For some of us scripture study is difficult because the scriptures are too easy. I sometimes hear people say things like “I’ve read it several times. I know what it says, so I don’t get anything new out of it.” Those are people for whom the scriptures have become too easy. I hope this book will help remedy that problem. Perhaps it will also help those who are only beginning to take scripture study seriously keep their scripture study fresh and educating.

To those ends, this is a book of questions. Just questions, no answers, though occasionally I will throw in some answer-like material to help make the question easier to understand. It is a book of questions because in my experience—in both personal scripture study and in teaching Sunday School and other lessons—questions are of more help for reflective, deep study. We learn new things when we respond to new questions, and the person who says “I no longer get anything out of my scripture study” no longer runs up against questions to think about as he or she reads. This book is intended to make reading harder—and therefore fresher—by giving such readers questions for study.

Sometimes when we study we may ask questions to which we can give answers based on research of some sort. Often, however, we learn the most when our questions are of a different sort, ones that don’t require specific answers as much as they require application. They cause us to reflect
on our lives and our associations with others. They make us consider whether we continue to live the covenants we have made. They help us ask once again what repentance means in our particular lives, what it requires us to do as individuals or as a people. You’ll find here questions of all kinds (though none, I think, that require research), but I have hoped to focus mostly on questions to which you can return more than once, questions that will help you, as I believe they have helped me, “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23).

I understand Nephi’s phrase to mean that I will find the scriptures call me to faith in Jesus Christ and to repentance. In Alma’s words, they call me to receive Christ’s image in my countenance (Alma 5:14) and to continue “to sing the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26). As I study the scriptures prayerfully and thoughtfully, they call me in the same way that they called those who first heard their revelations, sermons, stories, songs, and poems.

So perhaps the most important reason for focusing on questions when we study, either privately or in preparing for a lesson, is that questions about scripture help us think and ponder. They give us material to consider and ideas to contemplate. Questions help us to existentially hear again the divine call to come to Jesus Christ.

In contrast, when we focus on answers rather than questions, we tend to see scripture study as something that we can be over-and-done-with rather than as an ongoing process. Feeling that I know the answer tends to make me feel that there is nothing left to do. But focusing on questions helps me come back to passages fresh,
ready to learn new things as I read rather than returning to them with an implicit attitude of “I already know what this is about.”

A good example may be Doctrine and Covenants 121:43. The previous verses tell us that we can only use priesthood power through persuasion and love, “reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost.” Many in the Church have read verse 43 to tell us that sometimes we should reprove with sharpness, assuming that they knew the meaning of the word betimes. Had they approached reading this verse with questions, they might have asked themselves “Do I know what that word means?” and then checked a dictionary, where they would have discovered that it means “early.” Using that newly understood meaning, such a reader might well go back to Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–43 and rethink his or her understanding of those verses—as well his or her relations to others.

I hope that those who use this book will find that as they do they have questions of their own to add to mine. Obviously there is no exhaustive list of all the possible questions about the Doctrine and Covenants. I have written down the questions that have come to me as I read that scripture. As a result, for some sections and verses I have detailed questions. For others, I have only a question or two. That doesn’t mean that the sections or verses for which I have more questions are more important than those for which I have fewer. Were I to write this book again, I would revise the questions I have already asked and add new ones. I would almost certainly focus on different chapters, and
I would surely expand or contract some of my previous questions. My questions change each time I go through the scriptures anew.

So, as you read the Doctrine and Covenants, think of this book as a starter for study. Keep a notebook of your own questions and the reflections and ideas that my questions and yours inspire, and return to your notebook the next time you study the same passage, adding new questions and new insights. I believe that as you do this, you will find your appreciation and love for the scriptures growing. I also believe that there is no better method for learning what the scriptures have to teach us. They do not say the same thing to every person every time or even to the same person every time.

Most who study the scriptures have had the experience of reading a familiar passage but reading it as if for the first time, seeing something in it that we have never seen before. Such experiences are almost always enlightening. Sometimes they are deeply moving spiritually. They are the reward of scripture study, the way in which the scriptures come to bear on our lives. They give us insights into ourselves and our relations to others. They remind us of our duties. They help us understand and appreciate the Atonement. They carry us to a remembrance of the blessings we have received and, so, to humility and gratitude. I believe that using questions to help us think about the scriptures fosters these kinds of experience, so I offer these questions to other students of scripture as “seed money” that I hope will increase the value of their scripture study as they add their own questions and reflections to this seed and allow their study to grow.
Naturally, there are many more questions that can be asked about any part of the Doctrine and Covenants; I have asked only a few of those possible. As I said, were I to write this book a second time, I would doubtless create a very different set of questions than these. Nevertheless, I hope I have included questions that will help someone studying for a Sunday School or other lesson from the Doctrine and Covenants. I also hope they will help those who are preparing to teach those lessons. Given those hopes, these sets of questions correspond to the material suggested in the *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Class Member Study Guide* for the Sunday School lessons. Because those lessons sometimes cover a lot of material, not every set of study questions in this book covers all the chapters designated in the study guide.

If you don’t have questions of your own around which you can organize your lesson, perhaps mine will help you. If you are preparing a lesson, perhaps you will find a question or two among mine that you can use as foci for your lesson. Perhaps reading my questions will help you think of your own questions. In either case, the purpose of this book will have been fulfilled.

In my experience, one or two good questions in the hands of a prepared teacher are sufficient for an excellent lesson. Of course that presumes that the teacher has learned to control the discussion in a class so that it does not get away from the scriptures into personal flights of fancy or onto the gospel hobby horses we sometimes take such pleasure in riding. Mostly that takes practice, enough practice to give you confidence.
But there are a variety of methods that can help. Here is one that I have used and can recommend: Class begins with a brief review of the lesson from the week before (perhaps of about five minutes), followed by an overview of the reading for this week (another five or ten minutes). As part of this overview it may be important to discuss some of the history surrounding the reception of the revelation or revelations covered in the lesson. Then the class spends most of the time discussing one or two salient questions that are specifically about the scriptures assigned for the week. They may come from the lesson manual provided by the Church. They may come from this book. In the best eventuality, they come from your personal study of the material. The class discussion will not cover everything in the assigned material or in the lesson manual. There is always more in the material suggested for any lesson than can be covered in one lesson. But approaching the lesson in that way will cover something sufficiently well to help class members appreciate the reading and be prepared to do more individual study. When it goes well, as it usually does in the hands of a teacher who has prepared well, both by study and also by the prayer of faith (see D&C 88:118 and 109:7 and 14), a lesson of this sort not only is a good experience in itself but also encourages those in the class to learn from the scriptures after the class is over.

I assume that those teaching or preparing for the Gospel Doctrine course will take advantage of various materials on LDS history, including Our Heritage: A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Latter-day Saints, especially those who read English, have access to a
great many works on Church history. Using these resources will often make the lessons both more interesting and more intelligible. However, my notes here will focus not on the historical context of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants but on the revelations themselves, bringing in historical context only as necessary. As a result, the notes may be an aid in preparing a lesson, but they are generally insufficient.

A good question or two about a passage of scripture can also be the basis for an excellent talk for sacrament meeting: If the passage on which you are focusing is sufficiently brief, read it at the beginning of the talk, restating the parts most important to your talk in your own words. Make a point of raising your question in the context of the scriptures that brought it to your attention. Then discuss your thinking about the question. Explain the ideas that came to you in thinking about it. Talk about the implications of what you have learned. Show how what you have learned is relevant to your life and to the lives of those to whom you are speaking. To conclude, summarize what you have said, if your talk has been long enough to need a summary, and bear your testimony.

Over the years, many colleagues, friends, fellow members of the LDS Church, and university students have helped me think about the scriptures. Nate Noorlander has been invaluable in helping put these into publishable form, not only with formatting, but also with questions about my questions and suggestions for improvement, a task to which Joseph Spencer has also made a significant contribution. Jenny Webb did more than an outsider could imagine in putting this book into a good format. Pat and
Larry Wimmer and Art and Janet Bassett, who were willing to talk with me for hours about the Sunday School lessons, were especially helpful. I owe all of them thanks.

As always, I owe more than thanks to my wife and children who have borne with my idiosyncrasies for many years. Finally, I am grateful to my grandchildren—and to the rest of my posterity—simply for being. I hope that this work will help them have and increase their testimonies of Jesus.