**Context for Section 138**

**Deaths in the Family**

Early in 1918, Joseph F. Smith suffered a staggering blow. His eldest son Hyrum Mack an Apostle then forty-five years old, died on January 23 of complications from a ruptured appendix. President Smith wrote in his journal: “My soul is rent asunder. My heart is broken, and flutters for life! O my sweet son, my joy, my hope! . . . O God, help me!” After his sons Joseph Fielding and David Asael took him to view Hyrum’s body, President Smith confided again in his journal: At the noon hour David and Joseph took me to Hyrum’s where I once more kissed the lips of my boy—whose lips I have never failed to kiss since his birth whenever we have met, or parted until now—they did not, for the first time in all his life, kiss me back again! O how bitter is this unwelcome fate! I am actually thankful that I can find some relief from my overwhelming burden of grief in tears. The death of his firstborn son, in whom he took such pride and placed such hope, was devastating to the prophet. Suffering from ill health since 1916, President Smith declined markedly in the months following Hyrum’s death.

1915 his wife Sarah Richards died, followed later that year by his twenty-five-year-old daughter Zina Greenwell, who left behind a three-year-old child. By 1918, only one of his four adult sisters survived; his brother John had died in 1911. Of his forty-four children from five wives, thirteen had died, many in their childhood. Joseph F.’s expressions of grief over the death of each child in his journal and letters are heartbreaking from first to last. When his first child, Mercy Josephine, died before her third birthday, he wrote: My heart is bruised and wrenched almost asunder. I am desolate, my home seems desolate. . . . I look in vain, I listen, no sound, I wander through the rooms, all are vacant, lonely, desolate, deserted. . . . No beaming little black eyes sparkling with love for papa; . . . but a vacant little chair . . . and only the one desolate thought forcing its crushing leaden weight upon my heart—she is not here, she is gone!

Finally, just days before the vision of October 3, Hyrum Mack’s widow, Ida Bowman Smith, died of heart failure on September 24, six days after giving birth to a son, whom she had named after his deceased father. Death had surrounded him throughout his life, and the longings these deaths awakened could not be fully soothed in mortality.

**WW1**

By the end, seventy million men took up arms. There were over thirty million military casualties, including over nine million dead. On only the first day of the battle of the Somme, on a fourteen-mile segment of the overall five hundred mile Western Front, the British suffered nearly sixty thousand casualties on a single day: July 1, 1916. That is more than one casualty for every second of daylight. It remains the deadliest day in British military history.

**The Spanish Flu Pandemic**

The new killer was the genetically reassorted flu virus, more virulent than any ever known, and even today little understood. In the United States alone, in the month of October 1918—that is, the period between the vision of October 3 and its formal acceptance on October 31—there would be more deaths than in any other month in the nation’s history. In thirty-one shocking days, the flu would kill over 195,000 Americans. It was the deadliest month in this nation’s history. Coffins were in such demand that they were often stolen. Undertakers had to place armed guards around their prized boxes. The orderly life of America began to break down. All over the country, farms and factories shut down—schools and churches closed. Homeless children wandered the streets, their parents vanished. The vibrant and optimistic nation seemed to be falling apart.