ISSUES AND CHALLENGES. The manner in which the Church has handled a number of sensitive issues in the Middle East illustrates its capacity to adapt to local needs and customs. Between 1841 and 1950, the most vexing problem for the missionaries was how to deal with the poverty and poor health of the members. The Church attempted to alleviate the suffering of members by teaching them new skills, organizing cooperatives to market goods in Salt Lake City, soliciting clothing and food donations from members in Utah, and arranging for relocation to Europe, Mexico, and the United States. Since 1950 the Church has adjusted to issues of a cultural and political nature. One example is the First Presidency’s decision to allow members to hold Sabbath services, customarily reserved for Sunday, on the day of worship designated by local religious tradition: Friday in Muslim countries and Saturday in Israel. The Church has refrained from taking an official stand on the Arab-Israeli question; rather, the position of Church leaders is best revealed by the manner in which they have quietly sought to cultivate good relations and a reputation for impartiality with both Israelis and Palestinians. The following statement by Elder Howard W. Hunter, an apostle, is characteristic of this attitude: “Both the Jews and the Arabs are children of our Father. They are both children of promise, and as a church we do not take sides. We have love for and an interest in each” (pp. 35–36).

The greatest obstacle to Church growth today is the prohibition against proselytizing that prevails in every country in the Middle East. Despite its reputation for vigorous missionary activity in other areas of the world, the Church has observed religious restrictions in the Middle East by making nonproselytizing commitments to government leaders and by issuing strict instructions for members to honor these commitments.

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MILITARY AND THE CHURCH
Although the Church is opposed to war and recognizes that going to war is a very poor alternative in resolving conflicts, tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints have served their countries’ armed forces, sometimes even fighting in opposing forces, especially in World War II. The Church considers being loyal citizens to be a duty of its members, irrespective of nationality. Responding to a call for military service is one appropriate manner of fulfilling this duty of citizenship. Latter-day Saints who choose military careers have no restrictions on either their fellowship or their callings in the Church. While any member is free to object to military service because of conscience, Church membership in and of itself is not a justification, and Church leaders have discouraged conscientious objection in every conflict of the twentieth century.

The moral question for Church members is much more one of the spirit than of the uniform. It echoes John the Baptist’s counsel to soldiers to avoid violence and extortion, and to be content with their wages (Luke 3:14). The Book of Mormon repeatedly counsels soldiers to abhor the shedding of blood (Alma 44:1–7; 48:14–16, 23; Morm. 4:11–12). However, it also contains principles as to when war may be justified. Concerning the action of the Nephites when they were attacked by the Lamanites, the record states:

Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion [Alma 43:45–47].

One of the Church’s first significant involvements with a national military was the organization and the march of the Mormon Battalion. In
1846, as the Latter-day Saints were beginning their westward migration, they responded to the U.S. Army’s request for five hundred volunteers to serve in the conflict with Mexico. The battalion marched from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, through New Mexico and Arizona into Mexico, and then on to California, without combat. Most of its men then journeyed to join their families in Utah. The relative isolation in Utah provided for very little involvement in the Civil War. The Spanish-American War saw two artillery units mobilized from Utah, with the first LDS chaplain and the first LDS servicemen’s worship group organized. Involvement in World War I was similarly based in the activity of Utah soldiers but was far more extensive than in any previous military engagement.

In the period before World War II, President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., counselor in the FIRST PRESIDENCY, vigorously advocated U.S. neutrality, and opposed the maintenance of a standing army with equal vigor when hostilities ceased. However, he was the Church spokesman when it made official declarations encouraging LDS men to respond to their governments’ call for military service, despite the fact that these decisions were contrary to his personal viewpoint. In October 1940, he said, “We shall confidently expect that no young man member of the Church will seek to evade his full responsibility” (CR [Oct. 1940]:16). A 1942 First Presidency statement counseled Church members worldwide to be ready to respond to their government’s call to military duty and exonerated the members’ acts of war: “God . . . will not hold the innocent instrumentalities of the war, our brethren in arms, responsible for the conflict” (MFP 6:159). This statement has been reiterated during each subsequent period of military action.

The Church has always made significant efforts to help its members in the armed forces live by the same moral standards they would uphold at home. The General Servicemen’s Committee was organized in 1941 with Elder Harold B. Lee as chairman. Members of the committee had geo-
graphical responsibilities, visited military installations, and appointed more than three thousand servicemen as group leaders and assistants. These priesthood leaders facilitated fellowship and organized opportunities for military people who could not meet with ordinary wards and branches to partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The principle of servicemen’s group leadership as a special case of Church organization continues in force. LDS chaplains coordinate their activities with stakes and missions and are authorized to organize groups and call group leaders any time small numbers of LDS service people are put in circumstances that might restrict their access to worship.

The activities of the General Servicemen’s Committee (in 1969 it became the Military Relations Committee) ebbed and flowed with the intensity of military conflict. This committee began providing publications specifically for service personnel during World War II. It distributed pocket-sized copies of the Book of Mormon, a hymnal, and a doctrinal compendium, Principles of the Gospel, and prepared brochures on military life, sexual morality, missionary opportunities, and the Word of Wisdom. These resources formed the basis of a preservice orientation program instituted during the Vietnam era by the Military Relations Committee. Every stake was provided literature, audiovisual resources, and a curricular outline to help people entering the military prepare for that challenge.

The missionary opportunities in the stresses of military life have proven to be significant, both on a personal and on a national basis. Many military people join the Church, and missionary success in countries such as Japan and Korea has gained momentum from the work of servicemen and women. The membership of the Church commonly prays for service people as a group, much as it does for the missionaries.

Servicemen’s conferences are held frequently in Europe and the Far East. An English-speaking servicemen’s stake was organized in Europe in 1968, providing members living there the full program of the Church in their native tongue.

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MILLENNARIANISM
While the word “millennium” simply means a thousand years, the Millennium is usually understood as a thousand-year period during which Christ will reign on earth. Latter-day Saints from the beginning anticipated the return of Christ and worked to prepare the world for his coming. The Bible mentions the thousand-year period only in Revelation 20:2–7, though many interpreters believe that various Old Testament prophecies, such as Isaiah’s vision of the lamb and lion lying down together (Isa. 11), describe that time. “Millenarianism” refers to belief in and the study of the Millennium—how near it is and what life then will be like.

Not surprisingly, Christians have differed on these matters throughout history. Those who take a literal approach to prophecy anticipate a millennial world fundamentally distinct from the present age, an actual return to the paradisical conditions that prevailed in the Garden of Eden. For others, the millennial prophecies are mere metaphors for the better times ahead as the world is gradually Christianized. In nineteenth-century America, the latter interpretation was dominant. Most people believed that religious revivals and foreign missions, not the personal return of Jesus Christ, would be the means of ushering in the Millennium. They defined the Millennium in terms of the spiritual rather than the spiritual and physical transformation of the earth.

The Latter-day Saints rejected this figurative vision of the future. They believed that only the miraculous, divine intervention of Christ could fully destroy wickedness and re-create the New Eden. Mormons then and now literally expect the earth to be “renewed and receive its paradisical glory” (A of F 10). The extraordinary biological, geological, and social changes that will make the earth a paradise include the abolition of infant mortality, the herbivoration of carnivores; the unification of continental landmasses; and the cessation of all enmity, strife, and warfare.

As the revelations unfolded during the early years of the Church, it was learned that Christ and those raised in the first resurrection at the beginning of the Millennium “will not probably dwell upon the earth, but will visit it when they please, or when it is necessary to govern it” (TPJS, p. 268). The Saints also came to realize that the destruction of the wicked accompanying Christ’s second com-