s hand has led you here to celebrate His love and goodness and to learn what you can to more fully appreciate His efforts to care for you and those you love.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I have a solemn duty to face the Lord and deliver His message. His words often include words of encouragement and expressions of love. They also include words of warning.

The Lord told Ezekiel, “So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.”

The prophets and apostles are the watchmen on the tower today, and it is our duty to warn the people.

Through the Prophet Joseph, the Lord told the Saints in August 1831, “And in nothing doth man offend God save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.”

Acknowledging the Lord’s hand and obeying His commandments are essential to our well-being as individuals, and for our families, communities, and nations.

In this regard, the Lord commanded His Saints:

“Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land. I, the Lord God, make you free, therefore ye are free indeed; and the law also maketh you free. Nevertheless, when the wicked rule the people mourn.

“Wherefore, honest men ... [and I add women] should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil. And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God.”

America and the nations of the earth, as in times past, are at another crossroad. Where we go will determine our future and the future of our children and grandchildren.

Said Lincoln: “We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too proud to pray to the God that made us!”

My dear brothers and sisters, our nation was founded on prayer, it was preserved by prayer, and we need prayer again. I plead with you this evening to pray for this country, for our leaders, for our people, and for the families that live in this great nation founded by God.

Remember, this country was established and preserved by our founding fathers and mothers who repeatedly acknowledged the hand of God through prayer.

This area was the seedbed of so very much that led to the founding of this nation. Tonight I invite you to join in a new movement. Invite your neighbors, your colleagues, your friends on social media to pray for this country.

We must stand boldly for righteousness and truth, and must defend the cause of honor, decency, and personal freedom espoused by Washington, Madison, Adams, Lincoln, and other leaders who acknowledged and loved God.

As we conclude this historic gathering, I leave you my love and blessing as one of the

Lord's Apostles. I bless you to find great happiness and joy in living the gospel of Jesus Christ; in serving your family, neighbors, and communities.

As a country let us remember our prayers and express our love to God our Heavenly Father and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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