This is mostly a book of questions, questions about the material assigned for the Sunday School lessons of the LDS Church’s Gospel Doctrine New Testament curriculum. There is so much material in the New Testament that it would require several volumes to write study questions for everything in it. So I have shortened my task by focusing on the texts assigned for Sunday School reading.

Some readers may already be familiar with the other books in this series: *The Doctrine and Covenants Made Harder*, *The Book of Mormon Made Harder*, and *The Old Testament Made Harder*. They should feel free to skip this introduction since there is not likely to be anything new in it for them.

But those who are coming to this book and its companions for the first time might reasonably wonder about the title. It is only partly a joke, and it is the result of an experience I had long ago when I was a graduate student. For various reasons I was fortunate enough to do a tutorial with a philosophy of science professor who was also a part-time rabbi. For our first session he asked me to come with a list of questions on Genesis 1. Genesis was the book we were going to work on. I brought my questions. They were about such things as how to correlate the biblical and scientific accounts of creation. But when he saw them he was openly dismayed.
“If you are a religious person, why would you be interested in questions like these?” he asked. “They have nothing to do with what is important about this reading.”

Needless to say I was surprised, but I was also dumbfounded. I didn’t have anything to say in response. So we went to his questions. They were about the details of the account, about words and relationships between words, about the order in which things were presented, about differences between what was said in one verse and what was said in another. We spent hours talking and thinking about his questions, and much to my surprise I realized that I was learning a tremendous amount about the plan of salvation as well as about Genesis! I hadn’t expected a rabbi to be teaching me things of the gospel, but he was. He was sometimes surprised by things that I explained in a way that, as far as he knew, Christians were unaware of but that had come from a latter-day prophet. We were learning from each other, but I was learning a great deal by looking at the text itself closely and thinking about what that meant for me and my family.

That experience was life changing. It showed me a way of reading scripture I’d not been aware of previously. I’d read each of the scriptures cover to cover more than once. I’d read them topically, with a question in mind looking for answers to my question. Both of those ways of reading were and continue to be important to me as part of scripture study. But I’d never read with the attention to detail that the rabbi was showing, and I’d never read asking questions of the text that generated additional questions for me. But this way of reading wasn’t a way of making the scriptures
easy to understand. It was a way of making me stop and think about them, a way of forcing me to reconsider what I thought I already knew. It is not too much to say that it was a way of making the scriptures harder. It didn’t make their content any more difficult to understand, but it did force me to work harder as I read.

Of course, this book doesn’t ask every question that one could ask about the assigned readings. Some lessons contain so much material that I’ve had to select only part of the reading for questions. So lots of questions remain to be asked. In fact, the more questions you ask of scripture, the more questions there will be to ask. My hope is that as you read my questions you will have additional questions of your own and that, as you begin to think in terms of questions, you will develop a habit of looking at the details of scripture and asking about their significance. My testimony is that doing so will be profitable to you, not only intellectually, but spiritually.

The aim of these materials is to help us prepare for Sunday School lessons. We often talk about the need for class members in our Gospel Doctrine classes to prepare, but few read the lesson ahead of time, and even fewer spend time doing more than that. These questions are to help those who would like to study the readings but aren’t sure how to go about doing so.

But, of course, Sunday School teachers will also be reading and preparing for the lesson. Though these materials aren’t directed specifically at them, I hope they can be helpful. If you don’t have questions of your own around which you can organize your lesson, perhaps these will
help you. If you are preparing a lesson, perhaps you will find a question or two among them that you can use as foci for your lesson. Perhaps reading these questions will help you think of your own questions.

In my experience, one or two good questions in the hands of a prepared teacher are sufficient for an excellent lesson. Of course, thatpresumes 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 hobbyhorses we sometimes take such pleasure in riding. Mostly that takes practice, enough practice to give you confidence.

There are a variety of methods that can help a teacher organize her class time. Here is one that I have used and can recommend: Class begins with a brief review of the lesson from the week before (about five minutes or less), followed by an overview of the reading for this week (another five or ten minutes, at most). That leaves about twenty-five or thirty minutes that the class can spend 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 lesson manual will tell you what the focus of your teaching should be, and it gives suggestions for how to teach that, but ultimately the teacher must decide how she can best teach that lesson to her class using the scriptures assigned.

If you are using my way of organizing, then after the review and overview, choose one of the passages of scrip-
ture about which you want to lead a discussion and, as is often done in LDS Sunday School classes, have someone read that passage aloud. Then ask the question you want to talk about. Presumably this is the question you are most interested in pursuing, or a question that will lead to that question. Ask the person who read if he or she has an answer to your question. If the reader does, ask for other possible answers. If the reader doesn’t, ask if others can help. Don’t be intimidated by silence; patiently wait for someone to have time to think about the question and to respond.

Many are accustomed to teachers asking questions to which everyone in class already knows the answer: the teacher asks a question and we in the class repeat the answer as if in a kind of catechism. There is a place for that, but it ought not to be the dominant experience of those in Gospel Doctrine class. If instead your questions are open-ended (as I hope most of the questions in this book are), without a specific, supposedly right answer, members of the class are likely to be somewhat intimidated. They won’t be able to answer immediately because you are asking them to do something they are not yet used to. Wait for them to speak, and be pleased with whatever the first attempt at a response is. Use it to continue to talk about and think about the question.

As discussion begins, you may well need to guide it. Ask related questions to help keep discussion on track—not toward the answer you are looking for (presumably you haven’t already decided what the answer is), but toward thinking about the question with which you began. Don’t let class drift off into unrelated matters. Sometimes a teacher must
say something like “That’s an interesting question, but it
doesn’t seem directly related to what we are discussing right
now. Perhaps we could take it up after class,” or something
like that. In particular, keep the discussion flowing along
lines that are more likely to result in an increase in faith and
repentance, and in enduring to the end. The introduction to
the lesson manual says, “As a Gospel Doctrine teacher, you
can show your love for the Lord by feeding his sheep, en-
suring that each member of your class is ‘remembered and
nourished by the good word of God’” (Moroni 6:4). Keep
that in mind as you lead the discussion.

Class discussion will almost never 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. Our curriculum writers know
that. They have given us a large chunk of material for study
and suggestions for how we can lead the discussion of that
material, more material than can be used for any particu-
lar lesson. They expect teachers to use their knowledge of
class members, their inspired insight, and, especially, their
prayerful study to prepare them to teach effectively. Ap-
proaching the class session as I’ve described is one way to
cover something sufficiently well to help class members ap-
preciate 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, 14), a lesson
of this sort not only is a good experience in itself, it also
encourages those in the class to learn from the scriptures
after the class is over.
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.

In this study material, I usually quote from the King James Version, but when I depart from it, I am using my own translation unless otherwise noted.

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