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# The Old Testament Made Harder: Scripture Study Questions

James E. Faulconer

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# THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER



# THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER

SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

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Brigham Young University  
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THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER  
Scripture Study Questions

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# CONTENTS

Introduction	ix
Background for the Old Testament	1
Understanding and Studying the Old Testament	9
Overview of Genesis	17
Lesson 1	23
Lesson 2	37
Lesson 3	49
Lesson 4	67
Lesson 5	93
Lesson 6	119
Lesson 7	129
Lesson 8	141
Lesson 9	159
Lesson 10	181
Lesson 11	201
Lesson 12	215
Lesson 13	231
Lesson 14	245
Lesson 15	259
Lesson 16	275
Lesson 17	285
Lesson 18	297
Lesson 19	307
Lesson 20	311

Lesson 21	321
Lesson 22	329
Lesson 23	337
Lesson 24	345
Lesson 25	355
Lesson 26	367
Lesson 27	377
Lesson 28	393
Lesson 29	403
Lesson 30	413
Lesson 31	421
Lesson 32	435
Lesson 33	451
Lesson 34	469
Lesson 35	485
Lesson 36	497
Lesson 37	515
Lesson 38	525
Lesson 39	537
Lesson 40	549
Lesson 41	557
Lesson 42	575
Lesson 43	587
Lesson 44	593
Lesson 45	597
Lesson 46	613
Lesson 47	617
Lesson 48	625
Endnotes	629

*Wherever you look about you, in literature and life, you see the celebrated names and figures, the precious and much heralded men who are coming into prominence and are much talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railways, others by omnibuses and steamboats, others by the telegraph, others by easily apprehended compendiums and short recitals of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who make spiritual existence in virtue of thought easier and easier. . . . You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, undertake to make something harder.*

JOHANNES CLIMACUS  
*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*





# Introduction

**T**HIS IS THE THIRD in a series of books of scripture study questions, each with the same epigraph from the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, each with a version of this book's odd title. Most readers will ask the obvious question, "Why make scripture study harder? Isn't it hard enough already?"

The temptation is to answer the question by referring to the introductions to the two other collections: *The Book of Mormon Made Harder* and *The Doctrine and Covenants Made Harder*. But it is unreasonable to expect readers to buy two other books as introductions to this one. So I will repeat much of the substance of what I said in those earlier volumes. With apologies to those who may have read them, I'll try to say the same things differently.

Scripture study is difficult for many reasons. Between the need to exercise, time for daily prayer, children's schedules, work, shopping, meal preparation, church responsibilities, and the like, it is difficult to clear out enough time in the day to spend time studying the scriptures. The language of the scriptures can also make scripture study difficult; some of us have a hard time reading the King James English of the Bible or the similar language of the other standard works. Or people who have read the scriptures several times before may find studying them difficult because of their familiarity. For example, having read the

Book of Mormon several times, a person may see “the same old thing” on each rereading.

I have no answers to the first problem other than to say the obvious: planning is essential, as well as prioritizing to put the most important things first. The answer to the second problem is to become more acquainted with that older language. Those who have read that language for a long time find it relatively easy to understand. At particularly difficult spots when reading the Bible, it often helps to have a more modern translation handy for comparison. There are online sites, like “Blue Letter Bible,” that allow readers to have access to several different translations. Comparing the King James translation with one or more other translations can help readers get a better sense for what the Bible is saying.

The series of which this volume is part, however, is primarily a response to the third difficulty: what do we do when scripture study becomes stale, when there seems nothing left to be learned by reading the scriptures over again? We might say, in that case, that it has become hard to study the scriptures because it is too easy to understand them. What they say seems obvious, and they don’t say anything that they’ve not said in previous readings, so we no longer learn from them.

I offer these questions hoping that they will help refresh scripture study for people who say to themselves, “I’m getting very little out of reading these again.” This book is intended to give such readers questions to think about as they read, questions that I hope will help them read with new ideas and that I hope will help them learn to read

scripture by seeing questions that arise as they read and learning to respond to their own questions.

A key to scripture study is found in Nephi's admonition to "liken all scriptures unto us" (1 Nephi 19:23). That phrase can be understood in several ways, but I understand it to mean that I ought to listen for the message taught by the scriptures I'm reading and then respond to that message. Understanding that message most broadly, it would mean hearing the gospel preached in scripture and responding to it with faith and repentance. If I take Nephi's admonition to heart, then I will perform the experiment on the word that Alma describes in Alma 32: I will allow the seed of that word, the Word, to be planted in my heart and then to swell and grow until it becomes the tree of life.

I hope that the questions I ask in this book will help readers think and ponder the gospel message that is taught not only in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the New Testament, but also in the Old Testament. That message is often difficult to hear in the Old Testament, not just because of the King James language and not just because the books of the Old Testament have been edited, redacted, and translated by various people in different times for many different reasons—though both of those contribute to the difficulty of understanding the Old Testament. It is also difficult because its writings come to us from a very different time and place than our own, in fact from very different times and places from ours. The writings of the Old Testament were addressed to people who did not live in a world that we would recognize. Their cultures, social organizations, languages,

and customs were all different from anything we recognize. In addition, the writings of the Old Testament were given to those who lived before the time of Jesus and, so, were unlikely to understand the message about the Messiah in the same way that we do.

I have tried to include explanatory material such as occasional notes about Hebrew words to help us bridge those differences. But I have done so only insofar as it seemed to me that providing it would help us see and hear the call to faith and repentance, to living the life of those who trust in God. (And no one should depend on my notes about Hebrew words. I am not a Hebrew scholar; I just look things up and take the word of lexicons and scholars.)

The questions I provide are for one particular kind of study, not the only kind nor necessarily the best kind. Sometimes we study a book of scripture from cover to cover, learning or reminding ourselves of its overall teachings and how the parts of its story or stories fit together. This kind of study is essential to understanding the message the scriptures have for us. Sometimes we study chronologically, beginning with the earliest book or section and working our way toward the end so that we understand better the divine history recorded in the scriptures. Other times we study topically, trying to learn the things the scriptures have to say about particular problems or issues. Those are all important ways to study, and there are probably others that I've not thought of. These notes are for close reading, one more way to study. Close reading is helpful for seeing the depth of the scriptures, but it is a way that many of us have not had experience with. So, though I offer these questions

to help those who wish to do close readings, I don't suggest that close reading ought to be the only way we should study.

I don't pretend that I have asked all the possible questions about the verses in these study materials. Instead I hope that the questions I provide will help readers begin to ask their own questions. I recommend that as you study you keep a notepad and pen at hand so that you can jot down your questions and return to them later. The more the questions you take up are *your* questions rather than mine, the more you are likely to benefit from your study.

I have correlated these study materials to the scriptures assigned in the *Class Member Study Guide* for the Sunday School lessons for the year. Using them for weekly study would mean also preparing to take part in Sunday School, though these questions will almost always cover more than a class could cover in one session. Notice as well that the assignments for Sunday School often cover a lot of material, so not every set of study questions in this book covers all of the chapters designated in the study guide. But my hope is that people studying for Sunday School class will find these questions useful. Those who have prepared for Sunday School are more likely to have something to contribute to discussions, and they are more likely to enjoy their Sunday School class.

The fact that these questions are intended to help those who want to study for Sunday School also means that this is probably not a book to be read straight through, like a novel. A person who did that would find some repeated questions to be annoying. "How does this apply to our lives?" is such a question. But because the questions are to be taken up over

the period of a year, and because scripture study involves questions that come up over and over again—though not always with the same answers—repetition was unavoidable.

Since the sections of this book are correlated to the Sunday School lessons, some may wish to use the study questions to help them prepare to teach class. 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.

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), followed by an overview of the reading for this week (another five or ten minutes, at most). 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.

Choose one of the passages of scripture 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 the class. If instead your questions are open-ended, 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 the 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.

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. But approaching the class session as I've described 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, 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.

I owe many people thanks for their contributions to my work and my life, especially my wife and family. Readers will notice throughout that I owe special thanks to Arthur Bassett for stimulating conversations about the Old Testament. To all, thanks.

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Background for the Old Testament

## What Is the Old Testament?

The version of the Old Testament used by Protestants and Jews today contains thirty-nine books. Protestants adopted the books of the Hebrew Bible as their Old Testament. Catholic Bibles include nine additional books, as well as two additions to Daniel and one to Esther.

Though we might at first glance think that the Protestant decision to accept the Jewish canon makes the most sense, we must also recognize that at least some of the additional nine books of the Catholic Bible were used as scripture by Saints of the first century AD. We see this, for example, when Paul refers to the Wisdom of Solomon, an apocryphal book.<sup>1</sup> There was no prescribed set of scriptures at the time, just different, though overlapping, groups of individual books used by various people as scripture. The notion of a canon, a defined set of books recognized as authoritative, had not yet developed in the first century AD. Which books were “in” and which were “out” wasn’t the kind of problem for early Christians that it later became when heresies like Marcionism began to arise.<sup>2</sup>

In the first century, for example, Clement of Rome knew of some letters by Paul<sup>3</sup> and something he referred to as

“words of Jesus” (perhaps some of the gospels), but when he spoke of the scriptures he referred to the Septuagint,<sup>4</sup> a third-century-BC translation of Hebrew sacred books into Greek: the Old Testament. That was the closest thing to a canon that existed in the early Church. New Testament writers such as Paul more often quote from the Septuagint than from a Hebrew version of the scriptures. The Septuagint may have been more commonly used by Christians than Hebrew versions of scriptures because almost all Christians could speak Greek, the common language of the ancient Mediterranean world, and only a relatively few could read Hebrew.

The Dead Sea Scrolls show us that what the early Christians took as scripture was more like the Septuagint than like the Hebrew Bible that we recognize today. The Scrolls show us that the Hebrew Bible continued to be edited and revised until after the time of Christ, when the rabbis decided on what we now have as the canonical form of the Old Testament. That means that the Septuagint reflects more accurately what books would have been among those considered sacred in the early Church. In addition, it often gives us a better idea of what was in the individual books but that may not have been included by later editors. So the Septuagint is not just a very early translation of the Hebrew Bible; it also helps us understand the form and content that Hebrew scripture had when Christ was teaching—to the degree that it had definite form and content. Thus, the Old Testament that we use is quite similar to, but at important points markedly different from, the sacred books that the early Christian Church would have used.

Early Christians and Jews finished the process of deciding what books were to be included at about the same time, the second century and early third century AD, and each group had a slightly different list of pre-Christian scripture. More than a thousand years later, Protestants decided to use the list of books that the Jews had decided on rather than the Catholic list. The Eastern Orthodox version of the Old Testament, which varies slightly from the Jewish canon, didn't even come up for consideration by the Protestants.<sup>5</sup> So which is the "right" set of books for the Old Testament remains a question for discussion. For various reasons, though (mostly historical rather than doctrinal or revealed, I would guess) Latter-day Saints use the same version of the Bible as do the Protestants. But we explicitly recognize that the books of the Catholic Bible that are not in the Protestant Bible, the Apocrypha, may also be inspired. (See D&C 91.)

The major difference between the Protestant and Jewish Bibles is that the order of the books in each is different. The Protestants arrange the books chronologically, and the Jews arrange them according to the scriptural authority they give the books. (The New Testament is arranged, not chronologically, but according to type: Gospels, history of the early Church, then letters. The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants are arranged more or less chronologically, with obvious exceptions in both cases.)

Jews divide the Old Testament into three parts, each part less authoritative than the last, though all three parts are authoritative: the Law (or "Instruction," like the instruction a parent gives to a child), the Prophets, and the Writings. Scriptures such as Acts 28:23 reflect this arrangement.<sup>6</sup>

The Law is the first five books, also called “The Books of Moses” (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The section called “The Prophets” includes Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and “The Twelve Prophets” (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). The Writings are divided into three parts: the Greater Writings, which includes Psalms, Proverbs, and Job; the Five Scrolls, in other words Song of Songs (also called “Canticles”), Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther; and the historical books, a grouping that goes by a variety of names and includes Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

The books of the present Old Testament were selected informally over a period of time probably beginning in the second century BC and ending in the second century AD, when the selection was made final and formal, in other words, canonized.

We sometimes approach the books of the Old Testament as if we have translations of the original documents written by ancient Israelite prophets, poets, priests, and kings—or at least that we have what would be original documents were it not for the interference of unrighteous scribes. There is something to that view, as oversimplified as it may be. However, as pointed out, the books of the Old Testament were collected over time. (This is also true of the New Testament, though the period of time was shorter.) No one set out to write the collection itself; there was no “Bible,” in other words one sacred book, until that collection was completed. Rather, there were various inspired books and

groups of books used by different communities of ancient Israelites. Choices were eventually made between some books and others, and the collections began to coalesce. But until the second-century-AD canonization of what we now recognize as the Hebrew scriptures, some communities recognized one set of books as inspired and others recognized another, overlapping set.

The collection and editing process that went on for hundreds of years was similar to one with which we are already familiar, Mormon's editing of the Book of Mormon. But there was only one such editor for the Book of Mormon, while the editing of manuscripts that became the Bible was done by various people at different times in Israelite history. Scholars are relatively sure, for example, that a major edition of the first five books of the Bible was made while Israel was in Babylon, and they have reason to believe that at some point the book of Genesis as we have it was created from two or three previously existing documents. There may be hints within the Old Testament itself of some of this editing and rewriting, for example in the story of the purported discovery of "the book of the law" during the temple renovation ordered by Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:14–16). This may be an obscured report of temple priests editing the books that King Josiah's community considered to be sacred.

Perhaps the most important difference between the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon is that we cannot assume that the editors of the Old Testament documents were, like Mormon, always doing so under the direction of the Holy Ghost. Presumably much of the editing of the ancient books was done under the guidance of the Spirit. But



other editing may have had less-spiritual purposes. For example, some of the stories of slaughter supposedly ordered by God may have been created or, more likely, rewritten later to justify ancient Israel's politics.

Having said that, however, it is important also to remember that we ought to be careful not to chalk up every biblical passage that we find difficult or that challenges the way we understand things to "scribal error" or "scribal malfeasance." We too often use that as a way to avoid difficulty rather than using the difficulties as means for making us think carefully about scripture and what it means to us. We should begin by assuming that the scriptures as we have them are the things the Lord intends us to have and only account for textual difficulties as textual problems if we have prophetic or good scholarly reasons for doing so. Nevertheless, we must also avoid the kind of textual idolatry that is easy to fall into, a practice in which we refuse to recognize any possible fault in our books of scripture or their writers.

## Why is it called the Old Testament?

The New Testament Church sometimes spoke of a new covenant and an old covenant. (See, for example, 2 Corinthians 3:14, where the Greek word for "covenant" is translated *testament*, and Hebrews 8:7.) As a result, sometimes we assume that the Old Testament is the record of that old covenant and the New Testament the record of the new one. But that is slightly misleading.

When the early Church referred to a new covenant and the old covenant, it was distinguishing the covenant between

the Church and God before Christ's coming and the covenant between the Church and God after Christ's coming. That isn't the same as the distinction between the collection of scriptures used before Christ's coming, though not finalized until a couple of hundred years after his death, and the collection of documents that make up the New Testament, even though the time periods of each correlates with that of the other.

The early Church recognized that God made a covenant with Israel prior to Christ's resurrection (see, for example, Paul's discussion of this in Romans 11). They also believed that with his resurrection a new covenant had been introduced—though, as Paul teaches, the new covenant did not do away with the old one. But those in the early Church didn't explicitly think of the Old Testament as the record of the old covenant. In fact, for reasons we've already seen, they didn't think about something called “the Old Testament” at all. In the New Testament Church, the loosely held-together collection of texts that eventually became what we call the Old Testament was simply called “the Scriptures” or “the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets,” as they were called by other Jews. Christians didn't use the name “Old Testament” until the second and third centuries AD, when they were deciding which books to accept as canonical. That is the same time when the collection to which we refer as the “New Testament” was finished.

The word *testament* is related to the word *testimony*. So another way to understand the Old Testament is as a collection of the older testimonies of Christ, which makes the New Testament a collection of newer testimonies. This is

the same use of the word in the new subtitle of the Book of Mormon: “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” That is a reasonable way for us to understand what we mean by “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” but it is a meaning *we* give them.

## How can the Old Testament help us today?

Here are some questions to help you think about that broader question:

Can you say specifically what the New Testament writers meant by “the old covenant”?

What specifically did they mean by “the new covenant”?

How do those differ? How are they the same?

On the old covenant, see Exodus 19–24, especially 19:5–6; 23:20–33; and 24:7–8. On the new covenant, see Jeremiah 31:31–34 (Hebrews 8:8–13) and 1 Corinthians 11:24–26 (Luke 22:19–20); 2 Corinthians 3:6; and Hebrews 9:1–15.

How does the Old Testament testify of Christ (compare Jacob 7:10–11)?

Why might a careful and honest reader be unable to see that testimony in the Old Testament?

# Understanding and Studying the Old Testament

## What it means that the Old Testament isn't a modern document

Don't expect Old Testament writers to have written their histories the way we would have written them. Here are some differences:

1. For them history was meaningful to the degree that we could see patterns in it—"types and shadows," to use Book of Mormon language (e.g., Mosiah 3:15). They seem not to have assumed that the types *caused* the shadows in later events, but that looking backward we can see the meaning of two events by seeing the ways in which one conforms to the pattern of the other or how they both conform to some third type.
2. Old Testament writers liked to use wordplay, puns, speech patterns (like "chiasmus"), and assumed etymologies of words because those helped them make linguistic connections between ideas, things, and events.

For example, the name Jacob probably means "God will protect." However, it also sounds like the word for heel. So, Genesis 25:26 says that Jacob's name was "heel" because he had

hold of his brother's heel when he was born, a sign of things to come. We think such things are, at best, just decorations that one adds to writing. Hebrew writers saw them as essential to showing how ideas and meanings are connected.

It can be difficult to think in these terms rather than in the causal terms that we are accustomed to. But if we are going to understand the Old Testament, we have to learn to do so.

3. Those who wrote the Old Testament books believed that an event could be *both* literal and symbolic. Indeed, every important event was assumed to be both, and symbolic meaning was as much a part of the event as any other (if not, perhaps, the most important part of the meaning). In contrast, we think that the symbolic meaning is something we add to the event, that it is something subjective.

4. For Old Testament writers, showing the meaning of the event in question—how it revealed God and his work in the world—was the important thing, not showing exactly what happened as we might think it happened. They weren't interested in what we would think of as an objective account, one that gives us what a video recording of the event would show. But they didn't believe that the alternative was merely the subjective response of the writer: the connections of type and shadow, the connections of wordplay—these kinds of things showed something real, though something that the so-called objective observer would be unable to see.

If we ignore these four kinds of things and others like them, then we insist that the writers of the Old Testament thought like us (or should have) and that they wrote as we would have written (or should have). That is a kind of historical arrogance, an attitude that will cause us to read things into the Old Testament that are not there and to overlook important things the writers included.

If we want to understand the Old Testament, then we have to understand it as its writers intended it. If we want to understand it as they intended, then we have to understand it as they wrote rather than as *we* would write.

Part of that also means being sure that we ask *their* questions rather than ours. For example, when we read the story of Jacob and Esau, it is tempting for us to moralize, trying to decide whether Jacob was right to ask for the birthright, whether what Rebekah did was right, and so on. Or to take the other side and to insist that, as the mother of a prophet, Rebekah had to be doing the right thing, that Isaac must have been acting righteously since he was the patriarch called by God, and so on. But those don't seem to be the questions with which the writer of the Genesis story is interested. The real questions we should be thinking about are the ones that the writer was writing about. Before we jump into the moral and philosophical discussions that we find tempting, we need to ask ourselves whether that is what the story is about. If we are reading scripture, we want to know what that scripture was written to reveal. Unless we ask that question, we will miss the point.

## Preparing to study the Old Testament

As you prepare to study the Old Testament, think about scripture study a bit: What are the scriptures for? How should we use them? How *do* we use them?

“Proof-texting” is an approach to scripture that begins by assuming we know the doctrines and then searches through the scriptures to find something to back up the belief. Because it begins with what we assume we know rather from what the scriptures teach, proof-texting always runs the danger of “wresting” the scriptures. *Wrest* is the word from which the modern word *wrestle* comes, and it means “to twist or wrench; to pull violently.”

Jesus accuses the Jews of wresting the scriptures in John 5:39: “You search the scriptures because you think you find eternal life in them; [yet] they are what testify of me” (my translation). (See also 2 Peter 3:16, Alma 13:20, and D&C 10:63.)

Do we wrest the scriptures? How might we avoid doing so?

In 2 Nephi 25:1 Nephi speaks of the difficulty of understanding Isaiah:

Now I, Nephi, do speak somewhat concerning the words which I have written, which have been spoken by the mouth of Isaiah. For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

Why didn't Nephi's people understand Isaiah?

According to Nephi, why do we find Isaiah difficult? How is that related to why we find the rest of the Old Testament difficult?

Nephi then tells his brothers and sisters what they have to have to understand Isaiah: “Wherefore, hearken, O my people, which are of the house of Israel, and give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4). Do you think that applies to the Old Testament as a whole?

What is the spirit of prophecy? The phrase occurs in the Bible only once, in Revelation 19:10. But it is a very popular phrase with Book of Mormon writers: Jacob 4:6; Alma 3:27; 4:13; 5:47; 6:8; 9:21; 10:12; 12:7; 13:26; 16:5; 17:3; 25:16; 37:15; 43:2; and Helaman 4:12–23. (It also occurs in D&C 11:25; 131:5 and in Joseph Smith—History 1:73, footnote 4.) Does reading the Book of Mormon uses of the term help us understand better what Nephi might have meant? Why do you think the phrase is so important to Book of Mormon writers?

If you can figure out what the phrase means in the Book of Mormon, how would the spirit of prophecy help us understand the Old Testament?

Nephi gives another requirement for understanding Isaiah in the last half of 2 Nephi 25:5: “there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.” In your own words, what



is the requirement? Does that explain anything about *our* difficulty with the Old Testament?

Nephi explains how he understands Isaiah in 2 Nephi 25:6: “I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about.” What makes Nephi able to understand the way the Jews have written? (Is 1 Nephi 1:1 relevant here?) How can we get something like that ability for ourselves?

In 3 Nephi 23:1 Jesus adds to Nephi’s instructions about understanding Isaiah: “And now, behold, I say unto you, that ye ought to search these things [the writings of Isaiah]. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah.” What’s the difference between the searching that Jesus commands the Nephites and the searching he condemned in John?

What does the word *search* imply?<sup>1</sup>

In 3 Nephi 23:2, Jesus adds still more to our understanding of scripture study: “surely he [Isaiah] spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel.” How can Isaiah have spoken of *all* things concerning Israel?

Mosiah speaks of “types and shadows” in the scriptures (Mosiah 3:15; 13:31). What have these to do with speaking of all things in the scriptures?

In Ecclesiastes 1:9–10 we read, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the

sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.” Does that help us understand the way ancient Israel understood scriptures?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Overview of Genesis

The title “Genesis” is a transliteration of the Greek word that means “origin or source.” The Hebrew title is *bereshit*, “in the beginning,” the first word of the Hebrew text, though translated as three words in English.

Speaking of the book of Genesis, Margaret Barker says:

The word *bara'* [“to create”] is similar in sound and form to the word for covenant, *berith*, and the Hebrew dictionary suggests that the root meaning of “covenant” is “to bind.” This similarity of the words for covenant and binding and the uniquely divine creative activity leads me to suspect that is the key to the older Creation story, that the words had been related. [The first or “invisible” creation] was a process of binding into bonds, engraving limits and definitions, and then using them to order the visible creation.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, according to Barker, Genesis begins with a word for creation that sounds like, and therefore reminds us of, the word for covenant or binding. That relation of creation and covenant/binding is probably the key to understanding the story of Genesis 1: in the first creation story we see God binding creation into groups by giving those groups limits. In other words, we see him defining the major parts of the created world by giving them

a place in relation to other things and setting their limits. Then, in the second story of Creation, which begins in Genesis 2, we see him using those defined things and places to create the world we see.

Though Genesis is only one of thirty-nine books (in the Protestant version), it claims to cover approximately 2,000 years of Israelite history. In contrast, the other books claim to cover only about 1,500 years. As the first book of the “five books of Moses,” or the Pentateuch, Genesis gives us the background we need to make sense of the other four (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). It tells of the background to the Abrahamic covenant, the beginning of that covenant, and its partial fulfillment in the birth of Israel as a nation.

There are several ways of thinking about Genesis’s organization. We can, for example, understand it as a group of stories with a gradually narrowing focus:

1. From the cosmos as a whole (1)
2. To the nations (2–11)
3. To Israel and his children, in particular, Joseph (12–50)

A common way to divide up the book is to see in it ten parts, each with the heading “these are the generations of” (which could also be translated “this is the story of”), and beginning with a prologue. In that case, the outline of Genesis looks like this:<sup>2</sup>

0. Prologue (1:1–2:3)
1. The generations of heaven and earth (2:4–4:26)
2. The generations of Adam (5:1–6:8)
3. The generations of Noah (6:9–9:29)
4. The generations of Noah’s sons (10:1–11:9)
5. The generations of Shem (11:10–11:26)
6. The generations of Terah (11:27–25:11)
7. The generations of Ishmael (25:12–25:18)
8. The generations of Isaac (25:19–35:29)
9. The generations of Esau (36:1–37:1)
10. The generations of Jacob (37:2–50:26)

Notice that the first five of these divisions, not counting the prologue, is about the people before Abraham, and the second five tell us of Abraham and his posterity, the ancestors of Israel. Notice also that though chapters 1–11 tell us about twenty generations (from Adam to Abraham), chapters 12–50—by far the greatest part of the book—tell the story of only four generations. As a result, the fall of Adam and Eve gets one chapter and the story of Joseph gets thirteen chapters, about one-third of the book.

There are many ways of thinking about the structure of the book of Genesis, but do any of these three ways of dividing it help you see anything that you might have not noticed before? What kinds of things might they say about what the book of Genesis asks us to focus on?

We can also think of the book as divided into three parts geographically:<sup>3</sup>

1. Babylon (1–11)
2. Palestine (12–36)
3. Egypt (37–50)

Looked at in that way, the people of whom this book is a sacred history, Israel, begin outside of Palestine and end outside it. Does that help us understand the book of Genesis?

Yet another way to understand the structure of Genesis as a whole is to see it as divided according to the kind of history recounted, pre-patriarchal and patriarchal:<sup>4</sup>

1. Pre-patriarchal history (1–11): people who have land but lose it in some way  
(These stories deal with all of mankind, and they relate to stories shared by Israel with other Near Eastern traditions.)
  - a. Creation (1:1–2:25)
  - b. Crime and punishment (3:1–4:16)
  - c. The family of Adam and Eve (4:17–5:32)
  - d. The flood (6:1–9:29)
  - e. Noah's son's children (10:1–32)
  - f. The tower of Babel (11:1–9)
  - g. Noah's descendants from Shem to Terah (11:10–26)

2. Patriarchal history (12–50): people who do not have land but are promised it

(These stories deal specifically with the ancestors of Israel and mention other nations only in passing.)

- a. Abraham and his families (11:27–25:18)
- b. Isaac and Rebekah (25:19–26:35)
- c. Jacob and his family (27:1–36:43)
- d. Joseph (37:1–50:26)

Why might we want to think about Genesis in terms of the relation of God's people to land, as this division suggests we do?

Does this division focus on the Abrahamic covenant? If so, how does it do that and what is the effect of doing that?

Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn suggest that we should understand the first part of Genesis 1–11 in this way:<sup>5</sup>

1. Creation (1:1–2:3)
2. First threat to creation (2:4–3:24)
3. Second threat (4:1–26)
4. Final threat (5:1–9:29)
5. Resolution (10:1–11:32)

In turn, that helps us understand the rest of Genesis, according to Kikawada and Quinn, because the structure of chapters 1–11 mirrors the structure of Genesis as a whole.<sup>6</sup>



1. Creation
2. Adam
3. Cain
4. Flood
5. Dispersion/Primeval history (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph)

Finally, Kikawada and Quinn argue that Genesis mirrors the chiasmic structure of the Pentateuch as a whole:<sup>7</sup>

1. Genesis as a foretelling of Exodus
2. The Exodus story (Exodus–Numbers)
3. The retelling of the Exodus story (Deuteronomy)

This look at how scholars have thought about the structure of Genesis should give you an idea of the many ways in which we can understand that structure. But so what? Which of these help us see something about Genesis that we might not otherwise notice?

Which of these help us see meaning in the book of Genesis that we might have overlooked?

How are some of these related to others?

# Lesson 1

## Moses 1

### Overview of the Book of Moses

In 1830 Joseph Smith began a retranslation of the Bible that he continued to work on until his death. The LDS Church does not use that revision as its official Bible, though several other churches do. However, as the “Guide to the Scriptures” says, “this translation does offer many interesting insights and is very valuable in understanding the Bible. It is also a witness for the divine calling and ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith.” Some parts of the revision are part of our canon, but not all.

It is important to recognize, however, that when we speak of Joseph Smith translating, we aren’t using the word *translate* with the signification that it usually has for us. If I translate a text from one language to another, I have the text in the original language in front of me and usually to one side, with reference works nearby to consult about the variety of possible meanings or about points of grammar. I look at the original language phrase by phrase and word by word and try to find a way to render that meaning into English. I go back and forth from the original language to my translation trying to give the best sense I can to the translated text. Then, when I have a large-enough piece, I reread my translation to see whether it makes sense as a whole and to judge

how faithful it is to the original. I almost always go back and make changes to my original translation so that the final result will be more coherent. Sometimes that revision process takes as much time as did the original translation. And I consult the original constantly in both instances.

However, when Joseph Smith translated, he didn't do anything like that. Instead, he dictated text to a scribe without looking at an original text. Sometimes he had an artifact at hand—the golden plates or an Egyptian manuscript, for example. When he gave the new translation of the Bible, he did so by referring to nothing more than a King James translation. Some LDS artists have fancifully pictured Joseph with the plates at his elbow, open for him to look at and read as he translated them. That looks to us very much like what is involved when we translate from one language to another. But there is no historical evidence that Joseph Smith translated in that way. In the case of the Book of Mormon, Joseph used the Urim and Thummim or a seer stone (placed in a hat, presumably to block out ambient light), seeing in them what he should dictate. Whoever was acting as his scribe then wrote down what he dictated. When he translated the Book of Abraham, he didn't need the seer stone; instead, he received a revelation and dictated it. In both cases, he translated by dictating without referring to an original.

In fact, Joseph had been dictating translations for some time before he translated the Book of Abraham, specifically the new translation of the Bible. The heading of the original dictation of Moses 1 in 1830 is “A Revelation given to Joseph the Revelator June 1830,” and the heading for the transcription of Joseph's dictation of Matthew 1:1–9:1

reads “A Translation of the New Testament translated by the power of God.” His scribes understood themselves to be transcribing revelation, and they understood that revelation to be translation. They don’t seem to have seen anything odd in calling what Joseph was doing translation, even though that is not the word we would probably use if we today were describing someone receiving a revelation of a holy text and we were transcribing it.

For us, calling those transcribed revelations translations may seem odd, until we recognize that, as we can see in Webster’s 1828 dictionary, in the early nineteenth century the first meaning of the word *translate* was “to bear, carry or remove from one place to another.” That explains why we can also use the word *translate* to speak of Enoch or others being taken from the earth. Joseph Smith and his scribes understood him to be bringing texts from some other time to the present by divine power. Given that older definition of the word, when we hear Joseph Smith called a translator, we could equally well call him a transmitter or—more accurately—a revealer, a seer.

When Joseph Smith revealed the Book of Moses, was he revealing what was the original form of our present biblical manuscript? We don’t know. He may have been. The temple gives us a variation of the story of Adam and Eve that is different from any in our scriptures, so we know that there are different yet equally sacred variations of the same scriptural stories. The existence of the plates of Laban also suggests that there could have been several versions of the ancient book. The Prophet could be restoring text that is missing from our version, or he could be revealing another

version. Scholars believe that the text of Genesis as we have it was composed from several earlier manuscripts. Joseph could be revealing what was in one of those. Or he could have been revealing what the Lord wanted to have included in the Genesis story but that was not, as happened when the resurrected Jesus commanded the Nephites to include the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite in their records (3 Nephi 23:9–12). We don't know the exact relationship between the revealed manuscript we have in the Book of Moses and the text we have in the book of Genesis.

However, our job as believers is not to figure out the origin of each text and how it relates to the others. That can be interesting and fruitful work, the work of historians. That work is not irrelevant to the things we study in scripture. But when we approach these texts as believers, our primary job is to learn from them what pertains to our lives as believers. We ought to look to hear the gospel preached in them: faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and endurance to the end. Scripture reading and study ought to bring us to once again feel “to sing the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26) and to act on that renewed feeling of joy.

## Moses 1

**Verses 1–2:** A short prologue to the Book of Moses begins here. Where does it end? What does it tell us about this book?

Of what significance are mountains in scripture? For example, why do revelations so often occur on mountains?

Why is it important that we know Moses spoke with God face to face?

What does it mean to say “the glory of God was upon Moses”? What is his glory? In the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 2:14), the Hebrew word translated “glory” comes from a root word meaning “heavy,” and it means, figuratively, honor or glory. We do something similar in English when we speak of the importance of something as its weight. Often the Hebrew word connotes beauty, and when referring to God it has a visible manifestation, usually an overpowering one.

What does verse 5 tell us about what we read in these two verses?

How about verse 39?

Do D&C 29:36 or 88:19 help us understand these verses?

Note: There has been some discussion among Latter-day Saints as to who the Being speaking in this chapter is. Is it the Father or the Son? If it is the Son, however, then he speaks the words of the Father. In the materials that follow, for simplicity I will refer to the Father speaking here, since these are his words. By doing that I don’t intend to take a position on the question of which Being of the Godhead is actually speaking.

**Verse 3:** Why does the Father tell Moses his name? He has many names. Why does he here use this particular name, Endless?

Why does he explain his name with a rhetorical question? What does that question tell us?

**Verses 4–5:** Why does the Father withhold the vision of some of his works from Moses?

In what sense or senses are the works of God without end?

In what sense or senses are his words without end?

What is God teaching in these verses? How is that relevant to Moses? How is it relevant to us?

**Verse 6:** Why does the Father tell Moses that Moses is in the similitude of the Only Begotten? In what way or ways is he in that similitude? Is there any connection between Moses being in the similitude of the Only Begotten and the Only Begotten being the Savior?

Why does the Father say that the Only Begotten “*is and shall be* the Savior” (italics added)?

The Father tells Moses that the Only Begotten is and will be the Savior because he is full of grace and truth. Can you explain that? What does it mean to be full of grace and truth? Is “grace and truth” a pleonastic pair? (In other words, does it repeat the idea, using two words to mean the same thing?) Why does being full of them make him the Savior?

Why does the Father add “but there is no God beside me” immediately after telling Moses of the Savior?

What does it mean to say that all things are present to him? What does that have to do with the rest of the verse? In what ways can something be present?

The last clause of the verse says that the Father’s knowledge makes all things present to him. To say that knowledge makes things present is an unusual way to speak. What do you make of what this verse says? Does it suggest anything about how things are present before God? Are things ever present for us in that way?

**Verse 7:** What does the phrase “this one thing I show unto thee” suggest rhetorically? In other words, what might a person be implying who says something in that way?

What is the “one thing” that the Father shows Moses?

Why does he explain what he shows Moses by saying “for thou art in the world”? What does that clause add to the meaning of the verse?

**Verse 8:** Moses sees not just the world but “the world on which he was created.” Why does the writer (is it Moses or someone else?) put it that way?

The word *end* can mean “final point” and it can also mean “purpose.” Which meaning do you think is used here when the scripture says that Moses beheld the ends of the world? Why do the people Moses sees cause him to wonder? Does verse 10 provide any clues?

**Verse 9:** What does it mean to say that Moses was left to himself?

**Verse 10:** Why add the phrase “like unto a man” to “natural strength”? What does the addition add to the meaning?

Can you explain what Moses means when, having had this vision of the ends of the world and all the children of men, he says, “Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed”?

**Verse 11:** Does this verse help answer the question about verse 10? Does it help us understand what transfiguration (literally “changing the figure”) entails?



**Verse 12:** Why do you think Satan addresses Moses as “son of man”?

Under the circumstances, why does Satan even try to get Moses to worship him? After all, Moses has just seen a vision of the Father.

**Verses 13–14:** When Moses looks at Satan, what does he see? What did he see when he looked at God?

Why does Moses say, “I am a son of God”?

When Moses asks, “Where is thy glory?” what is he asking about? In other words, what is missing in his encounter with Satan?

How has Moses understood Satan’s address of him as “son of man”? How is this related to what he learned in verse 10?

**Verses 15–16:** What is Moses doing when he says “Blessed be the name of my God”? Do we do anything like that? If we do, in what way? If not, why not?

In verse 15 we could understand Moses to say “his Spirit has not completely withdrawn from me, in other words, where is your glory?” What does the fact that God’s Spirit hasn’t fully withdrawn from Moses have to do with his question about Satan’s glory?

How does the fact that Moses is in the similitude of the Only Begotten help him deal with Satan in this encounter?

Who else has said to Satan, “Get thee hence”? Does this parallel tell us anything about what we are reading?

**Verses 17–18:** Why is it relevant to Moses’s encounter with Satan that God has commanded him to pray? Why

is it relevant that he has been commanded to pray in the name of the Only Begotten?

Why does Moses tell Satan that he has other things to ask of God?

What standard does Moses use to distinguish between Satan and the Father? Can we apply the same standard if we have not had Moses's experience?

**Verse 19:** Compare Moses 4:1 and Moses 5:13. What does that comparison teach us about Satan's methods?

**Verses 20–22:** Why did Moses begin to fear? Why might fear cause him to see the bitterness of hell?

What is the connection between Satan's trembling and the shaking of the earth? What is the point of that connection?

Did it require strength for Moses to rebuke Satan? Where did he get that strength?

Why is it important to Moses that the Father is "the God of glory"? Does *glory* mean here the same thing it meant earlier in this account?

How many times does Moses have to command Satan to depart? Why so many? How does Moses's last command to Satan differ from the other two? What does that say to us?

**Verse 23:** Why/how would this record be withheld from humanity because of their wickedness?

Does this explain why the Bible doesn't contain some things that are revealed in the Joseph Smith revision? If so, can you explain that explanation?

**Verses 24–25:** First Moses was filled with the Holy Ghost. Then he called upon God. Then he beheld God’s glory again. Is that order of events significant?

What does it mean to say that Moses was chosen by God? What might it have meant to Moses? What does it mean to us?

Why is the blessing that he will be stronger than many waters important to Moses? Is “many waters” a metaphor for the ocean or something else?

Is the reference to many waters a reference to the primal chaos over which God is said to have hovered in Moses 2:2 (Genesis 1:2) and which appears also to be the reference in places such as Psalms 18:16 and 29:3? How would you decide these questions?

**Verse 26:** What does the promise that God will be with Moses mean?

Why are the two clauses of this verse connected by the word *for*? What does that connective tell us?

**Verses 27–29:** In verse 24 Moses lifted up his eyes to heaven. Now he turns them toward the earth. Does that detail tell us something? How does it help us understand the story we are reading?

What does it mean to say that there wasn’t a particle of the earth that Moses did not behold?

What does it mean to say that he beheld the earth “by the spirit of God”?

Why is *spirit* uncapitalized at the end of verse 27 and capitalized in verse 28? Presumably because the two phrases refer to different things. To what might each refer?

**Verse 30:** When Moses asks “why these things are so,” what is he asking?

Why does Moses ask *by what* God has made them rather than *how* he has made them? Or are those the same?

**Verse 31:** Is this a new event, or is the writer going back to the event that opened the chapter, Moses’s encounter with God?

When the Father says, “For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me,” which of Moses’s questions is he answering?

How would you put his answer in your own words? To what does the word *it* refer in “it remaineth in me”? To “wisdom” or to something else?

**Verses 32–33:** Why does the Father describe the Only Begotten as “the power of my word”? Notice that the phrase is not capitalized, so it isn’t another name for the Only Begotten. It is a description of him. How is Christ the power of God’s word?

In both verse 31 and in verse 33, the Father says that he created the worlds for his own purposes. What do you think that means? Why does he tell us that he did so?

**Verse 34:** The name Adam is Hebrew for “Aman.” It may be from a root meaning “red” (*dm*), and since the word for earth or ground is *adama* (which may also have *dm* as its root), many believe that Adam’s name is a play on

words: Adam :: human being :: earth. In some places (e.g., Genesis 1:26–28) the word *adam* refers to human beings in general. In other places (such as in Genesis 5:3–5) it refers specifically to an individual; it is a name. In each case, however, the writer probably intends us to remember each of the meanings: the person Adam, made from the dust of the earth, represents all human beings. The wordplay of the Hebrew cannot be translated, but it is important to understanding the story. Given that wordplay, why does this verse end with the phrase “which is many”?

**Verse 35:** Why does the Father tell Moses about other worlds?

According to a common Jewish understanding of the story of Creation, the purpose of that story is to teach us that the world and everything in it was created by the word and will of God rather than by some other being or by chance. How might this verse fit into such an understanding of the creation story?

Why does the Father say “there are many worlds *that have passed away* by the word of my power” (italics added)?

Is it significant that he says “there are many that now *stand*”? Does the verb *stand* tell us something that another verb might not?

**Verse 36:** Why does Moses ask the Father to be merciful to him? Is Moses showing fear?

How would an answer to his question about the earth and its inhabitants be an act of mercy? Why does Moses feel compelled to ask this question? Why is it important to him?

**Verses 37–38:** This is essentially a repetition of verse 4. Why was that repetition necessary?

We can see this pattern:

Verse 4: God tells Moses that his work is without end.

Verse 36: Moses prays that God will tell him about *this* world and its inhabitants.

Verses 37–38: The Lord says that his works are innumerable to human beings, but he knows his works.

How does the third part of this pattern answer Moses’s question in verse 36?

**Verse 39:** Given what was said in verses 37–38, why does this verse begin with “for behold”? In other words, how does this verse explain what was said in those verses?

Does this verse equate the work and the glory of the Father?

Does what the Father says here go further toward answering Moses’s question? Or is what he says in verses 37–39 a preamble to his answer? If the latter, why was that preamble necessary before he could answer Moses’s question?

**Verse 40–41:** Can we infer from these verses and the first part of verse 35 that the creation of this earth might have been different from the creation of other worlds? Why or why not?

What do these verses tell us about the origin of the account that Moses writes?

In what ways have people taken words from the Bible?

We usually compare Brigham Young to Moses, but here the Father compares Joseph Smith to Moses. How was Joseph Smith like Moses?

**Verse 42:** To whom is this parenthetical phrase spoken? To Moses? To Joseph Smith? To someone else?

Why is the name of the mountain kept secret?

What does the commandment not to show these things to any but believers mean to us?

## Lesson 2

Abraham 3; Moses 4:1–4

### Overview of the Book of Abraham

In July of 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio, an entrepreneur and traveling showman named Michael H. Chandler exhibited four Egyptian mummies that were originally discovered by the explorer Antonio Lebolo. With others, Joseph Smith bought the mummies and several papyrus rolls that went with them, and he said that one of the rolls was the record of Abraham.

Over a short space of time, the Prophet translated the five chapters of the Book of Abraham, which is now part of Latter-day Saint scripture. But to understand what Joseph and his contemporaries meant by the word *translate* (namely, to move from one place to another or, in this case, to bring from God to mortals), refer back to the discussion of the translation of the Book of Moses in the lesson materials for lesson 1. Over time the scrolls were lost and assumed to have been destroyed in the Chicago fire, until several fragments of them were discovered in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and in the LDS Church archives in 1967.

There is general agreement among both non-LDS and LDS Egyptologists that the standard interpretation of the facsimiles takes them to be an Egyptian funerary document



that has nothing to do with Abraham. There are several explanations for how it is possible for Joseph to have translated the Book of Abraham from the scrolls in question, and why we should accept his translation of the facsimiles though it differs remarkably from the translation Egyptologists give of them. LDS scholars have researched and discussed this issue since the 1967 rediscovery of the scrolls, and that research continues. Good summaries of it can be found at the website FairMormon ([www.fairmormon.org](http://www.fairmormon.org)). Some of the ongoing scholarly research can be found at the online site of the Maxwell Institute ([maxwellinstitute.byu.edu](http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu)). Those interested in pursuing the historical questions about the Abraham scrolls and facsimiles and their relation to the Book of Abraham can find a great deal of material at those sites.

However, if we approach the Book of Abraham as we do the Book of Moses, as scripture, then it is enough to note that, whatever explanation we find acceptable, the translation was done by the power of God. Joseph Smith translated—brought from God to us—the Book of Abraham in some way that we do not really know. The scrolls may have merely been an artifact that prompted him to receive the revelations. They may be encoded in a way that makes standard interpretation inaccurate. There could have been scrolls from which Joseph worked but which we no longer have. The book may be related to the scrolls in some other way. Whatever the possibilities, the important point is that if we approach the Book of Abraham as believers, then we want to know what it reveals to us. That's what these questions will focus on.

## Abraham 3

**Verses 1–19:** Why did the Lord reveal these things to Abraham? More important, why did the Lord think it important to reveal them to us?

**Verse 1:** Why is it important for Abraham to tell us that he received the revelation that follows through the Urim and Thummim?

**Verse 2:** Assuming that the throne of God is on a planet, why say that the star is near that throne/planet rather than that the throne/planet is near the star? In contrast, we don't say that the sun is near the earth, but that the earth is near the sun.

To what does the word *ones* in the phrase “there were many great ones” refer? Stars? Why is it important that we know this detail?

Why did the Lord think it important for us to know about Abraham's understanding of astronomy?

**Verse 3:** What does it mean to refer to a star as governing? How can multiple stars govern? What do they govern?

When the Lord tells Abraham that the star Kolob governs “all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest,” what is he saying?

Note that the word *kolob* may be related to a Hebrew root, *klb*, which appears to mean “bind,” though the words that follow from that root appear in late Hebrew rather than early.

Is Abraham understanding astronomy as we do today?

**Verse 4:** Why is this difference in time between the orders of stars and planets important for Abraham to know? How does it relate to the gospel (in other words, to the message of faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and endurance to the end)?

Does “one thousand years” mean “a very long time,” or is it being used as an exact measurement? How would you decide?

**Verses 5 and 7:** What are we to make of these verses? Are they about the moon?

What does it mean to say that the moon is greater than the earth?

Why does moving more slowly make one planet greater than another?

If we went to the moon, presumably we wouldn’t experience time differently than we do on the earth. So what does it mean to say that the reckoning of time for the moon is different than it is for the earth?

**Verses 6 and 8:** Note: The word *fact* was seldom used as we use it before the mid to late nineteenth century—after the Book of Abraham was translated.<sup>1</sup> Prior to that, it usually meant “something done.” And the word *feat* is related to the word *fact*, and both are related to the French verb *faire*, “to do.” The Latin root for all these words is *facere*, “to do or make.”

So the word *fact* probably meant “something done” for Joseph Smith and those reading the Book of Abraham in the first half of the nineteenth century. If you use that

meaning for the word *fact* to understand these verses, what do they say?

Try substituting *feat* for *fact* when you read these verses to better see how readers before about 1850 would have understood them.

**Verses 5–8:** Is the parallel structure of verses 5 and 7 and verses 6 and 8 significant?

**Verses 9–10:** Do these verses add any new information, or are they a summary of the preceding verses? If they add new information, what is it and why is it important? If they only summarize, why is a summary necessary?

**Verses 11–12:** How does the Lord give his revelation to Abraham differently than he did to Moses (Moses 1)? Do you see any meaning in those differences?

**Verse 11:** Here and in verses 12 and 21, the Lord speaks of the things his *hands* have made. The creation stories show the Father making things by his word, by commanding them to happen and being obeyed, rather than making them by his hands. Why do you think he uses the image of hands here?

**Verse 12:** What is the significance of the Lord's address to Abraham, "My son, my son"? To whom does this implicitly compare him? Why make that comparison? What is the significance of his outstretched hand? How does this event compare to the experience of the brother of Jared (Ether 3:6–7)?

In both Moses 1 and here, the prophets learn the innumerable character of the Lord's creations. Why is that an important thing for them to learn?

**Verse 14:** Do the preceding verses have anything to do with the promise that the Lord makes to Abraham?

Why is it relevant that this revelation occurred at night?

**Verse 15:** Does this answer the question about why the Lord revealed these things to Abraham?

What does the Lord mean when he says "that ye may declare all these words"? What would be the point of such a declaration in Egypt? Does this verse help us understand why the Lord revealed these things to us? How so?

**Verse 16:** Is the word *exist* here parallel to the word *facts* in verses 6 and 8? If so, what do you make of that parallel? Why does the revelation use the word *kokaubeam* rather than *stars* since, as we are told in verse 13, that is what *kokaubeam* means?

**Verse 17:** What is the relation of the first part of this verse to the second?

What does the second part tell us? Does it mean "God is arbitrary, doing whatever occurs to him," or does it say something about his character: "He does whatever his pure heart desires, and we can trust him because of the purity of his heart"? Or does it say something else?

**Verse 18:** Why is the analogy between the relation of the stars and the relation of intelligences important?

**Verse 20:** Verse 19 is about the relation of intelligences, and verse 21 is about God's relation to intelligences. Why is this verse inserted between them? What does the near sacrifice of Abraham have to do with the hierarchy of intelligences? Does it tell us anything about how we should understand the teaching in verses 19 and 21? Or do those verses tell us anything about how to understand the fact that God saved Abraham from sacrifice?

**Verse 21:** What does it mean to say that the Lord dwells "in the midst of," in other words, in the middle of or among, all the intelligences?

We could paraphrase the first part of this verse in this way: "Because I dwell in the midst of all the intelligences, I have come down to tell you of the works I have made." How does the first claim ("I dwell in the midst of all intelligences") explain the second ("I will tell you . . ."), as the word *therefore* ("because") suggests that it does?

What is prudence? Note that in 2 Chronicles 2:12, "prudence" translates a Hebrew word (*sekel*) meaning "understanding" or "ability to discriminate." The King James translators also translated that Hebrew word as "understanding," "wisdom," and "knowledge."

Sometimes the English word *prudence* translates a different Hebrew word (*orem*), as in Proverbs 8:12. That word can be translated "subtlety" or "guile," as well as "understanding" or "wisdom." In Ephesians 1:8, *prudence* translates a Greek word (*phronesis*) meaning "reason, cleverness, or insight."

What do you think the English word *prudence* meant in this translation when it was written? Which meaning of the word ought we to use as our reference point for understanding this verse, a biblical meaning or the ordinary meaning in Joseph Smith's day? Why?

**Verse 22:** How were the intelligences organized before the world was? By what principle? How do you know? Why is it important that Abraham know they were organized?

**Verse 23:** To which intelligences does "these souls" refer to? What does it mean to be chosen before one is born?

What does it mean to be chosen at all? Chosen for what?

Why is it important for Abraham to know that he was among those chosen? Why is it important for us to know that he was?

In this verse does *spirits* mean the same as *intelligences* did in earlier verses? Why or why not?

**Verses 24–26:** Who is speaking in these verses? To whom is he speaking?

Is he suggesting a plan or telling them what is going to happen? What is said in this chapter that answers that question?

What does *prove* mean in this context? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first meaning of the word *prove* is "to demonstrate the truth of [something] by evidence or argument." Is that meaning relevant to its use here?

In verse 26, why does the speaker refer to those who do not keep their first estate when that has not yet happened?

Why do you think the verse uses the word *estate* to describe the various states of existence? What does *estate* mean? What does it mean to keep an estate?

Will those who did not keep their first estate have glory in a kingdom? If not, why is this worded as it is: “They who keep not their first estate shall not have glory *in the same kingdom* with those who keep their first estate” (italics added)? Does that wording suggest that there is another kingdom in which they will have glory?

**Verse 27:** To whom does the word *Lord* refer here, to the Father or to the Son?

Why does the Lord ask, “Whom shall I send?” after the one “like unto God” has already said what he will do? Why does this say that the first person to respond was “like unto the Son of Man” rather than that he was the Son of Man?

In the Old Testament, the phrase “Here I am” translates a Hebrew verb that could also be translated “Look at me” or “I am ready.” It is the standard, idiomatic response to someone if one’s name is called (as it is in Arabic today). If we assume that the same Hebrew word is in Abraham’s original account, what does the meaning of the word tell us about the answer to God’s question?

You can find the same phrase in these scriptures: Genesis 22:1, 7, 11; 27:1, 18; 31:11; 37:13; 46:2; Exodus 3:4; 1 Samuel 3:4–6, 8, 16; 12:3; 22:12; 2 Samuel 1:7; 15:26; Isaiah 6:8; 58:9; 2 Nephi 16:8; and Moses 4:1. Do any of those uses add depth to your understanding of what is happening here?



## Moses 4

**Verse 1:** Why does the Lord say “that Satan,” using a demonstrative pronoun, rather than just “Satan”?

Perhaps knowing what the word *satan* means will explain why the Lord refers to this being as “that Satan.” (How would we find the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “satan”?)

The Lord’s reference to Moses commanding Satan takes us back to Moses 1:13–15. Why is that reminder here?

What does it mean to say that Satan was with the Father from the beginning?

Compare the offer “I will be thy son” with what happens in Moses 1:19 and 5:13. What do we see?

Why does Satan say, “I will be thy son” rather than “I am thy son”? Isn’t he already a son of God? Does D&C 29:36 shed any light on why Satan’s request “Give me thine honor” was wrong? Do we ever try to assume the honor of God? If so, how?

**Verse 2:** What do you make of the difference between the way that the Father describes Satan in the previous verse and the way he describes Christ in this verse: “my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning” compared to “the same which was from the beginning”? Does that tell us anything about what Satan was suggesting in the previous verse?

**Verse 3:** When did Satan rebel? Have we seen that happen in this story yet? If so, where? If not, why does the Lord speak of it here in the past tense?

What do you make of the difference between the way Satan describes his plan—“I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost”—and the way the Father describes his plan: “Satan . . . sought to destroy the agency of man”?

According to the scriptures, what is agency? (See, among other scriptures, 2 Nephi 2:16, 23, 27; Romans 8:2.) What would it mean to destroy human agency? Is that possible?

**Verse 4:** What does it mean to say “he *became* Satan” (italics added)? The answer to the question about the meaning of the word *satan* may also be the answer to this question.

Why is “father of all lies” such a descriptive title for Satan? (Remember this name for him when we study the story of Adam and Eve.)

What does it mean to say that those who follow him will be led “captive at his will”?

What does it mean to say that those who follow Satan are those who will not hearken to God’s voice?

What makes a person a follower of Satan? How does one avoid being one?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

## Lesson 3

Moses 1:27–42; Moses 2–3

Since the questions for Moses 1:27–42 are the same as the questions posted in lesson 1, please refer to the study materials for that lesson. The materials below are for Moses 2 and 3.

Before taking up questions about Moses 1–3, however, think briefly about the story of creation. Latter-day Saints have been given accounts of the creation in Genesis, Moses, Abraham, and the temple. Each of those varies slightly, but importantly, from the others. I don't think any other scriptural story has been repeated as many times in canonical form. Why is this story so important? Why does it occur in scripture three times?

Why are the versions of the story different from and textually irreconcilable with each other? Do we learn things from the differences that we might not see otherwise?

### Moses 2

**Verse 1:** Why does God say, “I reveal unto you concerning *this* heaven, and *this* earth” (italics added)? What in chapter 1 prepares us for this?

To what does the phrase “this heaven” refer?

The Hebrew word translated “heaven” and used in the corresponding part of Genesis (Genesis 1:1) means “what is

above the earth” or “the place where God dwells.” Which meaning do you think is intended here?

Why does God begin his revelation of this heaven and this earth by telling us who he is?

Why does he tell us that he created the world by the Only Begotten?

What does God mean by the phrase “in the beginning”? In the beginning of what? In the beginning relative to what?

We sometimes use the phrase “heaven and earth” to mean “everything.” Is that what it means here, or does it mean something else?

**Verse 2:** Given the state we see being described here, to what does *earth* refer? It cannot yet refer to the dry ground because that hasn’t been created. Things are as yet utterly chaotic (as we will see), so how is the word *earth* being used?

“Without form, and void” is a rhetorical form called *hendiadys*, a word of Greek origin that means literally “one through two.” It is pronounced “hen-DEE-ah-dis.” Hendiadys is a way of repeating words so that you say the same thing twice. Sometimes it is used for emphasis. Sometimes it is used for explanation. (It is convenient to be able to use that terminology to describe cases where the scriptures seem to create one meaning by conjoining two terms, but it isn’t essential.)

The earth was without form; in other words, it was void. What does this repetition tell us here? Is it a matter of emphasis or explanation?

The Hebrew word translated “without form” in Genesis 1:1 means “confused” or “chaotic.” It often means “desert,” as in Deuteronomy 32:10 and Job 6:18. The word translated “void” means “waste, emptiness.” See Isaiah 34:11, where we see the same words translated “confusion” and “emptiness.” Together these words mean “complete chaos.”

Of what was the earth void or empty? What made it confused or chaotic? Why does it say that God *caused* darkness to come over the waters? That is different from the standard Genesis text, in which darkness is simply on the face of the waters.

The word translated “moved” in Genesis 1:2 could also have been translated “hovered.”

Why does God tell us that his Spirit moved or hovered over the waters?

Why does this verse end “for I am God”? That seems to be an explanatory phrase, but what does it explain? Does it explain only the material in this verse, or does it also explain part or all of verse 1?

**Verses 3–5:** God describes the light as good. In what sense do you think he means that it is good? Is it good because it is pleasant? because it is better than something else? good in some other way?

Does the use of the word *light* in places like Psalm 56:14, Isaiah 9:1, John 1:4–5, and the many places in the Doctrine and Covenants have any bearing on how we should understand the word here?

Why does God say, “This I did by the word of my power, and it was done as I spake”? How does that relate to the things we saw happening in the previous chapter?

What does “the word of my power” mean? “The power of my word” is easier to understand, but that is not what he says. Is this usage related to the sentiment we see expressed in Ecclesiastes 8:4: “Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What does thou?”

Notice that “the evening and the morning were the first day” tells us that the word *day* is used here only to refer to the period of daylight. We sometimes use the word *day* to mean a twenty-four-hour period, but that isn’t how it is used here.

**Verses 6–8:** In Genesis 1:6, the word *firmament* could also have been translated “an expanse of beaten plates” or “canopy.” It can refer to something hard, but need not. It can also refer to something that has been stretched out. In any case, it refers to a covering.

As verse 8 makes clear, “the firmament” refers to the heaven or the skies, which look like a canopy or bowl over our heads. Thus, verses 6 and 7 describe a scene something like this: There is a mass of water, and God stretches out a space in the middle of that mass, dividing the water into two parts, that above what he has stretched out and that below it.

Obviously this is not the way we understand the universe today (there is no mass of water above the sky). So it seems that God is using the understanding of Moses’s day to teach what it is important for Moses—and us—to understand about the creation. We can see a number of places in the

story of creation where God explains things in that way. Why would he do that?

Notice that in verse 8, God gives a name to the firmament. In the creation story, he names five things: light (Day), darkness (Night), the firmament (Heaven), earth (Earth), and the sea (Sea). Remember this connection between naming and creation because it will be important when we read Moses 3:19 (Genesis 2:19).

**Verses 9–10:** To what things is God referring when he says, “I . . . saw that all things which I had made were good”? What is he telling us when he tells us that the things he has made are good? In what sense is the created world good?

**Verses 11–13:** What do “after his kind” and seed “in itself upon the earth” mean?

Why was it important to Moses and Israel to know that herbs and fruit were created yielding seed after their kind and in themselves on the earth?

**Verses 14–19:** Verse 14 begins a second phase in the creation. As many have pointed out, in the first phase (the first three days), God created all the things that cannot move on their own. In this second phase we will see the creation of those things that do move: the heavenly bodies, animals of all kinds, and human beings. (Notice that verse 20 makes this explicit.)

Some have understood “let them be for signs” in verse 14 to suggest that the lights of the heavens were to be used in astrological ways. Though God has used the stars and other heavenly body as signs (as he did with what we call



“the star of Bethlehem” and with the rainbow), I think “for signs, and for seasons” means “for signs of the seasons”: the heavenly lights are given to us so that we will have a means of measuring time. (Recall a similar discussion in Abraham 4:4–10.)

Notice that verse 18 repeats substantially the material in verse 16. How do you explain that repetition?

Verse 18 says that the moon as well as the sun divides the light from the darkness. What does that mean? In other words, how are we to understand the word *divide* in that verse?

If you read these verses not only literally but also symbolically, what can you see in them? What metaphorical lights has God given us? Are there greater and lesser lights? How do they mark the seasons for us? How do they give light on the earth? How do our lights divide the light from the darkness?

One of the frequent themes of scripture is the rivalry relation between older (greater) and younger (lesser) brothers. It is a theme that we have seen in Moses’s and Abraham’s accounts of the premortal existence. Does the creation of the greater and the lesser lights have anything to teach us about that rivalry? Why do you think that such rivalry is so often a theme of scripture?

**Verses 20–23:** The fifth day parallels the second: on the second day the firmament was created, with the waters below; on the fifth day the creatures that inhabit the firmament and the waters were created. The “great whales” in verse 21 probably refer to any large sea animals. It may also be a reference to the sea monsters mentioned in verses such as Isa-

iah 27:1, Psalm 74:13–14, and Job 26:13. In at least some of these, the biblical writers seem to be referring to Canaanite mythology in which these sea monsters are the principle of evil and, so, symbols of Satan. What might their mention here suggest symbolically?

A more literal translation of the Hebrew behind “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature” in Genesis is “Let the waters swarm with swarms of creatures.” What is the point of that repetition?

Notice that the fish are told to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters,” while the birds are told only to “multiply in the earth.” Why the threefold blessing/commandment for the fish and only a single one for the birds?

**Verses 24–31:** The sixth day parallels the third day: the creation of animals and human beings parallels the creation of the earth and its vegetation. The word *cattle* seems to be used more broadly than we would use it, referring to any creatures that can be domesticated. “Beasts of the earth” appears to refer to the other animals. To what might “creeping things” refer, and why are they categorized separately?

Why does verse 25 repeat what was said in verse 24?

Why does the Father tell us that the Only Begotten was with him from the beginning?

Why is “Only Begotten” almost exclusively the name used to refer to the Savior in these chapters?

When God created the things he created before creating human beings, he said, “Let there be . . .” and it was created, with no prelude. In this case, the story shows him stopping

to discuss the next event in creation: “I, God, said . . . Let us make man.” What does that tell us?

Though most of those who accept the Bible as scripture do not believe that God has a body, the language used in describing the creation of man is fairly clear language that says, implicitly, that he does. To make man in the image of God is to give him the same bodily form as God. Other interpretations are possible, but that is the plain surface meaning of the Hebrew text, for the word for image refers specifically to the visible form of something. (See, for example, Genesis 5:3, where the same Hebrew word is used.)

The word translated “likeness” is broader. It, too, can mean “visible shape,” as in 2 Kings 16:10, where it is translated “fashion.” But it can also be used for simple comparisons in which we would say “A is like B” without meaning that they look alike (as in Psalm 58:4 and Isaiah 13:4), and it can refer to how we think about something (as in Isaiah 40:18).

Given that we have the same form as does the Father, how else are we like him? How are we like the Son? When the Father says that human beings are to be made in the image and likeness of the Father and the Son, what is he saying?

Why is it important to notice (verse 27) that the word *man* refers to both male and female? What does that tell us about verse 26?

Why does verse 27 repeat what was said in verse 26?

How does the commandment to human beings (verse 28) differ from the commandment to fish (verse 22)?

What is the difference between being fruitful and multiplying, or is this another hendiadys: be fruitful, in other words, multiply?

In what ways can we be fruitful? What ways do we have to multiply the number of children in our Heavenly Father's kingdom?

What does it mean to have dominion? What kind of rule over others does God expect of those who follow him? How might that apply to our dominion over "every living thing that moveth upon the earth"?

What do you make of the fact that God gives us dominion only over the moving creatures? (Notice that Moses differs from Genesis in this way.)

Of course, human beings are also told to subdue the earth. What is the difference between subduing and having dominion? One alternative translation of the word translated "subdue" is "make to serve," which assumes that what one subdues resists. Does this verse tell us that we can do whatever we wish?

Compare Moses 2:29–30 to Genesis 1:29–30. What are the differences, and what does Moses teach us that we don't learn from Genesis? What do you make of the fact that both human beings and animals are given only vegetation and the products of vegetation as *meat*, in other words, as food? For other relevant scriptures, see Genesis 9:1–4 and Isaiah 11:7 and 65:25.

Each of the previous times that God has passed judgment on his creation, he has said that it was good (verses 4, 10,

12, 18, 21, and 25). In verse 31, why does he say that the things he has made are “very good”?

### Moses 3

**Verses 1–3:** In the Bible, the Hebrew word translated “host” almost always refers to the troops of an army or to warfare. Besides here, I can find only two exceptions (though I didn’t make a comprehensive search). One is in scriptures that speak of those who enter into service in the tabernacle (e.g., in Numbers 4, where the word is translated “service”). The other is in Job 7:1, 10:17, and 14:14, where the word means “appointed time” and seems to be unrelated to the use here.

Why does God use the word *hosts*, meaning “armies,” to describe his creation?

What do you make of the formality of the language in these verses? For example, in verses 1 and 2, God says three times that the heaven and the earth were finished. And in verses 2 and 3 he tells us twice that he rested on the seventh day. What do you make of the formal structure of the account as a whole? What is that formality of structure designed to teach us?

What does it mean to say that the seventh day is blessed? What does it mean to say that it is sanctified? Is there any difference between these two terms, or do we have another hendiadys here: “blessed in that I sanctified it”?

**Verse 4:** What does the phrase “generations of the heaven and the earth” mean?

When the verse says “these are the generations of the heaven and the earth,” is it referring to the account that has just been given or the account that is to come?

**Verse 5:** The creation story in Moses 2 (Genesis 1) is clearly different from that in Moses 3 (Genesis 2). That fact has bothered Old Testament readers of the corresponding chapters for some time. For example, in chapter 2, the creation takes six days; in chapter 3 it takes one (verse 4—“in the day”); in chapter 2 the earth begins as a mass of water, but in chapter 3 the land is already there (verses 5–6); in chapter 2 the two human sexes are created at the same time, but in chapter 3 male is created before female; in chapter 2 the plants are created on the third day—before the creation of humans—but in chapter 3 man is created before the trees and, perhaps by implication, before other plants as well (verses 7 and 9); and in chapter 2 the living creatures were created before humans, but in Moses 3 they are created afterwards (verses 7 and 19). Some scholars interpret the first account of creation as an account of physical creation and the second as an account of the mortal creation of human beings. How did Joseph Smith account for these differences?

The Book of Moses makes more clear than do the other two scriptural accounts what kind of creation we have been reading about so far. If Moses 3 describes the physical creation, what does that say about attempts to correlate Moses 2 (and Genesis 1) with scientific accounts of creation?

More important, what is the significance of the spiritual creation? Why is it important to know of the spiritual creation?

What might the fact of the spiritual creation teach us? In what ways is it a type of other things?

**Verse 7:** A great deal of our religious language depends on this verse. For example, *inspire* means “to breath into,” and *spirit* means, literally, “breath.” What is the point of this language? In other words, what does it teach us? (As you think about this question, consider John 3:8.) For example, do you see any significance in the fact that man is said to be made of both air (breath) and earth? Do you see any significance in the idea that man’s life comes to him as the breath of God? Remember that the name Adam and the Hebrew words for “earth” and “red” are related, at least by sounding much the same in Hebrew. (See the discussion of the word *adam* in the materials for lesson 1, pages 33–34.)

Why does God give man a name that can be understood to mean “earth”?

**Verse 8:** The name Eden seems to connote “a well-watered place.” What kinds of things are associated with water?

What is the point of saying that the garden was eastward?

What kinds of typological significances can you see in the Garden of Eden? For example, how does it point us toward Christ?

**Verse 9:** Moses differs from Genesis in that it adds *naturally* to the phrase “to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight.” What does that addition tell us? Why was that addition important?

What does it mean to say that the tree became a living soul? What else do we see described by that phrase?

The Book of Mormon often uses the tree of life as a symbol. Where do you see it used in the Book of Mormon? What kinds of things does it symbolize? Of what is it a type? How does what we see here inform our understanding of the Book of Mormon? Vice versa?

What does *knowledge* mean when used as it is here, in reference to good and evil? Here, too, what the Book of Mormon tells us about a knowledge of the tree of life may help us understand what it means to have a knowledge of good and evil. How do our children come to a knowledge of good and evil?

**Verse 10:** If the river flows *out* of Eden to water the garden, then it seems that Eden and the garden are identical. Compare this to verse 8. What does the word *Eden* refer to? Does this help us understand what “eastward in Eden” might mean?

**Verses 11–14:** Abraham omits this part of the story. Why? Why do you think it is included in Moses and Genesis? Is there a spiritual reason for its inclusion?

Might there be a connection between the rivers that flow from Eden and the water that is said will come from the Temple Mount at the Second Coming? If so, what is the connection?

**Verse 15:** What does it mean to dress the garden?

The Hebrew word translated “dress” in Genesis 2:15 means “to serve” (and is frequently used of temple service in the Old Testament) or “to till.”



What does it mean to keep the garden? The Hebrew word translated “keep” in Genesis 2:15 means “to guard” or “to keep.” Its basic idea is to exercise great care. The same word is used, for example, when the Bible speaks of keeping the commandments, as in Exodus 20:6.

One translator says that Adam’s job was “to serve and to guard” the garden.<sup>1</sup> What do you think of that translation? What does Adam’s job in the garden mean to us? Do we have any similar job?

**Verses 16–17:** Are there any commandments for which it is not true that we may choose for ourselves for it (the choice) is given to us? Does this addendum to the commandment make it different from other commandments?

Why does God add, “But, remember that I forbid it”?

What do these verses in Moses include that is omitted from the Genesis account? What does that addition teach us?

What does the Abraham account add to the Genesis account? What does that addition teach us?

**Verse 18:** The Hebrew of Genesis 2:18 might also be translated “it is absolutely not good that the man should be alone.”

What is the problem with man being alone?

We have the word *helpmeet* in English. However, notice that neither Moses nor Genesis uses that word. They use *two* words: *help meet*. The scholarly discussion of the meaning of this phrase is enormous, but I will deal with only a few possibilities. The Hebrew of Genesis literally means “a helper in front of him” or “a helper opposite him.” Is it significant that God describes the woman as being *in front*

of the man? In what sense does the woman stand opposite the man?

One relevant meaning of *meet* is “appropriate,” so we can understand the last part of the verse to say “a helper appropriate to him.” What kind of helper would be appropriate to Adam?

However, some commentators suggest that this should be understood to mean “a helper corresponding to him” rather than just “appropriate to him.”<sup>2</sup> What kind of helper would that be?

With what might a helper give man aid at this point in the story?

How does the account of the creation of male and female in this chapter compare and contrast with the account of that creation in Moses 2 (Genesis 1)? What does each tell us?

**Verses 19–20:** Notice that the Book of Abraham omits these verses at this point, putting them, instead, at the end of the chapter. What do you make of that difference? How does that change what Abraham is saying in contrast to what Moses is saying? Notice, too, that these verses break up the story of Eve’s creation: verse 18 prepares us for that creation, and verse 21 tells us of it. These verses interrupt the natural flow from 18 to 21. Why? What do they have to do with the creation of Eve? How do they help us understand that creation?

**Verse 19:** What does the fact that Adam names the animals teach us about the creation?

In the Book of Moses, God breathes the breath of life into the animals, but in Genesis he does not. Does the addition

to Moses teach us something about animals that the Genesis text does not?

Many readers have taken the Genesis account to suggest a special place in the cosmos for human beings, given the fact that in that account God breathes his breath only into the first human being. Does the Moses account change that relationship? For example, does it either elevate the position of animals in the cosmos or lower the position of human beings?

The phrase “living souls” in the Genesis text is “living creature,” *hayyah* in Hebrew. That sounds very much like the Hebrew word behind the name Eve, *hawwah*. Is the writer making a wordplay here? If he is, what is its point?

**Verse 20:** Does the end of this verse help us understand what verses 19 and 20 have to do with the creation of Eve?

What happened to Adam as he named the animals? What did he discover? Does this teach us anything about our lives?

**Verses 21–22:** What might be the significance of Adam’s sleep? As a matter of doctrine, we do not believe that Eve was literally created out of Adam’s rib. So why is the story told this way? What’s the point?

**Verse 23:** Does this verse help us understand what the story of Eve’s creation teaches us?

What does it mean to say “this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”? (Compare Genesis 29:14; Judges 9:2; 2 Samuel 5:1; 19:12–13; 1 Chronicles 11:1.)

Given the important role naming has played in this story, is there anything significant about the fact that Adam names

her “Woman, because she was taken out of man”? If so, what? Why doesn’t he give her the name Eve at this point?

Up to this point the Hebrew word translated “man” has been *adam*, from which Adam gets his name. Here, however, the word used is *ish*. The word *adam* can refer to a particular individual, or it can refer to humans in general. (As we will see, it can also refer to a married couple.) *Ish*, however, refers to specific individuals rather than to men or humans in general. The Hebrew word translated “woman” is *isha*. Obviously that sounds very much like *ish*, the word for man, just as the English *woman* sounds very much like *man*. Few scholars believe that *isha* is a variation of *ish*, but the writer of this story uses them as if they are. We are interested in what the writer is telling us, not in the history of words for its own sake. Given the story we have just seen in verses 19 and 20, what might the similarity of the Hebrew words for *man* and *woman* indicate?

How does the name that Adam gives to the woman differ from the names he gave the animals?

**Verse 24:** Who is speaking in this verse, Adam or the writer?

What does it mean to leave father and mother? What does it imply about the man and the woman?

What does it mean to cleave to a person? What are the different ways in which a man and a woman may cleave to one another?

What does it mean to be one flesh? Does it have multiple senses? How are those senses important to our understanding of God’s expectations for married couples?

**Verse 25:** What does the first couple's nakedness indicate? Why should they be ashamed? The Hebrew word translated as "ashamed" doesn't carry the sense of guilt that we associate with shame. "Unabashed" might be a better translation.<sup>3</sup> See Judges 3:25 and 2 Kings 2:17 for uses of the Hebrew root that do not carry the connotation of guilt.

What is the purpose of this verse?

## Lesson 4

Moses 4; 5:1–15; 6:48–62

These notes focus on Moses 4, giving less attention to the other scriptures assigned for the lesson. However, the other readings are necessary to understanding chapter 4. (The study questions for Moses 4:1–4 were part of the materials for lesson 2. Refer to the materials for lesson 2 for those questions.)

Note that *if* Moses 2 tells of the spiritual creation (as is commonly but not universally believed among Latter-day Saints), then chapters 3 and 4 correspond to Moses 2:24–30, the sixth day. That would mean that carrying out the physical aspect of each day’s creation involved considerably more than we see explained in Moses 2.

### Moses 4

**Verse 1:** Why does the Lord say “that Satan,” using a demonstrative pronoun, rather than just “Satan”? Perhaps knowing what the word *satan* means will help make sense of why the Lord refers to this being in that way. Doing an online search for the meaning of *satan* or looking in an online reference such as the Blue Letter Bible and using the search function there would show us that the Hebrew word comes from a verb meaning “to obstruct.” Perhaps the most literal translation would be “opposer” or “obstructor.”

The Lord's reference to Moses commanding Satan takes us back to Moses 1:13–15. Why is that reminder here?

What does it mean to say that Satan was with the Father from the beginning?

Compare the offer “I will be thy son” with what happens in Moses 1:19 and 5:13. What do we see? Why does Satan say, “I will be thy son” rather than “I am thy son?” Isn't he already a son of God?

Does D&C 29:36 shed any light on why Satan's request “Give my thine honor” was wrong? Do we ever try to assume the honor of God? If so, how?

**Verse 2:** What do you make of the difference between the way that the Father describes Satan in the previous verse and the way he describes Christ in this verse: “my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning” compared to “the same which was from the beginning”? Does that suggest anything to us about what Satan was suggesting in the previous verse?

**Verse 3:** When did Satan rebel? Have we seen that happen yet? If so, where? If not, why does the Lord speak of it here in the past tense?

What do you make of the difference between the way Satan describes his plan—“I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost”—and the way the Father describes his plan: “Satan . . . sought to destroy the agency of man”?

According to the scriptures, what is agency? (See 2 Nephi 2:16, 23, 27; Romans 8:2.)

**Verse 4:** What does it mean to say “he *became* Satan” (italics added)? The answer to the question about the meaning of the word *satan* may also be the answer to this question.

Why is “father of all lies” such a descriptive title for Satan? (Remember this name for him when we study the story of Adam and Eve.)

What does it mean to say that those who follow him will be led “captive at his will”?

What does it mean to say that those who follow Satan are those who will not hearken to God’s voice?

What makes a person a follower of Satan? How does one avoid being one?

**Verse 5:** What does it mean to say that the serpent was subtle? Another translation of the Hebrew word used in the corresponding verse of Genesis is “cunning” or “shrewd.” What does it mean to say that the serpent is cunning?

How do we see his subtlety or cunning in this story?

If we look at the language in Genesis, we see a play on words in Hebrew that shows a connection between Moses 3:25 and this verse: in Hebrew the word translated “naked” is spelled almost exactly the same as the word translated “subtle.” It even appears that the writer has gone out of his way to make that play on words, that it isn’t an accident. What do you make of that connection? What is Moses trying to do by connecting these two verses and the ideas represented by nakedness, on the one hand, and subtlety, on the other?

**Verse 6:** What did Satan put in the heart of the serpent?



Who are the many that Satan had drawn after him?

What does it mean to say that Satan didn't know the mind of God? What is the connection between not knowing God's mind and seeking to destroy the world?

**Verse 7:** Another translation of Satan's question (in Genesis) is "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" Why does he begin with a question?

What kinds of things does Satan insinuate with his question?

**Verses 8–9:** Why does the woman emphasize that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is in the middle of the garden? How is its position relevant to our understanding?

Why does the woman add to the prohibition? Compare this verse to Moses 3:16–17 to see what she has added.

Is it significant that the prohibition was given to Adam before the woman was created?

**Verses 10–11:** What is the serpent saying when he says, "Ye shall not *surely* die"? What kind of doubt is he trying to plant?

The Hebrew of Genesis 3:4 is ambiguous. It could mean either "It is not certain that you will die" or "It is certain that you will not die," though the first one is probably best. Why do you think the serpent speaks ambiguously here?

What ambiguity in the meaning of *die* is the serpent playing on? What meanings can it have other than physical death?

Notice that the serpent's words in verse 11 are almost exactly the same as those of the Lord in verse 22. What things

does the serpent prophesy? Notice that each of them comes true. What, then, is the serpent's lie?

What motive does Satan ascribe to the Father? In other words, how are these verses an example of the fact that Satan is "the father of all lies" (verse 4) when there is a sense in which what he says here is true?

**Verse 12:** What is the point of the series of things that the woman notices about the fruit before we get to the phrase "did eat"? What makes her think that the fruit is good to eat? Why is it good to eat? What does it mean that it is pleasant to the eyes? What is the woman doing in making these observations?

What does the woman now see when she looks at the tree that she didn't see before?

In Genesis 3:6, the Hebrew word translated "wise" is *sakal*. It means "to understand, to have insight" and also "to prosper."

Notice that the writer begins with a lengthy introduction to the material in this verse but that the clause describing what she does is terse: "She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat." What effect does this contrast create?

Why does the writer add "with her" to the phrase "gave also unto her husband"? What does "with her" add to the meaning? (Compare Genesis 6:18, 7:7, and 13:1 for similar uses of *with*.)

**Verse 13:** The serpent had said that their eyes would be opened and they are. What does it mean that their eyes were opened?

Are our eyes opened? If they aren't, what would it mean for them to be opened?

What do the man and the woman see when they open their eyes? Is it what they expected?

What does it mean to say they knew they were naked? Did they think before that they had clothing on?

Nakedness plays an important role in the account from Moses 3:25 to here. It is an important theme or symbol. Why is nakedness important to what is being said? How is it important? What does nakedness have to do with a knowledge of good and evil? Can nakedness be thought of as a type? Of what kinds of things might that nakedness be a symbol?

If you were naked, how effective would an apron be as a covering? What might their sewing of aprons rather than fuller clothing tell us? Of what might it be a type?

**Verse 14:** Why is the Lord God walking in the garden? Does it seem that this is a customary thing to do?

*Word Biblical Commentary* notes that the verb translated “walking” in Genesis 3:8 is later used to describe God’s presence in the tabernacle (e.g., Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 23:15; and 2 Samuel 7:6–7).<sup>1</sup> What is the connection between the Garden of Eden and the tabernacle?

Is the time of day that the Lord returned to the garden significant? If so, how?

Why did Adam and the woman hide?

Why does it say they hid “from the *presence* of the Lord God” (italics added) rather than they hid “from the Lord God”? What might the word *presence* indicate?

Is there any significance to the fact that they hid among the trees after they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, or is that just a coincidence? If it is a coincidence, why does the wording so closely duplicate the earlier wording: tree, midst, garden? Moses could have just said they hid in the bushes. In other words, what does the narrator do by using that wording here, wording that reminds of us earlier verses?

**Verse 15:** In Genesis the Lord God calls to Adam, asking, “Where art thou?” (That call is much like his call to Abel in Genesis 4:9: “Where is Abel your brother?”) In Moses he asks, “Where goest thou?” What is the difference, and does that difference make any difference?

Notice that the Lord doesn’t just call out, “Where are you?” like we might when looking for a lost child. He speaks *to* Adam when he asks the question. He obviously knows where Adam and Eve are, and we know he knows not only because he is the Lord and knows everything, but because the writer goes out of his way to make it clear that the Lord knows when he points out that the Lord spoke to Adam. So why does the Lord ask this question? What is the Lord doing by asking?

When does the Lord ask us where we are or where we are going?

**Verse 16:** Does Adam answer the question asked? If not, why not?

What does Adam's answer reveal about what Adam is doing? Doesn't he understand that his answer is in itself a kind of confession of what has happened? If Adam doesn't answer the question asked, what question is he answering?

Compare Adam's answer to the answers given by prophets in similar situations: Genesis 22:1, 7, 11; 31:11; 46:2; Exodus 3:4; 1 Samuel 3:4–6, 8, 16; Isaiah 58:9; 2 Nephi 16:8; Moses 4:1; and Abraham 3:27. What might the difference between Adam's answer and the answers given in those other places indicate about what is happening here?

**Verse 17:** Notice that the Lord asks two questions. What is the answer to the first? What is the answer to the second?

Also notice, again, the emphasis on nakedness.

How does Moses 4:18 differ from Genesis 3:12? What do you make of that difference?

**Verse 18:** Which of the Lord's two questions does Adam answer? Why doesn't he answer the other one?

What did you say the answer to the second question in verse 11 was? How does that answer differ from Adam's answer?

Does Adam really answer the second question?

Adam seems to be blaming here. Is he? If he is, who is he blaming? Is it only the woman? What difference does it make that in Moses 3:18 the Lord "commandest that she should remain with me" while Genesis 4:11 has only "to be with me"?

**Verse 19:** Since the Lord has already heard from Adam what the woman did, why does he ask her? How is the woman's answer like Adam's?

What does *beguiled* mean? Looking in a dictionary is a good idea, but seeing how it is used in other scriptures may also give you a better sense of what *beguiled* means in the scriptures. Take a look at Genesis 29:25; Numbers 25:18; Joshua 9:22; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 2:4, 18; 2 Peter 2:14; 2 Nephi 9:9; Mosiah 16:3; Ether 8:25; and Moses 4:6, 19.

Have Adam and the woman done something wrong? After all, Moses 5:10–11 shows that it was good that these things (as a whole) happened.

If they did do something wrong, what? Could they have accomplished the same ends in some other way? How do you justify your answer?

On the other hand, if they haven't done something wrong, then how do you explain Moses 6:53, where we are told that the Lord forgave Adam his transgression in the garden? If Adam didn't do anything wrong, why did he need forgiveness?

**Verse 20:** The Hebrew word translated "cursed" sounds very much like that translated "subtle" in verse 1 of Genesis 3 (and it is also very much like the word translated "naked" in Genesis 3:25). The play on words seems to suggest that the serpent's cunning turns out to be his curse and that his curse is a form of nakedness (with all the symbolic connections that nakedness has).

In Hebrew, Genesis 3:14–15 (corresponding to Moses 4:20–21) is written in verse. Why do you think that might be?

The Lord God gave both Adam and the woman a chance to answer his questions, but he doesn't ask the serpent anything, nor does he give him a chance to defend himself. Why not? Why give that chance to Adam and the woman but not the serpent?

Notice that the punishment fits the crime: the serpent's sin had to do with eating; his punishment has to do with eating.

What meaning does this verse as a whole have for us? Is it a type of something? If so, of what? Is "because thou hast done this" an echo of "What is this thing which thou hast done?" in verse 19?

Is "cursed above all the cattle . . ." an echo of "more subtle than any beast of the field" in verse 5?

**Verse 21:** What is enmity? Who are the serpent's seed? What does it mean to say there is enmity between the woman and the serpent? Why enmity between the woman and the serpent rather than between the couple and the serpent? What does it mean to say that there is enmity between the serpent's children and the children of the woman?

Why does the Lord say "her seed" rather than "their seed"?

Notice the footnotes to this verse in the LDS edition of the King James translation. They explain the Hebrew in the corresponding verses of Genesis 3. Using them, we could rewrite the last part of this verse: "He shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel." Which would you prefer, a

crushed heel or a crushed head? What is the serpent being told is going to happen to him? What does it mean to say that the serpent will crush the heel of the woman's seed? Who will crush the head of the serpent? What does that signify? (See Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14; and Revelation 12.)

**Verse 22:** In the Hebrew of Genesis 3:16, what the Lord God says to the woman is written in poetic form, as is the case with the curse on the serpent. Why?

Look at the footnote about the Hebrew for the comparable verse in Genesis (verse 16). Using that information, we could rewrite the first part of this verse: "I will greatly increase thy discomfort and thy size in thy conception; in discomfort thou shalt bring forth children." So what?

In the Hebrew of Genesis 16, the usual word used for the pain of childbirth is not used here. Instead, the verse uses a word that refers to pain less specifically and that has the connotation of work, very much like the English word *labor*. This emphasizes the other meanings of the word rather than the idea of pain. How is the understanding created by this difference of meaning different from our usual understanding of the passage?

Does this verse necessarily describe a punishment? Notice that the Lord describes what he says to the serpent as a curse, but he doesn't use that word here and he doesn't use it when he speaks to Adam, except to say that the earth is cursed for his sake.

If what the Lord says to Adam and the woman isn't a curse, what is it? Is it a blessing? If so, how?



What does it mean to say “thy desire shall be to thy husband”?

What does it mean to say “he shall rule over thee”? Is the earlier discussion of the word *dominion* (see the notes for Moses 2:28) relevant here?

Some see a parallel between what God says to each person in this couple: You influenced your husband, getting him to do what you wanted. Now you will have to do what he wants. What do you think? Is that what is going on?

What do you make of the parallel between the language used here and that used in Genesis 4:7?

**Verse 23:** Notice that the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because thou hast done this . . .” and that he says to Adam, “Because thou hast hearkened to thy wife . . .” Is that difference significant?

“Hearken to the voice of” is an idiom in Hebrew meaning “obey.” (See, for example, Genesis 16:2 and Exodus 18:24.) If we make that change in the text—“because thou hast obeyed thy wife”—does that change our understanding of this story?

In contrast with what he said to Adam, the Lord God didn’t give a “because” when he spoke to the woman. Why didn’t he say something like “because thou hast hearkened to the serpent”?

Why is the ground cursed? What does it mean to say that it is cursed *for* Adam’s sake? What does that say to us about what is going on here?

Similar to what happened to the serpent, Adam has disobeyed by eating and the consequence comes in terms of what he eats.

If we can understand the word *sorrow* in Genesis 3:16 to mean “discomfort,” are we justified in understanding it that way here?

Another translation for the Hebrew word for *pain* in Genesis 3:17 and, presumably, *sorrow* in Moses 4:23 is “labor,” in other words, “work.” What light does that shed on this verse? What light does it shed on Genesis 3:16, where the same word is used?

**Verse 24:** Why are thorns and thistles necessary? Notice the parallelism between the end of verse 23 and this verse (the A’s indicate similar ideas; the B’s indicate a different set of similar ideas):

- A   cursed is the ground for thy sake;
- B   in labor shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;
- A   thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee;
- B   and thou shalt eat the herb of the field

The parallel emphasizes two things: (1) that the ground is cursed and (2) that we eat what the ground produces through our work. (There is a very old tradition that all human beings were vegetarians prior to the flood.) What does that parallel say to us? How might this be a type of other things?

The transgression had to do with eating, and the result of that transgression for Adam is discussed primarily in terms of eating. Why might that be? How is eating an important symbol in the gospel? Who fed Adam and Eve before the fall? Who fed them afterward? Is there any connection between eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge,

eating the herbs of the field, and partaking of the sacrament? Is there an implied contrast between eating the fruit of the garden and eating the grain of the field? If so, what is the point of the contrast?

**Verse 25:** We know that work isn't a curse since Adam was commanded to work in the garden before the fall (Moses 3:15; Genesis 2:15). The first part of the verse reemphasizes the necessity of work. If we count the implied reference to work in verse 24, and if we remember that the word translated "sorrow" can also be translated "labor" or "work," this is the fifth time that work has been mentioned in four verses—twice to the woman and three times to Adam. Why so much?

Notice how Moses writes this in such a way as to connect it closely to the first part of Moses 3:7. What is the import of that connection?

This verse says that Adam will have to work until he dies because he came from the ground and will return to it. Since verses 23 and 24 have made it clear that Adam's work consists of tilling the soil, we might even paraphrase this as follows: "You will have to work the ground until you return to the ground, for you were taken from the ground and will return to it." (Verse 29 reinforces this connection.) What is being said here? What is the point of this connection of Adam, work, and the ground?

Could the emphasis on our "return" to the earth be to keep us properly humble? We have been created in the image of God, and we have partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge in order to have divine knowledge and to be like God (verse 28), but we were created from the dust.

Perhaps what this verse says is to help Adam (us) see these things from a proper perspective. Perhaps, too, the emphasis is to follow up on the penalty given with the original commandment: you shall surely die (Genesis 3:17).

For other helpful places where the scriptures speak of dust, see Genesis 18:27; Joshua 7:6; 1 Samuel 2:8; Job 7:21; 10:9; 42:6; Psalms 7:5; 22:15; 44:25; 103:14; 119:25; Ecclesiastes 12:7; 2 Nephi 1:14, 21, 23; 8:25; Jacob 2:15, 21; Mosiah 2:25–26; 4:2; 21:13; Alma 34:38; 42:30; Helaman 12:7–8; D&C 77:12; and Moses 3:7; 6:59.

Notice the parallel between what is said to Eve and what is said to Adam. Just as in English, the Hebrew word translated “labor” can refer both to childbirth and to work. So though there are differences in what is said to each of our first parents, in the main each receives the same explanation of the results of their choice: they will have to work and they will have difficulty. Eve’s work and difficulty has to do specifically with childbirth; Adam’s has to do specifically with tilling the soil. But both are required to do the same thing, work and suffer pain/difficulty. What might we learn from this?

Women continue to have the work of childbirth, but few men in modern countries today till the soil or farm in any way at all. We extend the idea of men as tillers to men as workers in other ways. Are there similar ways of extending the idea of women as those who go through childbirth? In other words, tilling is obviously metaphorical in Adam’s case. What if we think of childbirth as metaphorical in the woman’s case? What would that metaphor include?

**Verse 26:** Why does Eve receive her name only now? The Hebrew word translated “Eve” means “life-giver.” We could just translate her name as “Life.”

Given the sometimes pessimistic way this story has been read, Adam seems not to have been pessimistic: the woman with whom he has entered mortality and, in fact, who brought him into it by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil first is not something hateful or ignominious, but *life*. Obviously Eve gives life to all those descended from her, namely the human race. But is there also any way of thinking of her as the mother of *all* living?

Some have seen in Eve’s name a wordplay on the Hebrew word for serpent. If it is, why might Adam make that wordplay? What does the serpent represent besides Satan? There are many places where the serpent represents evil, for example: Genesis 49:17; Psalm 58:4; Isaiah 27:1; Revelation 20:2; 2 Nephi 2:18; Mosiah 16:3; and D&C 76:28; 88:110. But there are also places where the serpent means something quite different from that: Exodus 4:3; 7:9–12; Numbers 21:8–9; 2 Kings 18:4; John 3:14; 2 Nephi 25:20, and Helaman 8:14–15. What might this say about what Satan was doing in the garden? What might it say about Eve’s name? What has giving life to do with scriptures such as Exodus 7:9–12?

Joseph Smith has some very interesting things to say about the power of giving lives: “The power of the Melchizedek Priesthood is to have the power of ‘endless lives’; for the everlasting covenant cannot be broken” and “Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings

and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam.”<sup>2</sup>

What is the “power of ‘endless lives’”? What does it mean to “administer endless lives”?

If life-giving is the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood, why is it so intimately connected with Eve in this verse and in this story? Might this teach us anything about the relation of women to the Melchizedek Priesthood or about our understanding of the fulness of that priesthood?

**Verse 27:** What might this verse be mentioning obliquely?

Literally, the word translated “coats” means “coverings.” *Word Biblical Commentary* says the form of the verb *clothed* in Genesis 3:21 (Moses 4:27) “has two main uses: either of kings’ clothing honored subjects (e.g., Gen 41:42; 1 Sam 17:38), or for the dressing of priests in their sacred vestments, usually put on [the priests] by Moses.”<sup>3</sup>

Why did the Lord need to replace the coverings that Adam and Eve had made for themselves? Remember the role nakedness has played in this story. What might the aprons Adam and Eve made when they first discovered their nakedness indicate? What might the replacement of those aprons with coverings from the Lord indicate? One way to think about this question is to ask yourself, “What is the difference between clothing oneself and being clothed by God?”

**Verse 28:** Why does the Lord God say “the *man* is become as one of us” (italics added) rather than “*Adam* is become as one of us,” especially since “man” translates the Hebrew word *adam*? (Does Genesis 5:2 help answer this question?)

What does it mean to say that Adam and Eve are *now* like the Gods? In what sense are Adam and Eve like them?

Notice what preceded this verse: temptation, Adam and Eve discovering their nakedness, the promise of posterity and the requirement of work, and being clothed in a garment given by God. What have these things to do with the knowledge of good and evil? What have they to do with becoming like the Gods? Is this a type for us?

What does the word *know* mean in this context? Think back to Adam and Eve’s knowledge of good and evil. In what does it consist? It cannot be just the ability to discern between right and wrong. If it were, it would be impossible to later hold Adam and Eve responsible for disobeying the injunction against eating the fruit. They cannot be punished for choosing wrongly if they do not know the difference between right and wrong.

Does the use of *knew* in Moses 5:2 give us any indication of what *know* meant to the Hebrew prophets? Assume that Moses 5:2 isn’t just a euphemism. Given the fact that the Old Testament writers seem seldom to hesitate to say what they have to say straight out, it seems unlikely that Moses is using a euphemism here.

How is Adam and Eve’s knowledge like the knowledge that God has? Does that have anything to do with authority?

Does it have to do with the importance of families—and therefore also with the importance of sealing? Why doesn't the Lord want Adam and Eve to live forever?

**Verse 29:** If, on leaving the garden, Adam was given the job of tilling the earth, is it a problem that very few of us today till the earth? What might Adam's job signify to us?

Some interpreters have understood the creation story not to be finished until Adam and Eve are sent out of the Garden of Eden. Do you agree or disagree? Why do you think what you do?

**Verses 30–31:** Why do you think that the Lord God adds this summary to the story as a whole?

**Verse 30:** What does this ending tell us about the story we have just read? Have we been reading part of Moses's endowment? Why is this story *the* story for understanding the endowment?

## Moses 5:1–15

**Verse 1:** Does this verse tell us that Adam could not have dominion over the beasts of the field until after the fall?

What do you make of the last sentence of the verse? What does it tell us about the relation of Adam and Eve?

**Verse 2:** The word *know* in this sentence is not a euphemism. If you think about the kinds of things that the writers of the Old Testament wrote about, it should be obvious that they didn't see the need to use euphemisms when talking about human sexuality or anything else. How might



the use of that word in this verse help us understand what it meant earlier, for example in Moses 4:28?

**Verses 4–5:** In verse 1 of the chapter, we hear the Lord God speaking. The Lord God is the one with whom Adam and Eve have dealt in chapter 4. The name *Lord God* usually refers to Jehovah. God—Elohim—was whom we saw working in chapter 3. Now, however, the story usually refers only to “the Lord,” which could be either of them, though it more likely refers to the Lord God than to God. Why do you think the story makes that change? Why is it important that Adam and Eve could hear the Lord’s voice but could not see him?

**Verses 6–8:** Why does the Lord wait many days?

Has the Lord been speaking directly to Adam? If so, why does he send an angel to speak for him now? Compare these verses to Genesis 22, where the Lord commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac but an angel rescinds the command.

Verse 7 says, “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.” Does *which* refer to *Father*, to *Only Begotten*, or to *sacrifice*?

Verse 8 begins with *wherefore*, which usually means *therefore*: you will do everything in the name of the Son because the sacrifice you make is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten. Can you explain the connection between those two clauses?

**Verse 9:** We have this record of Adam receiving the Holy Ghost. Why don’t we also have a record of his baptism?

Who says, “I am the Only Begotten” in this verse, the Son or the Holy Ghost? It appears to be the latter, but how can that be?

Has Adam not known before now that he and his posterity could be redeemed from the fall? What implications does your answer have for how you understand Adam and Eve and their family’s life before this event?

**Verses 10–11:** What does it mean to say that Adam was filled? With what? We saw him receiving the Holy Ghost in the previous verse. Is this a repetition of that, or does it refer to something else?

To what are Adam’s eyes opened because of his transgression?

How does his transgression bring him joy in this life?

What does he mean when he tells us that because of his transgression he will see God in the flesh?

Eve says that the transgression brings the possibility of having children, the knowledge of good and evil, the joy of redemption, and the eternal life that God gives those who obey. Is she naming four different things, or is she saying the same thing in four different ways?

Is what Eve says different from what Adam says, or is she saying the same thing in a different way?

How is what Adam and Eve say related to the knowledge that they have received, both the knowledge they received from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the knowledge they have just been given by God’s messenger?

**Verses 12–13:** Notice the importance once again of knowledge. When Satan says, “Believe it not,” to what does the word *it* refer in these verses? What is Satan saying to the children of Adam and Eve when he says, “I am also a son of God”? Given what Adam and Eve have said just a few verses earlier about what it means to be godly and what they have learned because of their transgression, what might this verse mean when it tells us that people began “to be carnal, sensual, and devilish”?

**Verses 14–15:** How does the Lord call by the Holy Ghost upon people everywhere to repent? Is the second half of this verse parallel to Moses 4:30? If so, does that suggest anything about how the two stories completed by these parallel verses might be connected to one another?

### Moses 6:48–62

**Verses 48–49:** Are the themes of these two verses different, or do they say the same thing? In other words, does Satan’s presence in the world explain how we are made partakers of death, misery, and woe?

**Verses 50–52:** Why is it important that we know that the Lord is the Creator?

Moses doesn’t mention Adam’s baptism, but focuses instead on his reception of the Holy Ghost. Enoch focuses instead on Adam’s baptism. Why? Does that difference tell us anything about how to understand what these stories each have to teach us?

Verse 52 and Moses 5:7 describe Christ as “full of grace and truth.” What does that description of him imply? How is that relevant to Adam’s experience?

When we talk about the Holy Ghost, we usually do so in terms of the things that he can teach us. Here Enoch speaks about him being the agent through which the things will be given that those who have received him ask for. Can you explain Enoch’s way of thinking about this? Can we translate our way of thinking about the Holy Ghost into Enoch’s, and vice versa? Or are these two different ways of understanding what the Holy Ghost does?

**Verse 53:** How is the Lord’s answer an answer to Adam’s question? Why does Adam need to have what he did in the garden forgiven?

**Verse 54:** According to this verse, how long have people believed in original guilt? To what does “original guilt” refer in this verse? Does the phrase mean the same as “original sin”?

Does this verse give us any understanding of verse 48?

What does it mean to say that children are “whole from the foundation of the world”? Why *whole*, for example, rather than *clean*?

Does “foundation of the world” refer to a particular event or time period? If so, might it refer to the creation of spirits in the premortal existence? To the creation of this world when Adam and Eve left the garden? To something else?

**Verse 55:** What does it mean to say that children are conceived in sin if original guilt has been atoned for?

Is conception perhaps being used metaphorically in this verse? If so, for what is it a metaphor?

What is the connection between conception (metaphorical or not) and sin conceiving in the hearts of children? What does “sin conceiveth in their hearts” mean? Does it mean “sin is conceived in their hearts,” or does it mean that sin conceives—creates—something in their hearts? If the former, why is the scripture in the active rather than the passive voice? If the latter, *what* does sin conceive in children’s hearts?

Does this verse explain what seems to be our natural propensity to desire evil? If so, how? If not, why not?

**Verse 56:** Is the first clause of this verse a summation of the previous verse? To what is the Lord referring when he says “another commandment”? The commandment in the next verse seems to be a universalized version of the same one he gave Adam at his baptism (Moses 6:52).

**Verses 59–60:** What does it mean to say that we are born into the world by water, blood, and the spirit? What does the parallel between physical birth (water, blood, and spirit/breath) and spiritual birth (water, atoning blood, and Spirit) suggest? What does it mean to say that we keep the commandment by water? That we are justified by the Spirit? That we are sanctified by the blood?

**Verse 61:** Can you parse (outline; figure out the grammar of) this sentence so that you understand how its parts fit together? For example, should we think of the first semicolon (after “abide in you”) as if it were a colon, so that what follows is a list of the things that abide? Might each

of the items after “record of heaven” mean the same thing? If so, might “record of heaven” also mean the same thing? How? If not, what does it mean in this context?

**Verse 62:** To what does “this is the plan of salvation” refer here? To verse 61? To verses 59–61? To something else?

## Overall questions for this lesson

Given that the story of Adam and Eve is given to us in Genesis, Moses, Abraham, and the temple, it is clearly one of the most important scriptural stories. *Why* is it so important? What kinds of things does it teach?

How are Adam and Eve and their story types for our lives? To think about that, consider any parallels between them and their story and other scriptural stories as well as any parallels between them and their story and our own lives.

Here are other scriptures that discuss the story of Adam and Eve: Job 31:33; Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; 1 Timothy 2:13–14; 2 Nephi 2; Mosiah 3; Alma 12:22–23; 42:5; Helaman 14:16; Mormon 9:12; Moroni 8:8; D&C 27:11; 29:34–36, 40–42; 107:55–56; Moses 1:34; 5–6; 7:1, 22; and Abraham 1:3, 26; 5:13.

You might also read what Joseph Smith had to say about Adam and Eve: *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pages 12, 38–39, 122, 157–59, 162, 167–69, 171, 301, and 345.

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 5

## Moses 5–7

You will notice that there is considerable overlap between the readings for this lesson and those for lesson 4. In spite of that, I have created different questions for the verses that overlap; the questions for verses that are the same as the previously assigned verses are different from the questions in the earlier study material.

There is a great deal of material to cover in this lesson. You may not be able to use all of the study questions because there are so many. If so, then read the assigned scriptures, and as you come to verses that you wish to give more attention to, turn to the questions for those verses and use them to help you.

### Moses 5

**Verses 1–2:** How do these verses connect to the story we learned in Moses 4?

Given what we studied in the last lesson, what is the point of the last sentence of verse 1?

Does verse 2 suggest anything about how the Old Testament prophets understand knowledge? As mentioned in the materials for lesson 4, they are not squeamish about writing frankly concerning things that we often would rather not talk about, so it is difficult to think that the use



of the word *knew* is just a euphemism. But if it isn't a euphemism, then how did Moses and other writers of the Old Testament understand what it means to know something? Does that have any implication for what we mean when we say things like "I know the Church is true?"

**Verse 16:** Verses 2 and 12 refer to many children before Moses says anything about Cain. Were there children before Cain and Abel, or was Cain the first child of Adam and Eve? If the latter, how do you explain verses 2 and 12?

The name Cain seems to mean something like "one who makes." Another translation of what Eve says when she names Cain (Genesis 4:1) is "I have created a man with the Lord." Given what Eve says in that verse, what is the significance of his name? Does it say anything about what Eve may have learned from her experience in the garden?

What does Cain mean by the word *know* when he asks, "Who is the Lord that I should know him?" How do we know the Lord? How do we refuse to know him?

**Verse 17:** The name Abel, "breath," is often used to speak of the brevity of life. (See, for example, Psalm 144:4, where it is translated "vanity.") But what might Eve have meant by using that name? (Or did, perhaps, Adam and Eve rename him after his murder?)

The word Eve uses here is not the same as the word translated "breath" in Genesis 2:7 (Moses 3:7), but might she have been making a connection anyway?

What is significant about the fact that Abel kept sheep and Cain tilled the ground? And, since prior to Noah, it appears

that people were forbidden to eat meat (see Genesis 9:3–4, where the prohibition appears to be lifted), why would Abel keep sheep?

Is Cain—here—in any sense a type of Adam since he tills the ground as Adam was commanded to do?

**Verse 18:** How does Moses show us that Cain loved Satan more than God? Is the love of God or Satan something that is only a matter of our inner thoughts and feelings? How do we judge the validity of those thoughts and feelings? Is Cain different from the rest of Adam’s children in this regard? (Compare verse 13.)

**Verses 19–20:** What does the phrase “in the process of time” tell us?

If you look carefully at the way the two offerings are described, do you see any differences between them besides, of course, that they offered different things?

Why did the Lord not have regard for Cain’s offering? How does the Lord’s choosing of one offering over the other square with the scriptures that tell us God is no respecter of persons? Or ask the same question another way: What does the fact that God is no respecter of persons tell us about Abel’s and Cain’s offerings?

**Verse 21:** How did Cain know that the Lord had no regard for his offering?

**Verses 22–25:** Is the Lord rebuking Cain in the verse 22 and the first part of 23?

What alternative does he lay out for Cain in the beginning of verse 23? Why does he spend so much time expanding

on the second alternative? (He explains that in the rest of verse 23, and in verses 24 and 25.)

What does it mean to do well? What does it mean to be accepted?

What does it mean to say that sin is lying at the door?

What does it mean to say that Satan *has* someone?

What does this mean: “it shall be unto thee according to his desire”?

What does saying that Cain will rule over sin mean?

In what way can Cain be said to be the father of Satan’s lies? Notice that the corresponding verse of Genesis (Genesis 4:7) says that Satan’s desires will be to Cain and Cain will rule over him, echoing the words used to describe the relation of Eve to Adam (Genesis 3:16). What might this parallel indicate to us?

The word *perdition* means “utter destruction.” Why does the Lord give Cain that name, and why does he add “for thou wast also before the world” after giving that name to him?

Why is what the Lord describes in verse 25 a curse? What is so bad about having people say, “These abominations were had from Cain”? How can Cain avoid this curse?

**Verses 26–28:** What do these verses tell us about Adam and Eve? About their family?

Do you think that Satan might have believed that his attempt to thwart God’s plan was succeeding? Might he think the same thing today? What reason do we have to believe that he is *not* succeeding?

**Verses 29–30:** Why does Satan have Cain swear by his throat? Why do his brothers swear by their heads? Why does Satan have Cain and his brothers swear “by the living God”? What is Satan imitating? Why?

Notice that Satan is always imitating God. We saw him doing so in the story of the temptation and fall. And we see it here: In the garden, knowledge brought death; here too knowledge (revealing these things) brings death. But the death brought is different in each case, as is the knowledge. The former is a knowledge of good and evil; Satan gives them only a knowledge of evil.

From whom does Satan want to keep these oaths secret? Why? Why is “I will deliver thy brother Abel into thine hands” a promise that can tempt Cain? What does it show us about Cain?

**Verse 31:** Why is the fact that one can get gain by murder a “great secret”? Isn’t it an obvious fact of the world that we can, if we wish, get gain by murder?

What does it mean to be the master of a secret?

The footnote suggests that the word *Mahan* may mean “mind,” “destroyer,” or “great one,” but I couldn’t find anything to support that other than the footnote (which says more about me than about the footnote). The closest thing I could find that might be relevant was *macha*, meaning “to strike,” or *machah*, meaning “to wipe out, destroy.” Suppose those words are related to the name *Mahan*. What might the possible meanings I found suggest?

Of what is murdering for gain a type? What are some of the ways we participate in this type, even though few of us murder in a literal sense?

**Verses 32–33:** Why does Moses say “Abel, his brother” when we already know that Abel is Cain’s brother?

What does Cain mean when he says, “I am free”? Free from what? Free to do what? What does getting his brother’s flocks have to do with being free? Is his statement in this verse related to what he asked earlier: “Who is the Lord that I should know him?”

**Verse 34:** Why does the Lord ask Cain where Abel is when he already knows what has happened? How does the Lord’s question in this verse compare to his question in Genesis 3:9 and Moses 4:15?

How does Cain’s answer differ from his parent’s answers?

The question “Am I my brother’s keeper?” means “Am I supposed to guard him, keep watch over, or care for him?” Is Cain asking whether he is supposed to be, for Abel, a shepherd, as Abel was for his flocks? What is Cain denying with his question?

**Verses 35–37:** Cain is the first person to be cursed. The serpent was cursed (Moses 4:20) and the ground was cursed (Moses 4:23), but Adam and Eve were not cursed. The word *curse* does not appear in what the Lord says to them, and the language that he uses doesn’t have the form of a curse.

How is Cain’s curse—that the earth that has received his brother’s blood will not give its strength to him—different

from what the Lord told Adam about the need for him to farm (Moses 4:23–25)?

What does it mean that Cain was a fugitive and a vagabond?

**Verses 38–41:** Is Cain still rebellious in verse 38, or does he recognize the enormity of his sin?

Cain blames at least two people. Who are they? Is he telling the truth in either case?

In verse 39, why does Cain repeat the curse that the Lord has given?

What is he afraid of in verse 39?

Why does he add “for these things are not hid from the Lord” at the end of that verse? That clause begins with the word *for*, indicating that the clause explains something. What does it explain?

Why would anyone want to kill Cain? Why does the Lord make the promise to Cain that he makes in verse 40?

Why does the Lord say he will punish anyone who kills Cain seven times more than he will punish Cain? It doesn’t seem just to punish someone else more for committing the same sin. What does the Lord mean?

What does it mean to be shut out from the presence of the Lord? How is what happened to Cain different from what happened to Adam and Eve when they were cast out of the garden?

**Verses 47–55:** Why did Lamech kill Irad, his great-grandfather? Why do you think the Lord calls Cain’s secret a “secret combination”? Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines

*combination* this way: “intimate union, or association of two or more persons or things, by set purpose or agreement, for effecting some object, by joint operation.” Does that add to your understanding of the phrase “secret combination”?

What does it mean to say “they knew every man his brother”? Notice the irony: the secret combination is spread, not only by those who have taken part in that combination, but by busybodies (perhaps Irad?) and by those who despise the combination and its members, by those who do not have compassion on the members of the combination (e.g., by Adah and Zillah). What might this say to us about our own lives? Are there secret combinations that we spread as did Adah and Zillah?

**Verses 56–59, especially 59:** What things were confirmed to Adam? In other words, to what does “all these things” refer? How does a holy ordinance confirm such things?

If there has been apostasy at various times during the history of the earth, what does it mean to say that it was decreed during the time of Adam that the gospel should be “in the world, until the end thereof”? Wasn’t the gospel removed from the earth between the time of the great apostasy and the Restoration (as well as between other dispensations)? What do these verses tell us that *we* need to know?

## Moses 6

**Verse 1:** Doesn’t verse 1 fit better as the end of chapter 5 than as the beginning of chapter 6? (The division in Gen-

esis is more like that.) Why or why not? (Remember, however, that the chapter divisions in the Bible don't denote divisions in the original text. I am not sure what they denote in Moses. In other words, I'm not sure how Joseph Smith dealt with the chapter divisions of the Bible when he worked on his inspired revision.)

**Verses 2–4:** The name Seth means “appointed one” or “established one.” How is that relevant in the context of the immediately preceding story of Cain and Abel?

Genesis 4:26 tells us “then [at the time of Seth] began men to call upon the name of the Lord.” Verse 4 of this chapter tells us “then began these men to call upon the name of the Lord.” How does the understanding of Moses 6:4 differ from that of Genesis 4:26? So what?

**Verses 5–6:** The verb *recorded* is normally transitive, but it isn't used that way in verse 5. It has no object. What was recorded in Adam's book of remembrance?

Why does the verse specify that the book of remembrance was kept “in the language of Adam”? Was there another language it could have been recorded in?

Do we have anything comparable to Adam's book of remembrance?

What does it mean to have a pure and undefiled language? Or, the other way to put the question, what does it mean to have a language that is not pure and undefiled? How might our language be impure or defiled? What would the consequences of the impurity and defilement of language be?



**Verses 7:** Why does verse 7 refer to “this same Priesthood” when the priesthood has not yet been mentioned? How is the existence of the priesthood in both the beginning and the end of the world relevant to Adam’s book of remembrance, the subject of the previous as well as the subsequent verses?

**Verses 8–9:** What prophecy does the beginning of verse 8 refer to?

What are we to make of the end of verse 8 and all of verse 9? Is this what the book of remembrance said?

**Verses 10–21, 24–25:** Why are the facts about how long people lived included in scripture? Is there any way that this information can help point us toward belief in Christ and salvation?

**Verse 15:** How does this verse explain bloodshed and war? When does it say that bloodshed and war began?

We can understand how seeking for power causes human beings to kill one another. How do “secret works” do so? Does “secret works” mean the same as “secret combinations,” or does it include more?

**Verse 22:** The Church does not accept the Adam-God theory, so how do we explain “Adam, who was the son of God”? How is it relevant that Adam conversed with God? When did those conversations occur?

**Verse 23:** To whom does *they* refer in the beginning of the verse?

What does it mean to say “*faith* was taught unto the children of men” (my italics)? Why *faith* rather than *the gospel*?

**Verses 26–30:** In verse 26, what does it mean to say that the Spirit of God *abode on* Enoch?

Consider the metaphors in verse 27: hearts that have waxed (i.e., grown) hard, ears that cannot hear well, nearsighted eyes. Notice that the Lord does not speak of the people being completely deaf or blind. What do these three metaphors suggest about the people to whom Enoch has been called to preach?

Is the Lord using hyperbole when he says that humanity has gone astray “ever since the day that I created them”?

What does “have sought their own counsels *in the dark*” mean (verse 28, italics added)?

What does it mean to forswear oneself (verse 29)?

How have they brought death on themselves? Which death?

To what decree is the Lord referring in verse 30?

**Verse 31:** Enoch has heard the Lord but seems not to have seen him. (However, see verse 42, which suggests he might have.) So what can it mean to say that he “bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord”?

What does it mean to be slow of speech? Why would the Lord choose a prophet who is slow of speech when speaking is such an important part of his calling? (Compare Exodus 4:10; 2 Nephi 3:17.)

Paraphrased in contemporary English, the last clause of this verse asks, “For what reason am I your servant?” What point is Enoch making with his question? Is it unrighteous of Enoch to argue with God in this way? Do other prophets ever argue with him? Can *we* argue with him?

What do you make of the fact that in this verse Enoch says, “I am but a lad,” though in verse 25 we were told that Enoch was sixty-five when Methuselah was born. Has the story backed up in time? What is the relation between the genealogies in verses 10–25?

**Verses 32–34:** What does the Lord mean when he promises Enoch “no man shall pierce thee”?

Why does the Lord add “for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good” to his promise to fill Enoch’s mouth?

Why the emphasis on choice in verse 33?

Why refer to the Lord as their Creator rather than, perhaps, their Savior or their Redeemer rather than by some other name?

In verse 34, what is the Lord promising when he promises to justify Enoch’s words?

What is the point of the promise that the mountains will flee and the rivers will turn their courses before Enoch?

What does it mean to abide in—to reside in—the Lord? What does it mean for him to abide in us?

Given the things that the Lord has just said to Enoch, what is he saying when he commands him, “Walk with me”?

**Verses 35–36:** What is the relationship between verse 35 and John 9:6–7?

What does verse 36 tell us when it says that Enoch “beheld the spirits that God had created”? The spirits of those on the earth with him at that time? Other spirits?

How does this verse explain what it means to be a prophet, *seer*, and revelator? What is the significance of Enoch “standing upon the hills and high places” (verse 37)?

**Verse 38:** This is a strange verse. Why does it bother to mention the tent-keepers?

What do the people mean when they refer to Enoch as a wild man?

**Verses 39–40:** What do Mahijah’s questions reveal about Enoch?

**Verses 41–42:** Where was the land of Cainan? From what Enoch says, those in the land of Cainan were not unrighteous. To whom, then, was he preaching?

**Verses 43–46:** What is the theme of Enoch’s preaching in verses 43–44? Why is that theme an important part of his message?

How do you explain verse 45? Surely those to whom he speaks know that people die. What does he mean when he says “nevertheless, we know them”? What is it that he cannot deny? What is he telling them when he says that his people know “the first of all, . . . even Adam”?

**Verse 47:** Why would they have been unable to stand in Enoch’s presence?

**Verses 48–52:** Compare verse 48 to 2 Nephi 2:25. Both agree that Adam’s fall made it possible for us to be, but what they say after that is quite different. What do you make of that difference?

Does verse 49 teach us that to be carnal, sensual, and devilish is to worship Satan? Notice that Satan chose to be shut out from the presence of God and that he tempts us to make the same choice.

The message in verses 50–52 is the familiar and defining message of the gospel: all must repent, turn to God and believe, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Does anything in this particular version of that message stand out? If so, what does it teach us?

**Verse 53:** Adam asks why people must be baptized. How is what the Lord says in the second half of the verse an answer to that question?

**Verse 54:** This verse begins with *hence*, which tells us that the content of verse 54 is the result of what we learned in verse 53. Can you explain how the saying that went abroad among the people (concerning the Atonement and the guilt of children) is the result of what we see in verse 53, the Lord forgiving Adam and Eve’s transgression?

**Verse 55:** Given what we have just seen in the previous verse, what does it mean to say that children are conceived in sin? Of what significance is it that sin conceives in their hearts only when they grow up? How do you reconcile being conceived in sin, on the one hand, with conceiving sin in one’s heart only when one begins to grow up? Does this verse teach that we may taste the bitter only if sin has conceived in our hearts?

**Verses 56–57:** Here is a paraphrase of one theme in these verses: human beings are agents to themselves, and I have given them commandment that all people must repent if

they wish to inherit the kingdom of God. How are these two connected? Does the *and* in verse 56 suggest a causal connection between the two?

How should we understand the statement that the name of the Father is “Man of Holiness”? Is that one of his names or his most important name or something else?

**Verses 58–61:** Notice that this is one complex sentence. If you have the time and the skill, it would be informative to outline the sentence in some way. (You need not use the outlining system that some were taught in school. All that is necessary is to find some way of showing how the various parts of the sentence are related to one another.) Doing so will help you understand better how its parts relate to one another, and it will allow you to see what the main point of these verses is.

Verse 57 and verse 58 begin in essentially the same way. Are they two different ways of saying the same thing, with verse 57 being an overview of verses 58–61?

How do you understand the obvious parallel that verse 59 makes between the blood, water, and spirit of birth, on the one hand, and the blood, water, and spirit of rebirth? What kinds of things does that parallel suggest?

Grammatically, the phrase “that ye might be sanctified from sin” refers back to something that has come before it: “*x* happens so that you can be sanctified.” Does it refer to “ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven” or to both that and “by reason of transgression cometh the fall . . . and so became of dust a living soul”?

How do you explain the content of verse 60? What does it mean to say that we keep the commandment by water? What does it mean to say that we are justified by the Spirit? What is justification? What does it mean to say that we are sanctified by the blood? What is sanctification?

To what does *it* refer in the clause “therefore, it is given to abide in you” (verse 61)? Is the semicolon that follows “abide in you” an antique usage? Would it be a colon in contemporary usage, with the list of what abides following?

What is “the record of heaven” in this context? What are “the peaceable things of immortal glory”? There are two ways to read the phrase “the truth of all things,” as meaning “how all entities are true” or as meaning “the truth that encompasses all things.” Are there other possible meanings? What do you think the phrase means here? Why?

How would that truth abide in us?

What quickens all things and makes them alive? In fact, in what sense are all things alive? How can what quickens all things abide in us? What does it mean to say that which quickens all things has all wisdom according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment”?

**Verse 62:** The verse says “this is the plan of salvation.” To what does *this* refer here, something already said or something to come?

**Verse 63:** What does it mean to say that all things have their likeness? Does this have anything to do with Moses 2:26?

Is there perhaps more to the list of “all things” than a poetic expansion of that phrase?

**Verses 64–68:** How does the phrase “became quickened in the inner man” (verse 65) help us understand what it means to be born of the Spirit? When are we born of the Spirit? Is it always when we are given the gift of the Holy Ghost?

What does it mean to say that Adam’s baptism and birth of the Holy Spirit “is the record of the Father, and the Son” (verse 66)?

Is verse 67 a record of Adam’s ordination?

What is it that has made Adam one in the Father (verse 68)?  
 What does it mean to say that Adam is one in the Father?  
 Does that mean the same as one *with* the Father? If so, why does the Lord use *in*?

When we speak of ourselves as sons and daughters of God, do we mean the same thing that is meant here when Adam is called a “son of God”? Why or why not?

Verse 68 ends by telling us “*thus* may all become my sons.” The word *thus* tells us that we have seen how that is possible. It usually refers to something specific. To what in this reading do you think it refers?

## Moses 7

**Verse 1:** What does it mean to believe and to become a son or daughter of God? Have we seen that happen already? How did it happen? If we haven’t seen it happen, have we seen it explained? Where?

**Verses 2–10:** Why is it so important for us to have this prophecy that it was restored through a latter-day prophet? How is this prophecy relevant to us?



The Lord tells Enoch that he will show him “the world for the space of many generations” (verse 4). Then he shows him the people of Shum and Canaan and the lands of Sharon, Enoch, Omner, Heni, Shem, Haner, and Hanannah, with their people. What does this suggest about what the word *world* means here?

In verse 10 we find the Lord’s threat against those who do not repent, but the wording is unusual. The phrase “come and smite” occurs six times in scripture, but the phrase “come out and smite” occurs only here. Does that difference in wording make any difference to the meaning?

**Verse 11:** The members of the Godhead are one in will and purpose. Yet a distinction of some kind is made in this verse: the Father and the Son are full of grace and truth; the Holy Ghost bears record of them. What do you make of that distinction?

**Verse 12:** Why didn’t Enoch call the people of Canaan to repentance?

**Verses 13–15:** What is going on here? What do we learn? What did Enoch’s people learn? What did Enoch learn?

**Verse 16:** What does “the Lord came and dwelt with his people” mean? Does he dwell with us? In what sense? If he doesn’t dwell with us, can we be his people?

**Verse 17:** What does it mean to say that the people “were blessed upon the mountains, and upon the high places”?

**Verse 18:** We often quote this verse as a description of Zion (but sometimes we quote only the first of the three attributes mentioned): being of one heart and mind, dwelling in righ-

teousness, and having no poor among them. Can you explain concretely what each of those attributes means *for us*?

**Verses 19–24:** Why is the record of Zion being taken into heaven (verse 21) preceded by “in process of time”? What is that telling us?

Verse 22 has sometimes been used to justify the belief that black Africans are “the seed of Cain,” a false idea that has caused much offense and suffering. How would you explain what this verse means?

**Verses 25–66:** One might easily say that this is a vision of all things. Why would the Lord give Enoch such a vision, particularly when Enoch would no longer be on the earth? Why is it important for us to know about Enoch’s vision?

**Verses 25–27:** Is this a description of a particular period in human history, or is it a description of the pattern of all human history?

**Verses 28–37:** Why is Enoch surprised to learn that God weeps? How does God explain his weeping? Is the fact that he weeps a comfort to us? Or is it frightening, a suggestion that he is not in complete control and, so, perhaps unable to bring about his plans? If you reject the latter, why?

**Verses 38–39:** What do these verses suggest about the nature of the prison in the spirit world?

How would Latter-day Saints probably have understood the teaching of these verses in 1831, before the revelation of the three degrees of glory and before the doctrine of the spirit world in which we exist between death and the resurrection was fully understood?

**Verse 40:** To what does the pronoun *this* refer in this verse?

To what is the Lord referring when he speaks of “all the workmanship of mine hands”? Is this a metaphorical way of saying physical creation? Or does it refer to something broader, perhaps including spiritual creation? If it refers to all of creation, including the spirits, does it mean that all human beings weep because of the wickedness of the world? What might that imply?

**Verse 41:** What does it mean to say that Enoch’s “heart swelled wide as eternity”? Is that a good experience or an unpleasant one?

What does it mean to say that Enoch’s “bowels yearned”? This looks like an Old Testament metaphor, so perhaps looking at similar usage there will help. In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* we find that the Hebrew word often translated “bowels” (but sometimes translated “heart”: *mē‘eh*) has three major meanings: (1) internal organs, (2) reproductive organs, and (3) the seat of emotion. If the comparison to Hebrew usage is appropriate here, what does that suggest about what this phrase means?

Why might the ancient Hebrews have associated the emotions with our internal organs?

What does it mean for eternity to shake? In the phrase “all eternity shook,” to what does the word *eternity* refer?

**Verse 44:** What is “bitterness of soul”?

What does Enoch mean when he says not just that nothing can comfort him but that he *refuses* to be comforted? What is that experience like?

**Verses 45–46:** According to the 1828 edition of Webster’s dictionary, the word *meridian* means “a great circle supposed to be drawn or to pass through the poles of the earth and the zenith.” (The zenith is the point directly above an observer’s head and perpendicular to the earth.) Why is the time when “the blood of the Righteous [shall] be shed” called “the meridian of time”?

**Verse 47:** Does it strike you as odd that Enoch finds such joy in Christ’s crucifixion? How do you explain that?

When Christ says, “I am in the bosom of the Father,” what does he mean?

What does he mean when he says, “Zion is with me”? Is he referring to Enoch’s city? If so, how can he do so when that city has not yet been taken from the earth at the time that Enoch has his vision?

**Verse 48:** In what sense or senses is the earth “the mother of men”? What does it mean to say that wickedness has “gone forth out of me [the earth]”?

**Verse 49:** How would the Lord have compassion on the earth? Does the context of Enoch’s request suggest an answer?

Are the two questions “Wilt thou not have compassion upon the earth?” and “Wilt thou not bless the children of Noah?” parallel not only in grammar but also in meaning? If so, how would blessing Noah’s children be having compassion on the earth?

**Verses 50–53:** How does verse 51 change our understanding of the story of the flood as we find it in Genesis?

The editor who introduced the punctuation of the Book of Moses has made verses 51–53 one long sentence. Why do you think he did that? How did he see the content of each of these sentences and the clauses in those sentences related to each other as a whole?

What does it mean to say that the Lord could not withhold (verse 51)?

Are “that he would stay the flood” and “that he would call upon the children of Noah” meant to be parallel?

In the clause “that he would call upon the children of Noah,” does “call upon” mean “visit” or does it mean “make a demand of”? How do you justify your answer?

What is the point of the promise that some remnant of Noah’s progeny will be among every nation “while the earth should stand” (verse 52)? How is that an answer to Enoch’s prayer?

**Verse 53:** Why is it a blessing to have Messiah as one of one’s descendants?

Why doesn’t this verse put the article *the* in front of the word *Messiah*. We usually do that, saying “the Messiah” rather than just “Messiah.” Does its absence here tell us anything?

What does the title “King of Zion” teach about Messiah?

What does the title “Rock of Heaven” teach?

What does it mean to say heaven “is broad as eternity”?

Christ is portrayed here as a ladder by which we climb up to heaven. What do we learn from that metaphor?

The Lord says, “Blessed are they of whom I have spoken.” To whom is he referring?

**Verse 54:** Enoch repeats a question here, “Shall the earth rest?” a question that is a theme from verse 48 through verse 64. How does that theme tie together the various topics in those verses?

**Verses 55–58:** Why does Enoch weep after he sees the thing he has been looking forward to with joy, the crucifixion? In particular, why does he weep after he sees the resurrection of the Saints and the division of those in spirit prison between those on the right hand of God and those “reserved in chains of darkness”?

**Verse 59:** Having seen the vision of the verses just before this verse, why is Enoch concerned about whether Christ will return to earth?

**Verses 60–62:** This is another place where the editor has made these clauses into one very long sentence. Why do you think he might have done that rather than turning them into independent sentences? Is there something in the content of these verses that suggests we should think of them as one sentence rather than several?

What does the divine oath “As I live” (verse 60) mean?

How will Christ’s return in the last days fulfill the Lord’s oath to Enoch concerning Noah?

What does it mean to say that the heavens will be darkened and a veil of darkness will cover the earth (verse 61)? What does it mean for the heavens to shake?

In verse 62 these clauses are parallel: “righteousness will I send down out of heaven” and “truth will I send forth out of the earth.” Can you explain the metaphor of each clause? What does the fact that they are parallel teach?

Joseph Smith and the early Saints understood verse 62 to refer to a city that they would build in Jackson County, Missouri. Nowadays, however, we understand Zion to be wherever there are stakes of Zion. (Our understanding seems based on the way that the Doctrine and Covenants often uses the phrase “Zion, or any of her stakes.” We interpret that to be an equivalence.) How might the contemporary understanding of what *Zion* means cause us to understand the promise of verse 62?

**Verses 63–64:** The inhabitants of each of these cities, the city of Enoch and Zion, have never met before. What would explain the great joy that the Lord portrays in verse 63?

What does it mean to say that Zion comes “out of all the creations which I have made”?

How has the Lord answered Enoch’s question about the earth’s rest? What gives the earth rest?

**Verses 65–69:** What does it mean for men’s hearts to fail (verse 66)?

What does it mean for Enoch to see “all things”? Did he see every event that ever occurred, including, for example, which shoelace I tied on a particular morning?

Verse 67 speaks of the day of righteousness, which is the same as “the hour of their redemption.” To whom does

*their* refer? Presumably to some group previously mentioned in these verses? Who would that be?

What does it mean to walk with God (verse 69)? Genesis tells us that both Noah and Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:22–24; 6:9). The Book of Moses tells us the same thing, and it adds this verse about the people of Enoch walking with God. How can *we* walk with God?



THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

## Lesson 6

Moses 8:19–30; Genesis 6:5–22; 7:11–24; 8:1–22;  
9:8–17; 11:1–9

### Moses 8

**Verse 9:** The Hebrew of Genesis 5:29 shows us that Noah’s name means “rest.” How does his father, Lamech, explain the name? Is Noah’s name significant to the story of the flood?

**Verses 19–21:** Why don’t the people listen to Noah?

What do the things they say about themselves tell us about them? (Compare verse 21 to verse 14.)

Why does what they say focus on marriage and children?

How is what they say a reply to Moses’s message of repentance?

Do we see anything here about how they understand what it means to have dominion?

**Verse 22:** Compare this verse to what God says of creation (e.g., Moses 2:10, 31). What has happened to creation? How has it happened?

**Verses 23–24:** What does Noah promise the people of the earth if they will repent?

How is the *reception* of the Holy Ghost, as compared to its gift, a blessing?

**Verses 25–26:** Why does the Lord decide to destroy the earth?

In Genesis 6:6 the Lord says of human beings: “It repenteth me that I have made them.” The comparable verse of Moses (Moses 8:26) says, “It repenteth Noah that I have created them.” What is the significance of that difference? Is it just a matter of Moses giving us a better version of the story, or is there a difference in what the two versions are telling us?

**Verse 27:** What does it mean to be just?

What does it mean that Noah was “perfect in his generation”?

What does it mean to walk with God? We find the same phrase, “just man, and perfect in his generation” (with the plural of *generation* rather than the singular) in Genesis 6:9. There the word translated “just” is a translation of the Hebrew word *tsaddiq*, and the word translated “perfect” is a translation of the Hebrew word *tamim*. *Tsaddiq* is often translated “righteous” (as in Psalm 145:17 and Proverbs 13:25). The verb form of the word is used to speak of judgment: a judge must judge according to the truth, honestly and impartially. The Old Testament has a great deal to say about the *tsaddiq*. (For examples, see Job 29:12–15; 31:31–32; Psalms 37:21; 72:1–2; Proverbs 14:34; and Malachi 3:18.) *Tamim*, “perfect,” is most often translated as “without blemish,” but it is also translated as “whole,” “sound,” and “upright.” One translator (Nehama Leibowitz) translates the word as “whole-hearted.” Its root meaning is “whole,” as is the root meaning of our word *integrity*. We could say that to be *tamim* is to have integrity.

In Genesis, the Hebrew word corresponding to *generation* in this verse means “the circle of a person’s life, from birth to death.”

Some take the declaration that Noah was perfect in his generation to mean that he was righteous his whole life. Some understand it to mean that he had become righteous. Still others take it to mean that he was righteous in comparison to the other inhabitants of the earth. Which do you think is more likely, or do you have an alternative way of understanding this description of Noah? Why?

**Verses 28–30:** In verse 29, does “all flesh” mean “all human beings,” or does it mean “all living things”?

What does it mean to say that the earth was corrupt? That it was filled with violence? Where did that violence begin? What has been the outcome of Cain’s covenant with Satan?

Another translation of the word translated “corrupt” in the corresponding verse of Genesis (Genesis 6:11) is “destroyed.” Does that suggest anything about why the Lord agreed to destroy all flesh from the earth?

Compare Ezekiel 33:11. Does that verse suggest anything about what happened at the time of Noah?

## Genesis 6

**Verse 12:** Notice that Genesis says “all flesh had corrupted *his* way upon the earth,” and Moses says “all flesh had corrupted *its* way upon the earth” (italics added). What do you make of that difference?

**Verses 14–16:** How is the ark a symbol of salvation? (See 1 Peter 3:20–22.)

What does the story of Noah have to teach us today?

**Verse 17:** Notice how this verse is a kind of mirror image of the creation. In the creation, the Lord gave the breath of life to all things. Here he takes it away from them.

**Verse 18:** What covenant does the Lord establish with Noah? Why does he use the word *establish* rather than “make”? This difference isn’t only an artifact of translation. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the Hebrew word used here, like the English word *establish*, means “to cause to stand.” Does that meaning help us understand what it means to make a covenant?

**Verse 22:** Why did the writer include this verse? Why does it end by repeating “so did he”?

## Genesis 7

**Verses 1–5:** Though not a word-for-word repetition, these verses closely repeat what was said in Genesis 6:17–22. Notice that verses 7–9 repeat the information again. Why these repetitions?

**Verses 20–23:** Eden was a well-watered place (Genesis 2:10–14; Moses 3:10–14), and the creation as described in Genesis 1 and Moses 2 begins with water. Water is central to both the creation and the destruction of the earth. So what?

## Genesis 8

**Verse 1:** How was Noah like Adam? (Does Genesis 9:1 compare the two? Compare that verse to Genesis 1:28).

What does it mean to be remembered by God? The Hebrew word translated “remembered” in this verse can be used to refer to recollection (e.g., Psalm 137:1) as well as to meditation on something (e.g., Job 21:6–7). When used in reference to people, it often implies action, as in Numbers 15:40 and Ezekiel 6:9. Do those meanings help answer this question?

**Verse 4:** The ark “rested.” Is it a coincidence that Noah’s name means “rest”?

Is it significant that the ark came to rest on the seventh month? On the seventeenth day? If not, why are we told the day and the month?

It has been exactly five months since the flood began (Genesis 7:11). Is that relevant to understanding this story?

**Verse 5:** Three events are dated in this story: the rains begin (Genesis 7:11), the ark comes to rest (Genesis 8:2), and the tops of the mountains appear (Genesis 8:5). Is it a coincidence that the dry land appeared on the third day of creation (Genesis 1:9)?

**Verses 7–14:** Why do you think Moses spends so much time telling us about Noah waiting for the waters to abate?

Notice the pun on Noah’s name that occurs in this verse: the dove found no rest (*noah*) for her foot, so she went

back to Noah. Why are biblical writers so fond of puns and wordplay?

Umberto Cassuto argues that the date given in verse 13 for when Noah exited the ark tells us that, from the first rains until Noah stepped out on dry land, the flood lasted exactly 365 days, one year.<sup>1</sup> Is that relevant to our understanding of the story?

**Verses 17–19:** Notice the similarity between this and the creation story. What is the point of that similarity?

**Verses 20–22:** What does it mean to say “the Lord smelled a sweet savour”? The Hebrew word translated “sweet” in the King James Version could also be translated “soothing” or “restful.” It may be another pun on Noah’s name.

Does this verse show us the Lord changing his mind? If not, what is he doing?

Why does verse 21 tell us that the Lord said what he said “in his heart”?

The Lord told Adam that the ground was cursed for his sake (Genesis 3:17; Moses 4:23). What does it mean when he says, “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake”? What is he telling us that he will not do? Does it mean that the Adamic curse of the earth was lifted? If so, does this mean that the earth is allowed to rest, an answer to Enoch’s prayer?

How does the fact that man’s heart is evil from his youth explain that the Lord won’t curse the earth anymore (verse 21)?

## Genesis 9

*Verses 1–7:* Why does the Lord twice repeat the original commandment to “be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth” (verses 1 and 7)?

The Lord commanded Adam to subdue the earth. Why doesn't he repeat that commandment here?

Why was eating meat first not allowed (Genesis 1:29) and now allowed (9:2–4)? Does that have anything to do with the dominion that Adam was given?

Does comparing this to other commandments we have been given and that were then retracted (such as the law of consecration) help explain what may have happened?

Why is Noah forbidden to eat blood (verse 4)? What does blood symbolize, and when we refrain from eating blood, what might we remember?

What does it mean to say “your blood of your lives will I require” (verse 5)? Does what follows in verse 5 explain that phrase?

Does the concluding clause of verse 6 explain why we shouldn't kill another (because the other person is made in the image of God), or does it explain why the judge has the right to impose the death penalty (because he is made in the image of God and so has the power to deal out divine punishment)?

In Genesis 1 only the fish were told to “bring forth abundantly,” or “swarm.” Now human beings are also told to do



so (9:7). Why might that be added to the commandment to be fruitful and multiply?

**Verses 8–17:** Why was this covenant necessary? What purpose does it serve?

Why is the rainbow a particularly appropriate token of the Lord’s covenant never to destroy the earth by water again?

Is the fact that the rainbow has the shape of a bow significant?

What light does Isaiah 54:9 shed on the covenant and the meaning of the rainbow? What does it mean to us?

**Verses 18–23:** What is the import of “and Noah began to be an husbandman” (verse 20)? Is there a parallel here with Adam? Had he not been a husbandman (i.e., a farmer) before?

An alternative translation of “Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard” is “Noah, master of the earth, was the first to plant a vineyard”<sup>2</sup> or “Noah, the man of the land, was the first to plant a vineyard.”<sup>3</sup> As a thought experiment, suppose those translations are better. How might they change our understanding of what is being said here?

Verse 21 gives us the grounds for everything that follows, but the writer says no more than absolutely necessary about what happened. Notice that the same is true of verse 22. Why do you think that the writer may have been so terse in these verses?

Some have speculated that Ham’s sin was of an incestuous homosexual nature, but there is no textual evidence for such a claim.

What *is* the sin of Ham? Notice the difference between the amount of language used in verse 23 and that used in verses 21–22. What might the point of such comparatively expansive language be? Why, for example, do you think “their father’s nakedness” is repeated twice?

**Verses 24–25:** Perhaps the most difficult question in these verses is, “Why does Noah curse Canaan, the son of Ham, rather than Ham?” (verse 25). But what if the name Canaan doesn’t refer to Ham’s son? When the sons’ names were mentioned previously, they were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Here they seem to be Shem, Canaan, and Japheth. What are we to make of that difference?

In verse 25 the curse is that Canaan will be “a servant of servants.” In contemporary English, the Hebrew word translated “servant” would be translated “slave.” Does this mean that he will be the slave of other slaves? Or is the phrase suggesting that he will be the lowliest of slaves?

For quite some time in European history, this story was used to justify slavery. African blacks were assumed to be descended from Ham, and his curse was assumed to apply to his posterity as well as him. Suppose you were to be transported back to the mid-seventeenth century, or even the early twentieth century, when the argument continued to be used to justify racial segregation. What would you say to a person making that argument?

**Verses 26–27:** How might this verse change our understanding of what has just happened? Noah blesses the name of God, “the God of Shem,” and repeats that Ham will be “his” servant. To whom does *his* refer? To God or to

Shem? If it refers to Shem, is it significant that his servitude is mentioned in the context of praising God? Does verse 27 help us answer those questions?

## Genesis 11

**Verses 1–9:** How is this similar to what we saw happening with Adam’s descendants before Noah? What does that repetition of events suggest? (Refer back to what the Lord says of human beings in Genesis 8:21.)

Does the decision to give themselves a name (verse 4) suggest anything about their problem? Why do they want to give themselves a name? How do we try to give ourselves a name? What are they trying to avoid, and why are they worried about it?

What does having a common language allow people to do? What does a language barrier help prevent? In other words, what problem is the Lord dealing with in these verses, and why is the confounding of the language a solution to that problem? (Compare Isaiah 2:12–18.)

# Lesson 7

Abraham 1:1–4; 2:1–11; Genesis 12:1–8; 17:1–9

## Abraham 1

**Verse 1:** Why does this work use the name Abraham for the person in question when we know from Genesis that his name was as yet still Abram?

What does it tell us that Abraham says “the residence of my fathers” (plural) rather than “the residence of my father” (singular)?

Why did Abraham think he needed to “find another place of residence”? (Compare Genesis 12:1 as well as Abraham 1:5–12 and 2:1–4.)

What do you make of the dispassionate, deliberate character of Abraham’s language in this verse and, in the later verses, of his account of the Chaldean attempt to sacrifice him? Is that an artifact of translation, perhaps, or does it show us something about Abraham?

**Verse 2:** What does Abraham mean by “the blessings of the fathers”? Verse 4 tells us that the phrase refers to the priesthood. Then why is it plural?

If it does not refer to the priesthood in this verse, to what could it refer?

What would it mean to have the right to administer the blessings of the fathers? Who were the fathers? Are they the same fathers mentioned in verse 1?

Assuming that this verse is about the priesthood, how does possessing the high priesthood make Abraham “one who possessed great knowledge”? Are having the priesthood and possessing great knowledge the same thing for Abraham? How would having this blessing that he desires make him “a greater follower of righteousness”? What do you make of the double repetition in this clause: “Having been myself a *follower of righteousness*, desiring also to be one who possessed *great knowledge*, and to be a *greater follower of righteousness*, and to possess a *greater knowledge*” (italics added)?

How would Abraham have thought that having great knowledge would be relevant to him becoming the father of many nations?

Did he receive that blessing (Genesis 12:2) when he received the priesthood?

Does he intend the phrase “follower of righteousness” to mean the same as “follower of God”?

Are “father of many nations” and “prince of peace” intended to be two ways of saying the same thing? If so, how does that work? If not, why are they in parallel here?

What about “desiring to receive instructions” and “desiring . . . to keep the commandments of God”? Do they mean the same?

In the ancient Near East, gods were associated with a particular place: the gods of Assyria, the gods of Egypt, and so

on. How was Abraham's understanding of God different? How was it important to his time? Is there anything comparable to the local gods in our own understanding?

**Verse 3:** What does this history of the priesthood that Abraham has received tell us?

What do these verses tell us about the priesthood? Why is that important to our understanding?

The first word in the verse, *it*, refers to "the right of the firstborn." What does that tell us about the priesthood that Abraham is talking about?

Why does Abraham qualify "the firstborn" with "the first man, who is Adam, or first father"? Is Adam the only firstborn that Abraham is talking about? Are all firstborn a figure of Adam?

**Verse 4:** The first part of the verse is straightforward: "I sought for mine appointment to the Priesthood." But what does *Priesthood* mean when it is qualified by "according to the appointment of God"? Or does that phrase modify instead "I sought for"?

What does it mean to say that the appointment of God was "unto the fathers concerning the seed"? Does that phrase help us know how we should understand the word *appointment*?

**Verse 19** (my addition to the reading for this lesson):

What does the Lord mean when he tells Abraham, "As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee"?

Why is the next sentence in the verse written as a contrast with the first: "*but* through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever"?

## Abraham 2

**Verses 1–2:** Does the account here agree with Genesis 11:31–32? If so, how? If not, how do you explain that difference? Do we understand things differently in each case?

**Verses 3–5:** The order in which the Lord tells Abraham to leave is slightly odd: first country, then kindred, then father’s house. That is the opposite of the actual order in which a person would leave: first he would leave his father’s house, then he would leave his larger family, then he would leave his country. Do you think that reversal of what we might expect the order to have been is significant?

Why do you think Abraham felt it necessary to include the kinds of details we see in these verses in his record? What have they to do with us?

**Verse 6:** How do you think we should understand the word *minister* here?

What does it mean to give something as “an everlasting possession” to someone “when they hearken to my voice”? Doesn’t that qualifying phrase mean that the possession isn’t eternal or everlasting, that it can be lost?

**Verses 7–8:** In verse 7, are the particular actions named by the Lord important? If so, for what reasons?

Why is it important that Abraham knows that the Lord knows the end from the beginning (verse 8)?

Are the end and beginning of which he speaks temporal or spatial?

Why does the Lord use that wording, “the end from the beginning”?

How does the word *from* function in this sentence? For example, does it indicate a difference, like knowing chocolate from vanilla ice cream? Does it entail temporality: the Lord knows how things will end from the very beginning? What other ways of understanding *from* are there?

What does the imagery of the phrase “my hand shall be over thee” suggest?

**Verse 9:** How will the Lord make Abraham into a great nation? Why is that a great blessing to him?

The Lord says, “Thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations.” Does this mean “You will be a blessing to your seed *so that* they can take the ministry and priesthood to everyone,” or does it mean “You will be a blessing to your seed *in that* they will take the ministry and priesthood to everyone”? In other words, explain how Abraham is a blessing to his posterity and what that has to do with them preaching the gospel.

**Verses 10–11:** What does it mean to say that the Lord will bless Abraham *through* Abraham’s name?

Who are Abraham’s children?

Who will bless Abraham?

In what sense is Abraham our father? How and when do we recognize that?



Why does verse 11 say that both Abraham and his seed are his priesthood? What is Abraham's priesthood?

Do John 8:39 or Romans 9:7–8 add to our understanding of this promise?

## Genesis 12

**Verse 1:** It is often assumed that the word *Hebrew* comes from the root *ivri* meaning “someone from the other side.” The most straightforward way to understand that name is that it designates someone who comes from Mesopotamia, on the other side of the river. However, are there other ways to understand that Abraham and those who descend from him are from “the other side”?

Gordon Wenham says this about the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph:

Genealogically, the narratives are connected by Abraham's being father of Isaac, Jacob's being Isaac's son, and Joseph's being Isaac's grandson. But there are many parallels between the plots of each group of stories, and these tend to highlight the similarities between the careers of the leading patriarchs and, more loosely, with the subsequent history of Israel, for example:

1. All these heroes leave their home-land (12:1; 28:2; 37:28)
2. All quarrel with their brothers (13:7; 27:41; 37:4)

3. Three go down to Egypt, one to Gerar, i.e., toward Egypt (12:10; 26:1; 37:28; 46:6)
4. Two patriarchal wives are seduced or nearly so; an Egyptian wife attempts to seduce Joseph (12:14–16; 20:1–14; 26:1; 39:6–18)
5. Their wives are barren and quarrel (in Abraham's and Jacob's cases) (16:1–6; 29:31–30:8)
6. The younger sons are divinely favored (also Joseph's sons) (17:18–19; 25:23; 48:14; 49:8–12, 22–26)
7. Brides met at well (24:15; 29:9)
8. Promises of children, land, divine blessing (e.g., 12:1–3, 26:2–5; 28:13–14)
9. Gentiles acknowledge God's blessing on the patriarchs (21:21–22; 26:28–29; 41:39–40)
10. Buried in cave of Machpelah (23:1–20; 25:9; 35:27–29; 49:29–32)

These parallels between the patriarchs seem to be rather more than coincidence. Obviously, in a family where traditions run strong, it is not surprising that everyone is buried in the same ancestral grave. But the stories do seem to lay special emphasis on this point, and a whole chapter of the Abraham cycle is devoted to recording the purchase of the family tomb. Other features, though, like the seduction of the patriarchs' wives and Joseph's experience, meeting one's bride at a well, or the acknowledgment of divine blessing by foreigners, can hardly be put down to family tradition.

These parallels are being consciously drawn and even accentuated so that the analogy with the experiences of different generations can be observed. Therefore the stories should not be interpreted in isolation. They were written to shed mutual light on each other, and if we are to recapture and appreciate the original writer's motives and intentions, each cycle of stories must be read in the light of the others and each episode ought to be compared with other similar episodes. The slight differences from one version to another help to enhance the portrait of the actors. For example, while Jacob and, later, Moses both personally encounter their future brides at the well and then negotiate terms of marriage with their fathers-in-law, Isaac stays at home. Abraham's servant meets Rebekah, negotiates with Laban, and brings her to Isaac. This suggests that Isaac is a rather retiring, unforceful person, an impression that is confirmed later in his dealings with the Philistines and in his manipulation by Rebekah and Jacob.

If these parallels among the narratives give them depth and interest, they also illustrate the theological principle of typology. There is already in the parallels between Cain's and Adam's sin in Gen. 3 and 4 a rudimentary typology. We see men acting in similar fashion in similar situations. But typology is not merely a result of human nature's unchanging weaknesses; it also reflects the constancy of God's character. God always punishes sin and always keeps his promises, so it is not surprising that the accounts of his dealings with one generation resemble in some degree those of the next.

And man's propensity to disobedience only makes it more likely that history will repeat itself to some extent.

Yet we must not exaggerate the similarities among the cycle: there is a real development from one story to the next in the tightness of the plot, the depth of characterization, and in theological sophistication.

The differences between the primeval history and the patriarchal stories are most marked.<sup>1</sup>

Does what Wenham says about the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph show us a way to think about the Old Testament differently than we are accustomed to? Is that something we can use to help us understand?

**Verses 2–3:** What does it mean to say that Abram will not only be blessed, but will “*be* a blessing” to others? Why is that part of the covenant?

Do those who inherit Abram's blessing inherit the obligation to be a blessing? If so, what does that mean to us?

Is verse 3 a repetition of the meaning of verse 2, or does it say something new? If it is a repetition of verse 2, why does the Lord bother with that repetition?

Notice that the revelation of verse 1 placed Abram outside, putting a barrier between him and all those to whom he had been related. (Is this a repetition of the “expulsion from the garden” theme? If so, why does scripture repeat that theme?) In these verses, however, Abram becomes universal, a blessing to all. The movement is from particularism in verse 1 to universalism in verse 3. What do you make of that? What does it mean to us? Does it perhaps help us

understand our individual relation to the Church or the world and the relation of the Church to the world?

**Verses 4–5:** What does “all their substance that they had gathered” (verse 5) imply? What does “all . . . the souls that they had gotten in Haran” imply?

In this verse, the wording suggests that Lot and his family are part of Abram’s family: “Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son.” However, the wording of Genesis 13:1 ignores that relationship: “Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him.” If something has changed, what is it?

**Verses 6–8:** If you can, locate on a Bible map where Abram settled. What does that say to us about Abram’s relationship to his homeland? To the promised land?

What is the significance of Abram building an altar? Is there anything comparable in our lives? If so, what? If not, why not? Where are our altars to the Lord that express our gratitude for his blessings to us and from which we make our petitions to him?

## Genesis 17

**Verse 1:** The Lord calls himself El-Shaddai, the Almighty God. Later he tells Moses that this was the name by which he was known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but he was not known to them as the Lord, Yahweh (Exodus 6:3). Why do you think he used the name “Almighty God” in his relations with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but later used the name Yahweh, “the Lord”?

When the Lord commands Abram to be perfect, what is he commanding him to do? The Hebrew word translated “perfect” is the same word we saw used to describe Noah (Moses 8:27; Genesis 6:9): *tamim*, meaning “complete” or “whole.” How is this like or unlike the commandment that the Savior gave in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:48—the Greek word there is *teleios*, “having attained its purpose or end”)?

How is what the Lord commands here like or unlike the commandment with which the Lord begins the Mosaic law: “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2)?

Do these scriptures help us understand what the Lord is commanding when he commands us to be perfect? What kinds of misunderstandings might we have of that commandment? Do the scriptures undo those misunderstandings?

**Verse 2:** What is a covenant? We often compare it to a contract, but how does it differ from a contract? In the ancient Near East, society was created and maintained by covenants rather than by laws. (There were laws, such as Hammurabi’s Code, in some societies, but those societies were the exception rather than the rule.) Looking at those ancient covenants between peoples and nations can help us understand better what a covenant was in that world, and it may help us better understand what a covenant is for us. In those ancient covenants we see several things:

1. They usually occur in response to some important historical event, such as a battle.

2. The parties making the covenant are not usually equals.
3. In some sense, the covenant creates an exclusive relationship.
4. They involve appeals to God.
5. They describe the norms for expected future behavior.
6. A ritual act of some kind, often a sacrifice or the eating of a sacrificed animal, is part of ratifying the covenant.

How does the covenant that the Lord makes here with Abraham fit that model?

We see the Lord covenant with Abraham at least three times, in Genesis 12 (Abraham 1), Genesis 15, and here. Are these three different covenants or a repetition of the same covenant? How do you decide the answer to that question?

**Verse 3:** Why did Abraham fall on his face? What does that act imply?

**Verses 4–9:** Why might the Lord have changed Abram’s name to Abraham (verse 5)? Abram means “exalted or lofty father.” Given Hebrew naming conventions, most scholars believe that means “the Father is exalted” rather than “Abram is an exalted father.” Though the name Abraham sounds very much like Abram, it has a different meaning. It means “father of many.”

In your own words, what does verse 7 promise Abraham? What does the promise of verse 8 mean today?

# Lesson 8

Genesis 13–14; 18–19

## Genesis 13

**Verses 1–2:** Are there elements in Abram’s journey to Canaan that typify Israel’s later exodus from Egypt? If there are, what would be the point of that parallel?

**Verse 1:** Notice the difference in the way the families are described in Genesis 12:5 and here. Does anything in these verses suggest a change in the family situation? If yes, of what sort?

Journeys from Egypt to Canaan are said to be “up,” and journeys from Canaan to Egypt are said to be “down.” We might use the same metaphors because of the way we have constructed the map of the world, with Canaan to the north of Egypt, but that similarity is misleading since they didn’t have maps or use the points of the compass as we do. So why might ancient people have used that language of up and down?

**Verse 2:** What is the point of this detail? Does the comment about their wealth in verse 6 explain it, or is it here for some other reason?

The word used for *rich* in Hebrew means “heavy.” It is used to describe Abram’s wealth and also the famine (Genesis 12:1). Any wealth that a nomad had beyond his flocks would have



to be carried by camel, and it would be a heavy for them, so the word makes sense.

Was Abram's wealth a burden to him in any other sense? How is wealth a burden today?

**Verses 3–4:** Why does Abram go back to the place where he had built an altar? (See Genesis 12:7.)

**Verses 5–7:** What is happening to Abram's family here? He has already been blessed that he will be a great nation (Genesis 12:2). What would Abram think about that blessing at this point? Might there be anything deeper to this strife than an argument over pasturage?

Does Genesis 18:19 suggest something about the difference between Lot and Abram?

Why is the story of Abram's blessings interrupted by this story of strife? Not every detail of Abram's life is included, so when a detail *is* included, we must assume that there is a reason for including it. We must also give the writer some credit for placing details where he does. So why does Moses mention Abram's wealth and this strife, and why here?

**Verse 6:** What reason does this verse give for the land being unable to bear them? What does that mean? (What was the main way in which wealth was held?)

**Verse 7:** Why is it important that we know that the Canaanites and the Perizzites (a tribe usually grouped with the Canaanites) dwelt there? Why does the writer think it is important to include that editorial note?

**Verses 8–13:** Abram says, “Let there be no strife [i.e., quarreling], I pray thee, between me and thee.” The immediate reference is to what has just happened between their herdsmen: “Let’s not continue that.” Does this warning also point forward to anything?

The King James translation hides something interesting in the text. In Hebrew, at the end of verse 8 Abram says “for we be men and brothers.” The KJV elides that into merely “brethren,” which is a legitimate translation. However, what might the original text mean by “men and brothers.” What point is Abram making?

If Abram has been given all of the land, why is he willing to be so generous in giving it up (verse 9)? Should his generosity be a model for the behavior of his descendants?

Verses 11–12 show Lot choosing to live on the edge of Canaan, if not even beyond it. (Compare Genesis 10:19.) What is the significance of his choice? Is he turning his back on the Abrahamic blessing? Does separation from Abram mean, for Lot, separation from Abram’s blessing? If not, how does Lot continue to be part of that blessing?

In verse 13 we see a rhetorical form that the Bible uses often. It is called *hendiadys*, which means “two for one.” The people of Sodom are described as “wicked and sinners.” That is a way of saying “wicked sinners.”

Did Lot know what kind of men lived in the land he had chosen? Why did he choose that land?

What was the sin of Sodom? See Ezekiel 16:48–50 for one important explanation. Do we see anything in chapter 14 that suggests the same explanation?

**Verses 14–18:** Why did the Lord repeat his blessing to Abram (verses 14–16)?

Compare the wording of verse 15 with the wording of the same blessing in Genesis 12:7. Why is this wording much fuller? What do we learn from this wording that we didn't learn earlier?

Verse 19 ends the chapter as it began, with Abram settling down. Why do you think the story of this chapter is framed in this way?

## Genesis 14

**Verses 1–12:** Why have Arioch, Chedorlaomer, Amraphel, and Tidal invaded the Jordan valley?

The kings of Sodom and Gommorah have striking names, for they are made of words that, in Hebrew, mean “evil” and “wicked.” How would you explain that?

**Verses 11–12:** Why is verse 11 important to what we will later learn about Sodom and Gomorrah?

Why did the kings take Lot captive?

**Verses 13–16:** This is the first occurrence of the word *Hebrew* in the Bible. One reasonable assumption of the meaning of the word is that it means “someone from the other side.” (See the discussion of Genesis 12:1 in the materials for lesson 7.) Another is that it refers to the Habiru, a gen-

eral term for outsiders (foreign slaves, mercenaries, and especially marauders). What might these meanings for that word tell us about how Abram was perceived in Canaan?

“They were confederate with Abram” might better be translated “They had made a covenant with Abram.” Does that change our understanding of what we are seeing in these verses?

What kind of covenant would Abram and the Amorites have entered into (verse 13)?

What does verse 14 mean when it refers to *trained* servants? What was the point of this story for those hearing it in ancient Israel? What might its point be for us?

**Verses 17–21:** Notice the irony in Abram being greeted by the king of Sodom, on the one hand, and the king of Salem, Melchizedek, on the other (verses 17–18). Might there be a spiritual meaning in that irony?

These verses seem to be rhetorically structured as a chiasm:

- A The king of Sodom meets Abram
- B The king of Salem meets Abram (offering bread and wine)
- B’ The king of Salem offers Abram a blessing
- A’ The king of Sodom offers Abram a deal

Is that structure anything more than a good story telling technique? Notice that the structure is followed by Abram’s reply: he refuses to take his share of the booty. What do you make of the fact that the story presents this

as *one* episode: the king of Sodom and the king of Salem come to meet Abraham at the same time? Is the writer suggesting a comparison of the two? If so, what are we to make of that comparison?

The name Melchizedek is composed of two words, *melek* and *tsaddiq*. The second of these means “righteous.” (See the notes for lesson 6 for more about *tsaddiq*.) The first of these words is a general term for a ruler, from the king on down. So the name Melchizedek probably means “my king is righteous.” (The names Adonizedek in Joshua 10:1 and Zadok, David’s high priest [e.g., 2 Samuel 15:24–29] are related names.)

Genesis is filled with genealogies showing the connections of the prophets. Why is there nothing in those genealogies about Melchizedek? (In the Bible, he appears only here, in Psalm 110:4 and in Hebrews.)

Compare the additional material given in Joseph Smith’s revision of Genesis 14:17–40 and Hebrews 7:1–3 and found in Alma 13:14–19 and D&C 84:14; 107:1–4.) Assuming that at this point Joseph’s inspired revision gives us information that was originally in the Bible (rather than material he was inspired to give us), why might someone have removed this information?

Melchizedek offers Abram bread and wine. Is this symbolic, or is it merely an offering of a meal to a hungry returning army? What had the King of Sodom offered? So what?

In verse 19, many translators translate Abram’s blessing as “maker of heaven and earth” rather than “possessor of heaven and earth,” as the King James Version has it. What

might that alternative translation suggest? How could Abraham reasonably be called a maker of heaven and earth?

**Verses 21–24:** According to ancient custom, the victor had full rights to the spoils of war. Why would Abram have pledged to take nothing, in other words, none of the spoils of war? After all, Abram was the commander in chief of the winning army.

What does verse 21 show us about the king of Sodom?

How does Abram’s behavior toward the king of Sodom contrast with his behavior toward Melchizedek? What is the difference, and why does he behave differently?

How does Abram’s attitude contrast with that of the king of Sodom? What does that difference portend?

In verse 22, the phrase “I have lift up mine hand” means “I have solemnly sworn.” So what?

The Hebrew word translated “made rich” in verse 23 has a root that is almost identical to that of the word translated “tithed” in verse 20. What does that connection do in this story?

## Genesis 15

Chapter 15 isn’t part of the assignment, but it is used by Paul as an important linchpin in his argument in the early part of Romans, and many Protestants today use it when they talk about their understanding of salvation by grace. Because Genesis 15:6 is a verse that Latter-day Saints are likely to be asked to think or talk about, I’m including some notes and questions about it.

**Verse 6:** The word translated “believed” translates the Hebrew word *aman*, “to be firm or certain,” “to be stable,” “to trust,” “to believe.” (It is the root of our word *amen*.) The word *counted* translates a Hebrew word that means “reckoned” (see Psalm 106:31 and Numbers 18:27, 30). The word *righteousness* translates the Hebrew word *tsedaqa*, a variation of *tsaddiq*: righteousness, lawfulness, justice. (See the notes for Genesis 14:17–21 and for lesson 6 for more about *tsaddiq*.)

Given those word meanings, we can understand this verse to say “Abram believed/trusted the Lord [or believed/trusted *in* the Lord, as in the KJV], and the Lord credited or reckoned that belief/trust to Abram as if Abram were a righteous person, i.e., one who obeys the law.”

In this context, what is the best way to understand what *believed* means here?

In thinking about this verse, much depends on whether we understand the verb phrase to mean “believed the Lord” or “believed *in* the Lord,” and there’s nothing in the Hebrew to dictate either over the other—though if we substitute *trusted* for *believed*, a reasonable substitution, there is little difference in meaning. Looking at the verse in context—and trying to set aside your personal theological convictions for the moment—which do you think makes the most sense and why?

Is it relevant that the writer is either Moses or a later writer writing from a Mosaic perspective? What difference might that make to how we understand the word *righteous* in this verse?

What is your best explanation of this verse? Once you have thought about that, read Romans 3:10–4:22. If you have difficulty with the language of Romans, try reading it in a more contemporary translation, perhaps the New American Bible.

How does Paul understand the verse? Is Paul using the verse out of context to make his point (“proof-texting”), or is he true to what we read in Genesis?

Finally, what kind of theological answer might you give to someone who says that this teaches something that Mormons don’t believe, namely, salvation by grace alone without the necessity of works? Can you give a satisfactory answer that also takes careful account of the Genesis text?

## Genesis 18

Note: There is perhaps no better illustration than the story of this chapter of what narrative and other genres of scripture can do that theological reflection cannot. If we read the story of this chapter theologically—by stepping back from it and asking quasi-philosophical questions about it, by focusing exclusively on the principles that we assume it teaches and thinking about how those relate to each other—then we will almost certainly miss a great deal of what the story offers and, presumably, what Moses intended to give us by telling this in the way that he does. As you read this story, pay particular attention to it as a story about Abraham and Sarah and the Lord. Trying to understand it as a story before trying to theologize about it will provide rewards.



**Verses 1–2:** The story begins in the third-person plural (verse 2). Then it shifts to the third-person singular (verse 9) before it moves to the first person (verse 13). Why do you think the writer does that?

Though verse 1 tells us who is visiting Abraham, he appears not to know that these are divine beings until verse 14, when the Lord identifies himself. How would that suspension of identification affect our reading of the story if we were reading it for the first time?

Some have pointed out that this begins without explicitly naming Abraham: “*he* sat in his tent” rather than “Abraham sat in his tent.” They suggest that this shows that what follows is part of a series of stories (including the immediately previous chapter) that are to be understood together. So what?

Why does the writer tell us where Abraham was sitting and what time of day it was?

Why would Abraham have gone to his tent during the heat of the day?

Why does Abraham jump up and run to greet these visitors? Does he know what kind of visitors they are? It isn’t uncommon for people to run to greet others or to bow down to those in power. (See Genesis 29:13; 42:6.) However, these visitors are not yet known to Abraham to be either, so why does he bow down in this way?

**Verses 3–5:** As does Abraham’s initial greeting, what he says to the visitors can be understood on two levels, either as a greeting to three human visitors or as a greeting to the Lord.

Why does he use the singular when he addresses his visitors, rather than the plural?

Notice that Abraham underplays the thirst of his visitors: “I won’t fetch a lot of water, just a little, just enough to slake your thirst,” as it were. He also underplays the feast he is going to prepare: “a morsel of bread” (probably like a piece of pita bread). Why does he do that?

**Verses 6–8:** Is it significant that Abraham runs to fetch the calf rather than having a servant do it?

“Three seahs of meal” seems to be about 8 liters. Why so much bread for three guests?

Since it mixes meat and dairy (verse 8), this is not a kosher meal. Abraham does not live under the Mosaic law. According to *Word Biblical Commentary*,<sup>1</sup> the phrase translated “fine meal” appears elsewhere in the five books of Moses only in reference to temple offerings of various kinds. Do you think that this is a conscious choice on the writer’s part? If so, what is the point he is making by that choice?

**Verses 9–15:** Why does the visitor ask, “Where is Sarah thy wife?” Any visitor would have known who was in charge of preparing the meal and what that implied about where she was. And certainly the Lord would know where she was. So why ask? (Compare the Lord’s questions in Genesis 3:9; 4:9 and Moses 4:15; 5:34.) Why is it important for us to know that the tent door was behind the speaker? Who makes the promise of verse 10? How do you know? Did Abraham? Compare and contrast this version of the promise to that in Genesis 17:15–21. What do you learn from that comparison? How many different explanations can you give

for Sarah's laughter? Which do you think most reasonable? Why? How does Sarah's laughter here compare to Abraham's in Genesis 17:17? Are they doing the same thing or something different? In verses 14–15, is the Lord speaking to Abraham or to Sarah? In verse 15, what is Sarah afraid of? Compare the Lord's reproof of Sarah here with his reproof of Abraham in Genesis 17:19–22. How are they alike? How different? What might explain any differences?

Notice that the chapter begins with only Abraham. However, after the Lord asks, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" she begins to figure more prominently in the story. Skipping over the Sodom and Gomorrah story of chapter 19, we see that Sarah becomes an integral part of the story in chapters 20–21. What does that suggest?

**Verses 16–22:** Now we learn to where the three visitors were traveling when Abraham stopped them. We will continue to see him trying to stop them in this part of the story as two of them continue on their journey, but Abraham stands "yet before the Lord" (Genesis 18:22). To whom is the question of verses 17–18 addressed?

Can you put those verses in your own words? What point is the Lord making?

What does the Lord mean when he says that he knows Abraham?

The word translated "know" here is the same word translated "know" in Genesis 4:1. (It is also the same word used in verses like Amos 3:2, Exodus 33:17, Deuteronomy 34:10, and 2 Samuel 7:20.) Does that tell us anything about what

the Lord is saying? Does it suggest anything about how we should understand God's knowledge?

How does the description of Abraham's blessing in verse 18 differ from previous descriptions? So what?

How does verse 19 explain why the Lord is going to explain to Abraham what he will do? In other words, how is the fact that he will teach his children to be righteous relevant to the Lord's decision not to hide from Abraham what is going to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah?

Some Christians today, though not as many as we often believe, teach that the Lord's promise of blessing is unconditional, but it appears that we see exactly the opposite throughout the Old Testament. In verse 19, for example, we see that Abraham will teach his children to obey *so that* the Lord will give Abraham that which he has promised. Is this a difference between the Old and New Testament understandings of our relation to God? Or is there a better explanation?

This question, a question about grace, is not one in which those on the side we usually associate with other Christians say, "We don't have to keep the commandments" and we say, "Yes, you do." All who receive the promise must keep the commandments, and few Christians believe otherwise. The question is about the connection between the promise and obedience: do we receive the blessing because we obey, or do we obey because we have received the blessing (and we refuse the blessing if we disobey)? That is what is at issue in many discussions of grace and works.

What does it mean to “keep the way [i.e., the path] of the Lord”? Some have identified this with knowing the Lord. What does it mean to know the Lord? What does Mosiah 4 teach about what it means to know the Lord?

Does what we see in verse 19 perhaps explain what the Lord says about revealing his will to the prophets in Amos 3:7?

What does it mean to say that the children of Abraham “will do justice and judgment”? Why does the Lord describe that as “keeping the way of the Lord”? How do we do justice and judgment?

Compare “I will go down” in verse 21 with Genesis 11:7. What does that verbal connection suggest? Does verse 21 suggest anything about the Lord’s desires for Sodom and Gomorrah?

**Verses 23–33:** What does verse 23 tell us when it begins with “Abraham drew near”? Compare these verses of Genesis 18:

<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Response</i>
23–25	26
27–28a	28b
29a	29b
30a	30b
31a	31b
32a	32b

What is the point of this series? Why is Abraham bargaining with the Lord? Why talk him down from one number to another and then to still another? Why does the Lord

permit him to do this? What does this say about the Lord? About our relation to him? About prayer?

Does doing justice and judgment have anything to do with what we see here?

Compare Abraham's initial question, "Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (verse 23), with his final question, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there" (verse 32). How do you account for what seems like a difference in Abraham's confidence?

In the first part of Abraham's prayer (verse 23), he asked that God not destroy the righteous along with the wicked. In the second part (verse 24), he asks that the Lord spare everyone, not just the righteous. Then he goes back to asking that the righteous be spared when the wicked are killed (verse 25). How would you explain these differences?

## Genesis 19

**Verses 1–3:** Compare the beginning of the chapter with the beginning of the last. What does that comparison show?

If hospitality demanded that one offer a stranger a place to sleep, it also demanded that the stranger accept the offer extended. What do you make of the angels' initial refusal to stay with Lot? Was it just a polite refusal ("No thanks, no more chocolate cake for me. I'm full.") that could then be followed by acceptance, or was there something deeper to their refusal?

**Verses 4–11:** Why is it important that we know that “the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round about, both old and young, all the people from every quarter” (verse 4)?

What does Lot’s offer in verse 8 tell us about the ethics of the time? In spite of that, how do verses 6–9 portray Lot?

Those who try to break into Lot’s home refer to him as one who “came in to sojourn,” in other words, as a stranger living among them (verse 9). What is the point of that remark from the point of view of the Sodomites? What does it say about *them* from the writer’s point of view? (Notice the note of slapstick at the end of verse 11: everyone is stumbling around trying to find the door.)

**Verses 12–14:** In particular, what evil have the Sodomites revealed in the previous verses that now calls for the retribution described in these verses? In other words, did the sin of verses 4–11 exemplify the cry that the Lord referred to in Genesis 18:21?

Why do the sons-in-law think that Lot is joking (verse 14)?

**Verses 15–23:** Why is the Lord willing to save Lot and his family? Is it because of Lot’s righteousness? If not, what has this story to do with the bargain that Abraham struck with the Lord in the previous chapter?

What do we learn about Lot in verses 17–22? How does that compare to his bravery in verses 6–9? What kind of a person does Lot emerge as in this story?

Compare Lot’s pleading for Zoar with Abraham’s pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah. What’s the difference?

Compare and contrast this story with the Noah story. How are their messages the same? How different? In fact, compare and contrast several stories of what might be called rescue (though in Lot's case, they thought they were beginning a new world but were not): Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark, Abraham leaving Ur, Abraham and Isaac, and this one. What do you learn from those comparisons?

**Verses 24–26:** There are many possible naturalistic explanations of this story (including, for example, an explanation of humanlike rock formations near the Dead Sea), but what does the writer intend by this story? What does he want us to know above and beyond whatever happened to Lot's wife?

**Verses 27–29:** Compare verses 27–28 to Genesis 18:16. The beginning and the end are marked by the use of similar scenes. The story ended in verses 27–28. Now we have, in verse 29, an “and thus we see” passage. What is it that we are most supposed to remember about this story? How does that contrast with our usual discussions of the story? What might that tell us about our relation to scripture?

**Verses 30–38:** Obviously we find the story in these verses distasteful, though it is hard not to compare this story to that of Moses and Ham. How are the stories the same? How different?

Why is this story included in scripture? What are we to learn from it? Is it teaching a moral or something else?

Given the names that the daughters gave their sons, were they ashamed of what they had done? Why not?



Is it legitimate to compare this story to that of Tamar, who was forced to conceive a child by her father-in-law, Judah, because he would not fulfill the Levirate law and provide her a husband from among his sons? Does their (mistaken) understanding of the situation make us think differently about this event than we would otherwise? What does that mistake tell us?

## Lesson 9

Abraham 1; Genesis 15–17; 21–22

Because there is so much material to cover, I'm going to abbreviate some of what I do in the notes for this lesson. I'll deal with Genesis 15–17 and 21 relatively briefly and then concentrate on Genesis 22. There is a great deal of material in what I don't cover that could be dealt with profitably. In fact, it would be worth studying that material to see what we learn from the chapters that we usually skip over lightly. Nevertheless, chapter 22 is so important to Christian understanding that I will focus on it. As you can well imagine, the scholarly literature on Genesis 22 is enormous, thousands and thousands of pages. I don't pretend even to have dipped into that literature. At the most I've wet the tip of my finger, so I cannot pretend to do justice to the chapters that I'll cover, much less all of the chapters assigned for this lesson.

### Genesis 15

The victories of chapter 14 are not what Abram wants. When the Lord promises to be his shield and to reward him (presumably in battle), Abram responds that no reward can compensate for the fact that he has no heir.

**Verse 6:** As I mentioned in the notes on lesson 8, this verse is important as a proof text in Romans and, therefore, also

for many Christians: Abram's faith or reliance on the Lord/trust in the Lord was reckoned to him as obedience to the law/righteousness/moral conduct—and he exhibited that faith before God covenanted with him.

As we see in Ezekiel 18:5, righteousness is a matter of doing what is right. As we see in Deuteronomy 25:1, a righteous person is one who should be acquitted. We see the same concept used in speaking of the judgment of God in Psalms 1:6 and 75:11. So we could read this verse in this way: "He believed in the Lord; and the Lord counted that belief as making him one who should be acquitted." How would you explain this verse—and Paul's explication of it (Romans 3:10–4:22)—in LDS terms?

**Verse 18:** The Hebrew for *made* in this verse is literally "cut": "The Lord cut a covenant with Abram." (See also places such as Genesis 21:32 where the same word is used and translated "made.") Why do you think that *cut* is the word used for making a covenant even before the rite of circumcision is introduced as the mark of God's covenant?

What is the connection between cutting and Abram's sacrifice in this chapter, and why is cutting central to covenant making?

Is there any sense in which it makes sense to say that *we* too cut covenant with God?

When two people covenanted with each other in ancient Near Eastern custom, the meaning of their ritual seems to have been "If I don't fulfill the covenant I am making with you, may God cut me as I have cut these animals."<sup>1</sup> But it

cannot mean that here, where the Lord himself makes the covenant. So what does it mean?

What might the significance of the animals that have been laid out mean? What might the pot of fire represent?

## Genesis 16

**Verse 2:** Given the social norms of Abram’s day, how should we understand what the narrator is saying when he says, “And Abram hearkened to [i.e., obeyed] his wife”?

Is it significant that the only other place this phrase occurs in Genesis is in Genesis 3:17? If so, does the usual LDS, positive reading of what happened in the garden suggest a positive reading also of this verse (Genesis 16:3)?

**Verse 9:** The word translated “submit” is from the same root as the word translated “dealt hardly” in verse 6. What is the angel instructing Hagar to do?

**Verse 12:** Do Jeremiah 2:24 and Hosea 8:9 help us understand what this prophecy about Ishmael means?

**Verse 13:** Does this verse suggest that rather than just an angel, Hagar has seen the Lord?

**Verse 14:** *Beer-lahai-roi* means “well of the Living One who sees me.” What is the significance of the name that Hagar gives the well?

**Verse 16:** In verse 2 Sarai says she hopes that she will obtain a child through Hagar. But verse 16 says that Hagar “bare Ishmael to Abram.” Is the writer telling us something by that difference in the way he tells the story?

## Genesis 17

Gordon Wenham notes that after the covenant and the Lord's speech on making covenant in Genesis 17, "divine speeches become rarer and little new content is added to the promises, but the fulfillment of these promises becomes more visible."<sup>2</sup> Do you think that Wenham's observation is accurate? If so, why do you think what he notices is the case?

Might the change in divine speeches with Abraham suggest anything about the fact that there appear to be differences between the number of direct visions that Joseph Smith had and the number that contemporary prophets have?

**Verse 10:** Genesis 9:14–16 tells us that the rainbow was a reminder to the Lord that he would not forget his covenant with Noah. Is circumcision also such a reminder to the Lord, a reminder of his covenant with Abraham and his descendants?

Most societies that practice male circumcision perform that circumcision when boys reach puberty or immediately before marriage. Why do you think that Lord has Israel do circumcision at birth? Are there symbolic reasons as well as reasons such as lessening the memory of pain?

Why will God remain faithful to the covenant (Judges 2:1) even if Abraham's descendants break it?

**Verse 18:** In context, how do you explain Abraham's petition: "O that Ishmael might live before thee!"?

What do you make of the fact that Sarah receives the same blessing as did Abraham?

**Verses 19–21:** There appears to be a chiasmus in these verses:

- A Sarah will bear a son, Isaac (verse 19a)
- B The Lord will establish his covenant with Isaac (verse 19b)
- C Ishmael and his descendants will be blessed (verse 20)
- B' The Lord will establish his covenant with Isaac (verse 21a)
- A' Sarah will bear Isaac at this time next year (21b)

What do you make of that chiasmus? What kinds of things might it help us see?

## Genesis 21

**Verse 1:** What is the point of saying that God *visited* Sarah? Compare 1 Samuel 2:21, but see also Exodus 20:5.

**Verse 3:** Why the redundancy of this verse: “the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him”?

**Verse 6:** Has the nature of Sarah’s laughter changed? (Compare Genesis 17:17 and Genesis 21:6.)

**Verses 8–9:** What do you make of the sudden change of tone between verse 8 and 9? Why do you suppose the narrator makes such an abrupt shift?

Why do you think that from here on Ishmael is never mentioned by name in this story?

**Verses 10–11:** What reason does Sarah give for her demand that Ishmael be expelled? Why do you think she

avoids using either Hagar's or Ishmael's names but refers to Isaac by name?

How does Sarah's description of Ishmael in verse 10 differ from Abraham's in verse 11? So what?

**Verses 12–14:** What does it mean to say that Abraham's posterity will be called—in other words, named—through Isaac? Does this mean that the descendants of Ishmael are not called Abraham's posterity?

Notice that Abraham is concerned not only about Ishmael, as verse 11 might be interpreted if read by itself, but also about Hagar.

**Verses 15–20:** As you read this story, think about its possible parallels to the sacrifice of Isaac in chapter 22: God calls to Hagar; as the child is at the point of death, an angel appears and saves him; Hagar sees a well of water, as Abraham will see the ram in the thicket. Are these genuine parallels? If so, what do you make of them?

Is there anything for *us* in this story of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael?

**Verses 21–22:** Obviously there is a significant break between the story about Hagar and Ishmael and the short story about Abimelech and Phichol. But is there any connection between them? Why would the narrator have put these two stories together this way?

Indeed, the first of the two stories in this chapter is clearly relevant to Abraham's history as the father of Israel, but why is the second included at all? Does it prepare us for the story in Genesis 22 in some way?

**Verse 31:** Beersheba later becomes an important center of Israelite worship, including an early temple. Is this story about Hagar and Ishmael somehow relevant to that?

**Verse 33:** Usually Abraham builds an altar as a monument to God. Why does he plant a tree in this case?

## Genesis 22

**Verse 1:** Chapter 22 begins by explicitly referring back to the events of chapter 21: “after these things.” It seems that Moses wants us to understand chapter 22 in relation to chapter 21. As we have seen, Genesis 21 tells of the birth of Isaac, which had been promised, and of Ishmael and Hagar being cast out. It also tells of the covenant that Abraham made with Abimelech. The first two of these events are clearly background to the sacrifice in chapter 22, but are they any more than that? What insight into the story might they give us into what we read in chapter 22?

The story of this chapter appears to be written in such a way as to remind us of Genesis 12:1: “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.” In this chapter, as in chapter 12, Abraham is commanded to leave his home and his kindred and go to a land that the Lord will show him. What might the writer be doing by making that connection?

The word *Elohim* is used in the first sentence of the verse (with a definite article). (*Elohim* has been named as the divine Agent since Genesis 21:2.) Of what significance is



it that he (presumably the Father), and not Jehovah (the Son), poses this test?

Notice the footnote in the LDS edition of the scriptures. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English, the language of the King James translation, the word *tempt* meant not only “to allure,” as it does today, but also “to test” or “to try.” If this is a test, what is being tested? We often say “Abraham’s faith,” but what do we mean by that? Can you be more specific about what the Lord is finding out about Abraham?

Why would the Lord need to try Abraham? Does Abraham know that this is a test? Consider some other tests in the Old Testament: Exodus 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deuteronomy 8:2, 16; Judges 2:22; 1 Kings 10:1; and Daniel 1:12–14. Does seeing what are considered tests (or “proofs,” “assays”) in those cases help us understand what the Lord means here?

Abraham answers the Lord’s call by saying, “Behold, here I am.” That means, literally, “See me here.” In Arabic, even today a person answers a call with something similar—the equivalent of “Ready”—and that is part of the import of this response. In scriptures we find this phrase commonly used when prophets respond to a call. (For other examples of the phrase, see verse 11 of this chapter, Genesis 27:1, 18; 31:11; 46:2; Exodus 3:4; 1 Samuel 3:4, 5, 6, 8, 16; Isaiah 6:8; and 2 Nephi 16:8. We also see it in Moses 4:1 and Abraham 3:27, in the calling of the Savior and in Satan’s rebellion.)

Compare what happens in verse 1 to 1 Samuel 12:3, where we see the same kind of language in another case, and

Genesis 3:9–10 and Exodus 20:18–21, where we see cases in which people don't respond to a call from the Lord in this way. In scripture, what might be the import of this response? What would it mean for *us* to say to God, "Behold, here I am"?

**Verse 2:** The verb translated "take" could also have been translated "please take." That is rare in a divine command. Why is it part of this command?

Why is Isaac said to be Abraham's only son? What about Ishmael? The Hebrew emphasizes that Isaac is the only son.

There is a traditional Jewish story told of this verse: God said, "Take thy son." Abraham said, "But I have two sons!" God said, "Whom thou lovest," and Abraham said, "But I love them both." God said, "Even Isaac." From the point of view of that story, the writer of Genesis 22 shortened everything by giving us only God's words. What problem is this traditional story designed to solve? Are there other answers to that problem?

Why is the Savior said to be the Father's only son? Aren't we also the children of our Father in Heaven? Does thinking about the question in Abraham's case help us understand the question in the second case?

Why does the Lord add "whom thou lovest"? Is that written for us or for Abraham? If for us, what does it do to help us understand the story? If for Abraham, why does the Lord remind him of his love of Isaac?

Why doesn't the Lord tell Abraham which mountain he is to go to? Why wait to tell him?

We don't know for sure where the "land of Moriah" was. The Temple Mount is named Moriah (see 2 Chronicles 3:1), but it may have been named after the sacrifice rather than before. Perhaps the region of Moriah contained what would become the Temple Mount, but we don't know.

Though the Septuagint (a very early translation of the Old Testament into Greek) calls the land "the high land," the Temple Mount is more a hill than a mountain. Why is it referred to as a mountain?

Some have seen a connection between the word *Moriah* and the word *myrrh*, one of the incenses used in the temple. Whether that conjecture is correct or not, it is clear that Israel closely connected the sacrifice of Isaac with the ancient temple. Why would *they* have done so? What connections might Isaac's sacrifice have to do with the modern temple?

Besides the possible connection between *myrrh* and *Moriah*, some connect the word *Moriah* to the Hebrew word for sight or vision (*mr'h*). (For example, the Vulgate, an early Latin translation, calls Moriah "the land of vision.") Does the sacrifice of Isaac have anything to do with vision? Does the ancient temple? Does the modern temple?

Still others connect *Moriah* to the Hebrew word for teaching. What has that to do with the ancient temple? The modern? It is not uncommon for people to say that they learn a great deal in the temple? What do they mean? About what do they learn?

"Offer him there for a burnt offering": The Hebrew says, literally, "take him up there for (or 'as') a burnt offering."

Though the wording is the wording one would use to tell someone to make a sacrifice, the Hebrew is more ambiguous than the English; it is less obvious in Hebrew that a blood sacrifice is demanded. What do we make of that ambiguity?

How does what the Lord commands here compare to what we see recorded in Judges 11:31–40, 2 Kings 3:27, and 2 Kings 17:17? How would Abraham’s experience as a sacrificial victim (Abraham 1:12) have made him feel about this commandment?

In English, the word *sacrifice* is closely related to the old verb *sacrify*, meaning “to make sacred.” We often think of sacrifice as giving something up, but it isn’t necessarily—except that to recognize something as holy is no longer to claim that it belongs to me. In what sense or senses was Isaac sacrificed?

**Verse 3:** Why does Moses tell us that Abraham rose “early in the morning”?

Why doesn’t he tell us anything at all about how Abraham felt or what he was thinking?

The events in this verse are out of sequence: Abraham arose, he saddled the ass, he took his servants and Isaac with him, he cut some wood, he rose up, they went to Moriah. The expected sequence would have Abraham arise, then cut the wood before saddling up the ass before leaving with the young men and Isaac. Why do you think that Moses has given the events in this order?

Though we see here that Abraham has at least two servants, and earlier scriptures tell us that he has many ser-

vants, Abraham saddles his own ass and cuts the wood for the sacrificial fire himself. Why? Does that tell us anything about Abraham? And why is that an important part of the story of the sacrifice?

Why does Abraham take two servants with him?

**Verse 4:** In this story we see only three gestures, here and in verses 10 and 13, so I assume that when the gestures are mentioned they are important to the story. Why does it say that Abraham “lifted up his eyes”? (Is the name of the mountain relevant?) Abraham was looking at a mountain, but it was a long way off and, if the tradition is correct about it being the Temple Mount, it wasn’t much more than a large hill, so it would not have been the physical geography that made him lift up his eyes. What is the writer telling us?

Is there any significance to the fact that the trip takes three days? If so, what is it? (Compare Genesis 31:22; 40:20; and 42:18.)

Given that the trip took three days, why don’t we see even one detail regarding it? Are there any parallels to this that might be instructive? Does this detail tell us anything about Abraham or about the sacrifice itself?

**Verse 5:** Why does Abraham not want the servants to accompany him?

Is the fact that Moses went up Mount Sinai alone relevant to understanding this story? (See Exodus 19 and 24.)

Though not as explicit in English as in Hebrew, notice that Abraham unwittingly prophesies what will come: “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”

He tells them “*we* will come again to you.” What is the point of this unintentional prophecy? In other words, what is it supposed to tell us, as readers?

The word translated “worship” means literally “to bow low.” This is a much weaker term than “make an offering.” Is Abraham weakening in his resolve? If not, why does he describe what will happen with that term rather than with “make an offering”? In any case, what has bowing low to do with worship? What does bowing symbolize? Are there scriptures that indicate that worship involves what bowing symbolizes? How about Mosiah 4? If Mosiah 4 is an appropriate comparison, how does it help us understand this better? How might this help us understand Mosiah 4 better?

There are at least four ways that a person who didn’t already know the story could understand what Abraham is doing: he could be deceiving them about his real purposes so that they would not interfere with him; he could be understood not to be deceiving anyone, but to not plan to kill Isaac; we could read him as affirming his faith: “I don’t know how this is going to work out, but I know that God will not make me annihilate Isaac, the child through whom God has promised that my blessings will come. So I know that we both will return.”<sup>3</sup> Given the story as Moses has written it, which do you think is the best interpretation?

**Verse 6:** Notice how the writer alternates: details in verse 3, none in verses 4 and 5, and details again in this verse. Why give us details in those places and not between? What purposes do the details serve?

To help you think about the details and what they do, notice that the word translated “knife” could also be translated “cleaver.” It may mean, specifically, a butcher knife. (Compare Judges 19:29, where the same word is used.) How would that different translation change how we read this verse? For more understanding of the impact of that difference in translation, read about what was done with the sacrificial animal—see, for example, Leviticus 1:3–9.

Notice the parallel between Christ carrying his own cross and Isaac carrying the wood for the sacrifice. Why would such a parallel be important to Moses, the writer?

Why does the writer, at the end of the verse, make such a point of Abraham and Isaac being together?

**Verse 7:** Why does the writer repeat the word *father* and then contrast it with the word *son*? What effect does that create? What does that repetition and contrast teach us?

Notice that in this story Abraham consistently refers to Isaac as “my son,” rather than by name. Does that have anything to do with the fact that Ishmael’s name isn’t used in the story about his sacrifice?

Abraham answers his son in the same way he answered the Lord. What might that show?

What is Isaac’s reaction to the situation he finds himself in? When do you think Isaac understood what was to happen, now or later, in verse 9? Why?

Based on the age of Sarah at her death—which occurs immediately after this story—tradition has it that Isaac was thirty to thirty-five years old at the time of the sacrifice. If

Isaac was older, perhaps even as old as thirty or thirty-five, how would that change our understanding of the story? Note that in verse 12 Isaac is called a *n'r*, which is translated “babe” in Exodus 2:6 and “young man” in 2 Samuel 14:21, so the Hebrew word doesn’t help us answer the question about Isaac’s age.

**Verse 8:** “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering”: Like most prophecy and much scripture, there are several levels at which this phrase can be understood. Among them are:

1. Like his comment in verse 5, it could suggest that Abraham is deceiving his son (though, unlike verse 5, if we read it in that way, there is no suggestion that Abraham is going to disobey the commandment).
2. It can mean what Isaac (correctly) thinks it means, that the Lord will provide a lamb they can use.
3. It can mean what Abraham thinks it means, that Isaac—provided by God in the matter of his birth, and now (Abraham thinks) provided by God in the matter of his death—will be the sacrifice.
4. It can be Abraham’s unknowing prophecy of what we read later (verse 13).
5. It can be a prophecy of the Atonement, provided by the Father for the redemption of all mankind.

Which of these possibilities help us think about the meaning of Abraham’s sacrifice? How do they help us understand Christ? How do they help us understand our own lives?



This verse, like verse 6, ends with “they went both of them together.” Verse 6 listed the implements of the sacrifice, then ended with this phrase. Verse 7 takes up the question of the victim of the sacrifice. Then verse 8 takes up the answer to that question and ends with the phrase “they went both of them together.” The parallels are so deliberate that they cannot be coincidence. What is going on here?

The phrase “God will provide” is the turning point of this story. Could it also be something like a thesis statement for the story? How might that phrase be a response to the test that Abraham has been given?

**Verse 9:** We saw absolutely no details of the journey, so why does the writer give us details when they get to the mountain?

The traditional Hebrew name for this event is the *akedah*, meaning “the binding,” rather than “Abraham’s sacrifice” or some other variation that we use. Why was the binding of Isaac so important to the Jews that the whole event could be named after it? What kinds of things can “binding” mean? Do those meanings have anything to do with the ancient temple? With the modern temple? Compare and contrast the different things that these different names for the story tell us.

**Verse 10:** The word *slay* translates a Hebrew word that could also be translated “slaughter.” In most cases, it means to “kill in a ritual manner.” (The same word is used in Leviticus 1:5 and 6:25.) Why is it important that the writer use that word here?

Here the second gesture of the story appears: “Abraham stretched forth his hand.” (The first was when Abraham lifted his eyes in verse 4.) What does that gesture show us? Does this gesture say something about Abraham’s attitude? Notice that this verse and verse 9 use very short phrases: “came to the place,” “laid the wood in order,” “bound Isaac,” “laid him on the altar,” “stretched forth his hand,” “took the knife to slay his son.” What is the effect of this staccato pattern?

**Verse 11:** In verse 1, Elohim himself gave Abraham the commandment, but in this verse the commandment to not sacrifice Isaac is delivered by an angel, the angel of Jehovah. Why is the original commandment given by the Father but the reversal of that commandment is given by an angel of the Son? Why this difference of messengers?

What might Abraham’s reaction to that difference have been? What kinds of things does this show us?

Why does the angel call Abraham’s name twice? In verse 1, the Lord called him only once. What might the repetition show?

**Verse 12:** Why does the angel repeat the injunction not to hurt Isaac?

What does it mean to fear God? Does this story help us understand that by showing us? Do we see any evidence of what we might mean by *fear* in this story? Why do you think English uses the word *fear* for this attitude of awe and respect before God?

What does it mean to say that Abraham hasn't withheld his son from Jehovah?

**Verse 13:** Here the third gesture occurs, and it is the same gesture as the first one: "Abraham lifted up his eyes." What does lifting his eyes indicate? Does the parallel to verse 4 help us understand either one of these better?

Do the gestures create a frame for the story? If so, how does that framing work?

The ram, of course, is the traditional burnt offering. (See Leviticus 1:10–13.) There is an obvious textual difficulty here: Abraham looks *up* and sees the ram *behind* him. That seems impossible. But scholars have suggested that perhaps copyists have made a mistake and written a Hebrew word for *behind* when they were reading a very similarly written Hebrew word for *solitary*. If we accept that emendation of the text, what is the point of writing "a solitary ram" rather than just "a ram"?

By the way, the Joseph Smith Translation deals with the problem by putting the ram behind the thicket: "Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind a thicket, there was a ram" (Genesis 22:16 JST).

**Verse 14:** Notice that there is a double entendre in the name *Jehovahjireh*: The Hebrew phrase means literally "The Lord will see," but that can also be understood to mean "the Lord will provide." What has the Lord seen? What has he provided? (See verse 8.) You might want to do some brainstorming on this one to go beyond the obvious answers to those two questions—Abraham's obedience and a ram. Remember the connection to the temple and the atonement.

“Mount of the Lord” is a phrase often used in the Old Testament to refer the temple, whether on a mountain or not. Another translation of the sentence that explains the name Abraham gave the place is “The Lord will be revealed in a mount (i.e., a temple).” (This is probably a more accurate translation than the translation given by the King James translators.) Moses tells us that people say this because of the sacrifice of Isaac and the name Abraham gave to the place of that sacrifice. Ancient Israel offered sacrifice in its temples, so the connection of this story to their temples was more obvious. (You might want to read about sacrifice in the LDS Bible Dictionary in your scriptures.) But it might pay to think about, though not to discuss, the connection between the sacrifice of Isaac and the temple.

What has this story to do with temple work? What has it to do with seeing the Lord in the temple? How is the Lord revealed in the temple? What do we learn of sacrifice here? In the temple?

**Verse 15:** Why is the angel’s message divided into two parts? Does the division help us focus on particular aspects of each part? Is there a difference in the messages?

**Verse 16:** What is the significance of the Lord saying, “*By myself have I sworn*” (italics added)? (Compare Jeremiah 22:5; 49:13 and Amos 4:2; 6:8.) One medieval Jewish commentator (Nachmanides) suggests that in the phrase “By myself have I sworn” we see the Lord making Abraham’s calling and election sure. (Obviously, I’m using our terminology for his concepts, not his terminology.) So what? How is that relevant to *us*?

Notice the emphasis put on Abraham's not having withheld his only son. Why that emphasis? What does Abraham's not withholding his son show?

The blessing that follows in verses 17 and 18—a blessing already given once before (Genesis 12:2–3 and 13:14–16)—is said to be “because thou hast done this thing.” But if the blessing was given before, how can it be the result of this test? Does this say anything about the nature of the “test”?

**Verses 17–18:** Why does the Lord say, “in blessing, I will bless thee”? What do you think the repetition of a word for blessing does for our understanding? Abraham has already received this blessing. Why repeat it? Or is this version different in some way?

Why is this blessing such a desirable blessing? Why is it a blessing to have innumerable posterity?

Hebrews 6:14 quotes the blessing of verse 17. Does that quotation help us understand something of what this story teaches from a Christian point of view?

What does it mean to say that Abraham's seed will possess the gates of their enemies? Who are their enemies? What are the enemies' gates?

What does it mean to say that all the nations of the earth will be blessed in Abraham's seed? Compare Abraham 2:9–11 to see more clearly who Abraham's children are.

Does the end of verse 18 perhaps give us a better idea of what the Lord meant by “this thing” in verse 16?

**Verse 19:** The Lord has spoken to Abraham and renewed the covenant. However, we don't see Abraham respond or Isaac

being released. Isaac isn't mentioned again in the story, and Abraham just goes back to his servants and goes with them to Beersheba. Why this strange ending to the story?

At the end of chapter 21 (verse 34) we are told that Abraham lived in Hebron (the land of the Philistines). Now we are told he dwelt in Beersheba. Has he moved? If so, why? If he moved, how would the sacrifice have caused Abraham to move to a new location?

**Verses 20–23:** Here, within a message given to Abraham, we see Milcah's sons. Why is this message important to Abraham as part of the story of his test?

When the Bible was divided into chapters and verses, the editors could have put these verses into the next chapter, as its beginning. Do you have any ideas as to why they would think it belongs in this chapter, with the story of sacrifice?

Why is this genealogy inserted here, between the story of the sacrifice and the account of Sarah's death? Rebekah's birth seems to be the point of the genealogy. How is that relevant to what we have just seen?

**Verse 24:** In contrast to verses 20–23, this list of Reumah's sons is not something that was said to Abraham, but a comment made by the writer. Why does he think he needs to make this comment, and why has it been included here rather than at the beginning of the next chapter? Of course, the chapters and verses we see were not part of the original text. But there is a natural division at Genesis 23:1. So we could ask the question in this way instead: why does this genealogical list come before rather than after that natural break?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 10

Genesis 24–29

Too often when we study some of the stories of the Old Testament, we too easily become bemired in questions that have much more to do with our worldview thousands of years later than with the meaning of the story in its ancient context. For example, we assume today's understanding of families and ethical relations and then try to understand the story of Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob. When we do that we almost certainly miss what the text is actually about.

One way to focus more on what the stories are about than on our own preconceptions is to look at patterns and common themes that we see in them. For example, what do you make of the similarities in the following stories?

Abraham deceives Pharaoh—about Sarah being his sister (Genesis 12:11–13)

Abraham deceives Abimelech—about Sarah being his sister (Genesis 20:2)

Isaac deceives Abimelech and the men of Gerar—about Rebekah being his sister (Genesis 26:8)

Isaac is deceived by his wife Rebekah and by his son Jacob (Genesis 27:11–24)

Jacob deceives his brother Esau (Genesis 27:35–36)



Jacob is deceived by Laban when he marries Leah (Genesis 29:22–26).

Simeon and Levi deceive Hamor and Shechem in the rape and marriage of Dinah (Genesis 34:1–26).

Jacob is deceived by his ten sons regarding the selling of Joseph (Genesis 37:31–33)

Tamar deceives Judah (Genesis 38:13–26).

Joseph deceives his brothers (Genesis 42:7–20; 44:1–12).

Though we don't want to countenance deception, ask yourself whether these stories make a point of some kind, or more than one point—points that perhaps have nothing to do with deception. If they don't, why are they given to us?

Here is another set of stories that are similar and about which we can think using those similarities. What is the text saying by giving us these more or less parallel stories?

1. Sarah is barren and years later has a child.

Ishmael and Isaac rival for the birthright.

Sarah is jealous of Ishmael and his possible birthright blessings; she rejects Ishmael and his mother.

Sarah ensures Isaac the birthright blessing.

2. Rebekah is barren and later has twins.

Rebekah and Isaac create rivalry between the two brothers.

Rebekah ensures Jacob the birthright blessing; Esau rejects the birthright.

3. Rachel is barren and later has two sons.

Rachel and Leah create rivalry between their sons.

Rachel's son Joseph receives the birthright blessing; Leah's sons reject the birthright.

## Genesis 24

**Verses 3–4:** Why doesn't Abraham want his son to marry someone who is Canaanite? Knowing Abraham's history, what do we know about his kindred? Are they part of the Abrahamic covenant? Do we know whether they are part of a righteous family? Does verse 7 suggest an answer?

## Genesis 25

**Verses 1–6:** What is Abraham doing when he gives everything to one son and sends all of the others away with gifts? Is the parallel with how he dealt with Ishmael instructive, or is it just a coincidence based on the fact that he gave everything to Isaac?

**Verse 19:** We expect a genealogy to follow when we are told "these are the generations of so-and-so," but here none follows. What meaning does the word *generations* have in this verse? Does that tell us anything about the usual meaning of genealogy? Does it add any depth to our understanding of genealogy?

The form of this genealogy is unusual in that it first mentions Isaac and then goes back to Abraham, his father, rather than going immediately to Isaac's descendants. How would you explain this unusual form?

**Verse 20:** Why do you think the writer mentions Isaac's age when he married?

Why is it important that Bethuel and, therefore, also Rebekah and Laban, were Syrian? (See also Deuteronomy 26:5.)

**Verse 22:** Rebekah is having a difficult pregnancy and asks, "If this is the way it is, why am I here?" In other words, "Why do I continue to live?" Though many pregnant women have asked this question (perhaps all, and especially those with multiple babies), her case is different: she asks the Lord about it and receives an answer. Compare Genesis 27:46. What do you make of the similarity of the complaint?

Is it significant that Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife because she was not conceiving, but that she goes to the Lord for herself about the difficulty of her pregnancy?

**Verse 23:** The answer has the form of a poem:

Two nations are in thy womb,  
and two manner of people shall be separated from thy  
bowels;  
and the one people shall be stronger than the other  
people;  
and the elder shall serve the younger.

Does seeing this as a poem tell us anything about what the Lord has said to Rebekah?

Do you think that Rebekah did not understand what this poem meant until later? If so, how? If not, why was she given this answer when she asked?

If we did not already know what is going to happen, we could understand the first line as a repetition of the Abrahamic blessing. The second line is more specific, but “two people” could be the descendants of one child, so it still does not necessarily tell Rebekah that twins will be born.

Wordplay seems to be at work here (though almost certainly a wordplay that Rebekah would not have understood or perhaps even noticed): the word translated “shall serve” (more literally translated it means “will be a slave of”) rhymes with *Jacob* and has the same three consonants; the Hebrew word for *younger* may be a wordplay on one of the names for Esau—Edom. If Rebekah didn’t understand this wordplay, what is its point?

We do not know whether traditional Jewish inheritance laws applied in Isaac’s time, but many interpreters assume that they did. According to those laws (see Deuteronomy 21:17), the eldest son got two shares of the inheritance (birthright) and each other son got one share. But that could be changed if the father desired. Since the Lord could control birth order, why do you suppose he arranged things in this way, a way contrary to what would be expected? Why do you suppose the younger brother so often is the leader in both scripture and Church history (as in the cases of Joseph

and his brothers, Nephi and his brothers, and Joseph Smith and his brothers)?

**Verse 25:** David, too, was described as reddish or ruddy. (See 1 Samuel 16:12 and 17:42.) Is that significant?

Here is another wordplay: *reddish* is a wordplay on *Edom*, in other words, Esau. In the ancient Near East, hairiness appears to have been considered, by itself, to be a sign of being uncivilized. What is the writer doing by giving us this detail?

**Verse 26:** Though the name *Jacob* seems to mean something like “May God protect,” since it sounds like the word for heel in Hebrew, the writer uses that play on words to make his point. Why does the writer do this, make up an etymology for the name Jacob?

To understand the Old Testament, we must gain a taste for such wordplays and puns and for things like patterns of speech, etymologies (true or false), parallels, the forms of story, and the idea that an event can be *both* real and symbolic. Those kinds of textual matters and attitudes are generally overlooked, thought inconsequential, thought of as secondary traits (“only metaphor”), or denied by those of us brought up on the kind of thought that has been the norm in European and American cultures since about 1500. That isn’t how we write history.

However, when we overlook them, think them insignificant or merely secondary, or deny them, we are insisting that the writers of the Old Testament should have thought like us and that they should have written as we would have written. That is arrogance even if unintended, an attitude that will cause us to read things into the Old Testament that are not

there and to overlook important things the writers included. We need to practice reading the scriptures as the writers wrote them rather than as we would have written them. If we are to read what they wrote literally—in other words, as they wrote it and for what the text itself says (rather than for what it would say if it were understood as a modern text, as a transcription of a video recording)—then we cannot insist on reading it in our terms and with our methods. Why do you think Moses and the other Old Testament writers were interested in puns, plays on words, and so forth?

Why does the verse tell us Isaac's age when Esau and Jacob were born? What do we see by comparing what we learn here about Isaac's age with what we learn about it in verse 21?

**Verse 27:** What is the contrast between the two brothers? Why might this contrast be included in the story? Specifically, what do the words *cunning* and *simple* show us?

Is it significant that Esau liked the outdoors and Jacob preferred to stay around the tents? Does the contrast between these two brothers teach us anything about either them or ourselves?

The word translated “simple” is problematic. The most natural translation is “perfect,” but that seems unlikely, even if we understand *perfect* as discussed in lesson 6 in the discussion of Moses 8:27. (Note, however, that the Hebrew word for “perfect” that is used here is not the same as that in Genesis 6:9.)

**Verse 28:** Isaac prefers Esau because Esau provides the food he likes; Rebekah loves Jacob. Why aren't we told the reason for Rebekah's preference?

**Verse 29:** The word *sod* means “made.” Pottage isn’t anything in particular. It just means “something boiled in a pot.” Later we learn that it is red (Genesis 25:30) and then that it is a lentil stew (Genesis 25:34). Why do you think that this verse gives us no details when it describes the stew, though the details are given later?

Why was Esau faint, in other words, exhausted?

Here *field* does not mean a cultivated field, but the open countryside.

**Verse 30:** The Hebrew says something like “Let me swallow [a formal word rather than an ordinary one] some of that red stuff [a very informal phrase].” What does this show us about Esau?

Why do you suppose the story emphasizes the word *red*? Esau is red, he asks for red pottage, the word *Edom* is a play on the word for red. What might that color be here to indicate?

**Verse 31:** Esau has said please (Genesis 25:30), but Jacob’s response is curt: “Sell me your birthright right now.” What do you make of this difference in the way the two brothers speak to each other?

It is tempting for us to moralize at this point, trying to decide whether Jacob was right to ask for the birthright, especially since almost all readers know what is going to happen in a chapter or two. But is *Moses* interested in the moral question?

Rather than asking about what we are interested in, we should ask, “What does the story itself tell us to look at and

think about, above and beyond what we are interested in?” It isn’t that we can’t discuss the morality of what occurs, nor that Moses didn’t think that there was a moral issue at stake in what happened. Neither is it that we can’t have sympathy for Esau. Though he portrays Esau as uncouth, Moses clearly has sympathy for him. (See, for example, Genesis 27:34, 38, where Esau is portrayed very sympathetically.) Other biblical writers are also sympathetic to Esau. (See, for example, Hosea 12:2–3 and perhaps Jeremiah 9:3.) However, we don’t want to get so involved in those aspects of the story that we miss its real point.

So what *is* the real point of this story? What does it tell us about the lives and blessings of Jacob and Esau? What does it tell us about these events from Jacob’s point of view? From Esau’s? Wenham suggests that the word translated “right of the firstborn” (*bkrh*) is an anagram of the word that we translate “blessing” (*brkh*).<sup>1</sup> If that is right, there is another wordplay at work here. What could the writer be doing with that wordplay?

**Verse 32:** How seriously should we take Esau’s statement that he is about to die? Is there anything in the story that will help us decide whether he is actually on the verge of death or whether he is just exaggerating because he is hungry? How does what we say in answer to this question affect what we take to be the meaning of the last half of this verse? Can you think of any reasons why Esau might have thought that his birthright was of no value to him?

Does the contrast between Esau and Jacob that we saw in verse 27 help us understand what is going on here?



**Verse 33:** Jacob responds with what is, in Hebrew, a three-word reply that we can represent as “swear to me now.” Why is everything that Jacob says in this story so curt?

There are traditional Jewish stories that say the birthright was represented by a holy garment of skins (the garment given to Adam, the garment Noah was not wearing when Ham mocked him). If we accept those stories, what might we infer about the transaction between Esau and Jacob?

**Verse 34:** It is possible to interpret the pottage of lentils as different than the red pottage that Esau requested.<sup>2</sup> In that case, Esau asks for one thing (red pottage), makes a deal for it, and gets something else (lentil pottage). On that reading we have one more deception to add to the list with which the notes for this lesson began. What might that reading suggest about how to understand this story?

Notice the terseness of “and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way.” The Hebrew is even more terse. We could translate it as “He ate, drank, got up, and went away.” What might the narrator be trying to show us by writing in that way?

Why does Esau, who has previously in the story been rather talkative, say nothing at all now?

It is rare that the narrator in Genesis intrudes to make a point. Usually he just tells the story and does so in a way that allows the story to make its own point. Here, however, he inserts a moralizing conclusion: “So Esau showed contempt for the firstborn rights.” Why insert that comment?

## Genesis 26

**Verses 19–22:** The writer shows us Isaac’s restraint. From verse 16 we know that he is more powerful than the Philistines, yet rather than assert his rights to the wells, he digs new ones until the Philistines no longer strive with him for them. Why is that important to the overall story of Isaac?

**Verses 28–29:** What motivates Abimelech’s request for a covenant?

Is his assessment of the Philistine relations with Isaac accurate?

## Genesis 27

**Verses 1–5:** This is the first of five dialogues that Moses uses to tell this story. The others are Genesis 27:6–17, 18–29, 30–40, and 41–45. Consider studying the chapter by focusing on those five “scenes” and asking what each scene is supposed to show readers.

The overall story in these verses is straightforward: Isaac asks Esau to prepare a meal for him and promises Esau a “deathbed” blessing. Since meat was exchanged as a symbol of ancient covenants (compare Genesis 15:8–11, 17), the meal Isaac asks for may be symbolic of the fact that a covenant is to be established or passed on. Is it normal for the father to summon only one son for his deathbed blessing? (Compare Genesis 49 and 50:24–25.)

Most other blessings to sons are given when the father knows he is going to die and as part of the preparation for death. (See, for example, Genesis 47:29; 50:24; Joshua

23:14.) What is the significance of the fact that Jacob says that he does not know when he will die (verse 2)?

Why does Isaac add “such as I love” to his request for savory meat? Why does Isaac say “[so] that my soul may bless thee” rather than simply “so I may bless you”?

What do these verses show us about Isaac’s intentions?

Suppose that you had never read the Bible before and so did not already know the story as it will unfold. What would you think at the end of verse 5?

**Verses 6–10:** Here too the story is straightforward. The writer is an excellent storyteller. We see Isaac’s expectations described in the first four verses of this scene; then we see the plot that is to come about in its next six verses. There aren’t going to be any surprises, so those reading the story will have to concentrate not on the ending but on *how* that ending comes about and what it means to those involved. In verse 5, Esau is referred to as “his son.” But in verse 6, the narrator refers to Jacob as “her son.” Why does he make that shift?

Isaac said “that my soul may bless thee.” Why does Rebekah change that to “that I . . . may bless thee” (verse 7)?

What is the significance of the phrase “before the Lord”?

Why does Rebekah offer to prepare the stew (verse 9) rather than have Jacob prepare it, as Isaac expected Esau to do?

Does what we know of Laban, Rebekah’s brother (Genesis 24:29–31), perhaps help us understand this story?

**Verses 11–12:** The culture of the Bible differs from other ancient Near Eastern cultures in that it gives more strength to the mother’s authority. Here, for example, Jacob seems genuinely torn between obeying his mother and deceiving his father. (See the inclusion of mothers also in places such as Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17; and Proverbs 1:8; 6:20. However, see also Numbers 30, the entire chapter.) Is Jacob torn by duty, motivated by fear, protesting insincerely? How should we understand what he says in these verses, and what in the text justifies your answer?

Is Deuteronomy 27:18 relevant to our understanding of Jacob’s response: “Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way”?

**Verse 13:** What do we see of Rebekah here?

If the blessing given to Jacob could not be changed and given to Esau, how could the hypothetical curse, had it been pronounced on Jacob, have been transferred to Rebekah? Is this merely something that Rebekah and Jacob overlook, or is her offer a rhetorical way of encouraging her son, a way of saying, “That will never happen”?

Rebekah says the same thing to Jacob at the beginning of verse 9 and at the end of verse 13, but she doesn’t say it in the same way. How do you explain that difference?

**Verses 14–17:** Why do you think the writer includes so many details, many of which are repetitions of things he has already told us?

Who does most of the acts in these verses, Jacob or Rebekah? What does that tell us?

How does each person act, with any noticeable alacrity or enthusiasm?

**Verses 18–24:** Which persons appear in this scene? Who does not appear? Why is the scene built in that way?

Do we see Jacob hesitating here? Does that change our reading of the previous verses, or do we see that Jacob has changed?

Does Isaac doubt that he's speaking with Esau? How many proofs does he demand?

Might Jacob's three deceptions have anything to do with Peter's denial? Is a type of some sort at work here?

**Verses 26–27:** Notice how Jacob has gradually gotten closer and closer to Isaac and finally is intimately close to him, making verse 27 poignant.

The tension has mounted and mounted: Isaac thinks he hears Jacob, but he is told it is Esau. But he has returned from the hunt too quickly. Step by step we see Isaac questioning whom he is dealing with, and we can imagine Jacob becoming more and more fearful that he will be exposed. Isaac feels his son's hands and isn't reassured. So he asks who he is speaking to and Jacob must lie to him if the ruse is to succeed. Isaac agrees to eat but still seems hesitant. Finally, Isaac asks for a kiss, the final test. We can imagine how frightened Jacob must have been. But Jacob pulls it off: Isaac is finally convinced by the smell and immediately gives his blessing. Why does this ruse work when there were so many places that it could have gone wrong?

**Verses 28–29:** Notice the connection between Esau’s clothing (verse 27) and the blessing that follows. How would you explain the point that Isaac is making? Does that point also have relevance to Jacob?

Isaac promises Jacob perhaps three things: the bounty of the earth, rule over others, and that those who curse him will be cursed while those who bless him will be blessed. (The last of these three may not be a separate blessing. It may be a repetition of the second blessing.)

Part of the first promise (“plenty of corn and wine” or “new grain and wine”) may indicate the materials used in the temple ritual. If so, the bounty of the earth includes priesthood authority. The second promise also can be construed as priesthood authority, especially in a patriarchal period.

If the third promise is a separate blessing, what might it have to do with the priesthood?

Taken as a whole, how does this blessing’s wording differ from the other places where the Abrahamic blessing is given (e.g., Genesis 25:23)? Are those differences significant?

Is this blessing connected to Joseph’s dream (Genesis 37:7, 9) and the bowing that his brothers will do?

**Verse 30:** Notice how Moses moves the story along: just as Isaac finishes his blessing and Jacob leaves, Esau returns. Just as we were beginning to feel some relief from the tension building up as Jacob passed the tests his father posed, just as we might have begun to feel comfortable with what has happened, Moses shifts the perspective of the story to

Esau and a new tension begins to build. Now we will see Esau's reaction.

**Verses 31–33:** Notice how quickly Isaac is convinced that he is indeed speaking with Esau. Does Moses want us to feel sympathy for Isaac? What makes you think he does or doesn't?

Why does Moses go to such lengths to allow us to see Esau's and Isaac's emotions? He doesn't normally tell us very much at all about people's emotions.

Why is Isaac in such a panic? (The Hebrew word translated "trembled" is used to refer to the trembling associated with great fear, as in Genesis 42:28; Exodus 19:16; and 1 Samuel 21:1.)

What is the significance of the end of verse 33, the last part of Isaac's cry?

**Verse 34:** It is difficult to read this verse without hearing Esau's cry and feeling for him. The writer portrayed Esau unsympathetically before, so why does he now portray him so sympathetically?

**Verses 35–38:** Can you hear the resignation in Isaac's answer to Esau (verse 35)? What tone of voice do you imagine Esau using when he says what he says in verse 36?

In verse 37 Isaac seems at a loss. He has already given everything to Jacob. What are Isaac's options at this point?

How does Esau's tone change in verse 38? Is it the same as in verse 36? Is it the same as in verse 34?

What is Esau asking about in verse 38? Do we know of other deathbed blessings in which only one son was blessed or one was excluded? Does this suggest anything about Isaac and Esau's original plan?

**Verses 39–40:** Esau's blessing, too, has three parts. The first part is almost the same: the riches of the earth (but without the promise of "plenty of corn and wine," the ritual materials that perhaps indicate priesthood and temple service). Modern commentators tend to read verse 39 privatively: these things are being taken from Esau rather than given to him; he is to become a wanderer like Cain. If that is true, what do you make of this scene?

The second part of this blessing is the reverse of the second part of Jacob's blessing: you will serve your brother. How can that be a blessing? How is it a blessing to serve Jacob? Given the kind of authority implied for Jacob, what kind of service might be implied for Esau?

The third part is the promise that Esau will be able to throw off his brother's yoke. The third blessing indicates that Jacob (or his descendants) will put a yoke on Esau's neck. The yoke indicates more than just the service of a lesser brother; it indicates slavery. Thus, though Jacob has received a wonderful blessing, the blessing on Esau indicates that the authority given to Jacob and his descendants is an ambiguous one. It can be exercised unrighteously and, when it is, those over whom it is exercised unrighteously will be blessed to break that yoke.

How do you think Esau would have responded to such a blessing? How would one of us probably respond?



**Verse 41:** Now what is Esau's mood? How have we seen that mood change in the last few verses? Has it shifted from one thing to another, or has it grown in generally one direction? What kind of character do we see in Esau? Why does he postpone his vengeance? What becomes of Esau's threat? (See Genesis 33:1–15.)

**Verses 42–45:** If Esau's hatred was something that he said in his heart (verse 41), how was it reported to Rebekah (verse 42)?

Once again we see resourceful Rebekah. She tells Jacob to stay with her brother a few days. How long did he end up staying (Genesis 31:38)? Why don't we see Jacob respond to Rebekah?

What might this story about Jacob (who later is renamed Israel) and his domination of Esau have said to the nation Israel about its self-understanding?

What might this story say to us about *our* self-understanding as latter-day Israel? What mistakes might we make in understanding ourselves via this blessing?

## Genesis 33

**Verses 1–3:** What do we expect to follow these verses?

Does Jacob/Israel arrange his family in order of his feelings for them, with the favorites at the rear, or does he arrange them according to their birth order? (Compare Genesis 32:7–22.) What is the significance of the order of his caravan?

Verse 3 tells us that Jacob/Israel was at the head of the procession. Does that help us decide what he is doing? Does Jacob/Israel's bow have anything to do with the blessing he received (Genesis 27:29)?

**Verse 4:** Why is this such a surprise? Has Esau changed his character, or does this show him as he was before, impulsive? Does this event change the meaning of what happened earlier?

The parable that we usually refer to as that of the “prodigal son” (though it is, importantly, also about a father and a second son) uses the language of this verse to describe the welcome the father has for his lost son. The language of running, embracing, falling on the neck of the other person, and weeping is common to stories of relatives meeting each other in the Bible. Does that connection between Christ's parable and these Old Testament stories suggest anything about how early Christians might have understood this story?

**Verse 5:** Some commentators have noticed that Jacob/Israel doesn't refer to his children and other possessions as “blessings,” but as things that have come by the grace of God. (See also verses 8 and 10.) Why might Jacob emphasize grace or favor rather than blessing?

**Verses 8–9:** What is going on here? Is this merely a formal exchange in an ancient culture?

**Verse 10:** Why does Jacob/Israel allude to his experience with God here? (See Genesis 32:24–33.) In effect, he says, “Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me [as God has accepted me?], so you should

accept these gifts.” How do we make sense of his comparison of his relation to his brother and his relation to God?

**Verse 11:** Does this verse answer the question of verse 5 about blessing and favor?

Jacob/Israel says, “Take back the blessing I received because God has been gracious to me.” Is he giving back the birth-right blessing? What point is he making?

# Lesson 11

## Genesis 34 and 37–39

### Genesis 34

What was the sin of Dinah’s brothers? Was it that they took vengeance?

Reread the Abrahamic covenant to see what it promises, and think about that covenant as it relates to this event. Did they violate that covenant?

How does this chapter portray Jacob? Beyond the rape, what does Shechem do, through his father, that is an affront to Jacob and his sons?<sup>1</sup>

### Genesis 37–47

It is obvious that, like we who try to study the large amounts of material assigned for each lesson, those who created the LDS Church’s Sunday School lessons have struggled to deal with the amount of material to be covered. They have had to divide the story of Joseph in two, chapters 37–39 in this lesson and chapters 40–45 in lesson 12, and they have omitted the denouement of Joseph’s story, chapters 46–47, as well Jacob’s deathbed blessing of his sons and Joseph’s death (48–50). The result forces us to focus on parts of the story and, perhaps, to overlook the story as a whole—which is likely to change our understanding of the parts.

However, to understand the story of Joseph, I think that we need to read it as a whole. We can understand the story as having these parts:<sup>2</sup>

Joseph is sold into Egypt	Genesis 37:2–36
Tamar and Judah	Genesis 38
Joseph and Potiphar	Genesis 39:1–20
Joseph in prison	Genesis 39:21–40:23
Joseph in the palace	Genesis 41
Joseph’s family’s first visit	Genesis 42
The second visit	Genesis 43:1–45:28
The third visit: reconciliation	Genesis 46–47
The deaths of Jacob and Joseph	Genesis 48–50

To understand the story as a whole, consider questions such as how the third visit and the story of Joseph’s sale as a slave are connected and why the story of Joseph includes the stories of Tamar and Judah and of Joseph and Potiphar, as well as how those two stories are alike and dissimilar. Also ask how this story illustrates the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham. Look at each specific part of the blessing, and see whether you can see how Joseph’s story exemplifies that part.

## Genesis 37

**Verse 2:** Similar to the story of Isaac (Genesis 25:19), this story begins “these are the generations of Jacob,” but it isn’t

followed by the expected genealogy. (The word translated “generations” could also have been translated “results” or “proceedings.” It refers to an account of a person and his descendants and is the word used in Genesis 2:4.) Why do you suppose the two stories begin this way?

Is that the beginning of this story, or is it the end of the list of Esau’s descendants in chapter 36? (Remember there were no chapter and verse divisions in the original text.)

What difference does each way of reading the text make?

Why do you think Jacob is referred to here as Jacob rather than as Israel?

We read the story that begins here and ends in chapter 47, with the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (or even in chapters 49–50, with the deaths of Jacob and Joseph), as “the story of Joseph.” If we understand “these are the generations of Jacob” to be the beginning of this story rather than the end of the genealogy of Esau, what is the significance of that beginning?

Who is Joseph’s mother? (Reread Genesis 30 and 33 for a better understanding of the fact that Joseph is Jacob’s favorite son.)

Of what significance is it whose sons Joseph was with?

“The lad was with the sons of Bilhah” may mean “the boy was a servant to the sons of Bilhah.” If we understand the text that way, does it change anything about how we understand the story?

How is Joseph’s age relevant?

How does the last clause of the verse prepare us for what is to come? Does it give us some reason to believe that Joseph's brothers won't be happy with him, even before we hear the rest of the story?

Are we supposed to feel sympathy for Joseph? For his brothers?

**Verse 3:** How does the beginning of this verse contrast with the end of the last? What do you make of the explanation for why Jacob loved Joseph most, especially in light of what you've read in chapters 30 and 33, and in light of the fact that Jacob has another son of his old age, Benjamin? What does the explanation indicate?

The phrase "of many colors" is a guess at a translation of a difficult Hebrew phrase. Others have translated it "a coat with long sleeves." The Koehler-Baumgartner Hebrew lexicon says that it is a garment worn next to the skin that covers the arms to the wrists and the legs to the ankles.<sup>3</sup> Second Samuel 13:18 takes it to be something worn by a princess.

Whatever the correct translation, it is clear that Jacob has made Joseph a special coat, perhaps even a ceremonial one, and almost certainly a sign of authority. What might such special clothing indicate? Might that at least partially explain Joseph's brothers' animosity toward him?

Do you think Jacob's own history might at least partially explain his love for one of his youngest sons? Isn't there an irony in the comparison of Jacob's history and this story?

**Verse 4:** What is going on in this family? Does this fully explain the brothers' hatred? What about the end of verse 1? Does that also explain their hatred?

Why do you think that Moses repeats three times that the brothers hated Joseph, here and in verses 5 and 8?

**Verses 5–8:** Why does the writer introduce the story by giving us a synopsis of it (verse 5)? Picture a seventeen-year-old boy saying this to his brothers, some probably in their forties. How is Moses portraying Joseph? Are we supposed to have some sympathy for the older brothers? Are we supposed to understand their anger?

Ultimately the answer to the brothers' question will be yes, but what are we supposed to see at *this* point in the story?

**Verses 9–10:** Why has the writer placed these two dreams so closely together? What effect does he create by doing so?

This pair of dreams is paralleled by the dreams of the butler and baker and the two dreams of Pharaoh. Is that significant?

How does the story of this dream differ from that of the previous dream?

What do we learn about Jacob from these verses? What do verses 5–10 tell us about Joseph? Do you think Joseph knew the reaction his stories might bring?

**Verse 11:** *Envied* translates something that is much stronger in Hebrew. The Hebrew means that they had a strong emotion that made them red in the face.

Jacob's reaction is different from that of the brothers: he observed (or guarded—held close) what Joseph had said.



What do we see about Jacob here, given what we saw in verse 10?

If Jacob couldn't get what Joseph was saying out of his mind, why did he rebuke Joseph in the previous verse?

**Verses 12–14:** How is this connected to the immediately preceding stories? In verse 2 we saw Joseph tending sheep. Then we saw three short stories about Joseph's relation to his family. Now we see him at home with his father while his brothers tend the sheep. So what?

Why did Joseph, the shepherd, stay behind? Why might Jacob have sent Joseph rather than a servant to check on the sons?

The phrase "be well with" translates the Hebrew word *shalom*, often translated "peace," though "well-being" is also a very important meaning. How is *shalom* a key word in this story as a whole?

**Verses 15–17:** Why does the writer include this episode in the story? What's the point? Why not move immediately from verses 12–14 to verse 18?

Note that Shechem is a place destined for disaster. (The word may mean "retribution.") In addition to the evil done by Joseph's brothers there, Dinah was raped there (Genesis 34), and Israel was divided there between Jeroboam and Rehoboam (1 Kings 12).

What do you make of the fact that Joseph was wandering?

**Verse 18:** What does this verse tell us about Joseph's brothers? How long did it take them to come to a decision?

**Verses 19–20:** What do the brothers intend by the phrase “this dreamer”? What does it mean to the writer? “This dreamer” translates what literally means “this master of dreams.”

Given what the brothers say in these verses, what motivates their hatred?

Notice the way in which, at the end of verse 20, they prophesy unwittingly. What point is the writer making?

When describing what the brothers intend to do, the writer used a word that is correctly translated “slay” or “kill.” Here, however, the brothers use a word that might be well translated as “murder.”

Exodus 21:16 is relevant to understanding the seriousness of what the brothers have decided to do. It is given after these events but nevertheless gives us insight into how ancient Hebrew culture probably thought about these matters.

**Verses 21–22:** What do the brothers believe Reuben is proposing? Why might Reuben want to save Joseph?

What is Reuben’s position in the family? How might that be relevant? For example, in Jacob’s absence, what would be his responsibility?

**Verses 23–24:** Have the brothers decided yet what they are going to do, kill him or leave him in the dry cistern to die? How could Reuben save Joseph from immediate death (verse 21) but agree to let him die of thirst in the pit?

**Verses 25–27:** What does the first clause of verse 25 say about the brothers? Is Judah also trying to save Joseph?

What reasons does he give against killing Joseph? How seriously would the brothers have understood each reason to be?

**Verses 28:** What happened here? Are the Midianites and the Ishmaelites two groups or two names for the same group?

Note that 20 shekels (pieces of silver) is the standard price in the Old Testament for a young male slave (Leviticus 27:5).

**Verses 29–30:** Where has Reuben been? Why didn't we see him leave?

What is Reuben asking when he cries, "And I, whither shall I go?"

Why does he tear his clothing? What does torn clothing represent in the Old Testament?

**Verses 31–33:** Why don't the brothers respond to Reuben?

Why do the brothers invent this relatively elaborate subterfuge? Why not say nothing at all? We know Joseph got lost on the way to see them (verses 15–17). Why not just pretend they never saw Joseph?

Is there any connection between this deceit by Joseph's brothers and the deceit that Jacob played on his father, Isaac?

**Verses 34–35:** Is Moses portraying Jacob's mourning as excessive? Why or why not? Compare Genesis 50:10 and Deuteronomy 34:8.

## Genesis 38

Many find this story distasteful and so avoid it. But it is important not to read it merely through contemporary eyes.

Tamar set about obtaining what was hers by legal right—see Genesis 38:26—and what her father-in-law had refused her.

What do Onan's actions show us about his relationship to the Abrahamic covenant? Tamar's? Does that help explain why Tamar is one of only three women (besides Mary) mentioned in Jesus's genealogy (Tamar, Ruth—married to Tamar's descendant Boaz—and Bathsheba: Matthew 1:3, 5, and 6)? Many contemporaries of each of these women, and Mary, would have thought them questionable people.

Why is this story included in the scriptures at all? Does it parallel the story of Joseph and Potiphar in some way? If so, how? (For example, compare with Genesis 37:32–33; 38:25–26.)

If we take “these are the generations of Jacob” to be the beginning of the story in these chapters, does this episode fit into the story better?

If we assume that the story belongs in the scriptures, why does Moses interrupt the story of Joseph to tell it to us? If it is necessary that the story be included in scripture, it could have come before the Joseph story without breaking the chronology significantly. So it seems to be where it is for a reason; its placement draws attention to it. What might the reason be for Moses putting it here rather than somewhere else? In other words, what has this story to do with the story of Joseph?

How does the Judah whom we see in this chapter compare to the man we see in Genesis 44:18–34? What brings about that change? Might it be this event? Is there any evidence for such a conclusion?

Wenham notes a possible correlation between this story, the story of Joseph's sale, and the story of Jacob's blessing:<sup>4</sup> Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, and was, in turn, deceived by his son Judah, who was then deceived by his daughter-in-law Tamar. In each case, clothing and goats are used to carry off the deception. Do you think this is a legitimate connection? If so, what is its point?

### Genesis 39

For an excellent discussion of the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, read Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.<sup>5</sup> Sternberg also has a useful discussion of the story.<sup>6</sup>

**Verses 1–6:** What do we see of Joseph in these verses?

Verse 2 says that “the Lord was with Joseph.” Compare Genesis 26:3, 24, 28; 28:15, 20; and 31:3. In fact, in verses 2, 3, and 5 we are told five times “the Lord was with Joseph” as he entered and worked in Potiphar's house. What does Moses use this phrase to signify?

Has Joseph learned something from his experience with his brothers?

Is verse 5 intended to show the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all the world would be blessed through his descendants?

How are the descendants of Israel a blessing to the world? If this is an example of how the house of Israel is a blessing to the world, should we take the promise not only spiritually but temporally? If we take the promise temporally, what

does it mean about the house of Israel today? How are we a blessing to the world, if we are?

Verse 6 tells us that Potiphar didn't concern himself with anything having to do with his household except the food that he ate. Why would that be an exception?

Verse 6 ends with a note that Joseph was a handsome, well-shaped man. That would be a more modern translation of "goodly and well favoured." "Joseph was fine-figured and had a handsome face" would also be a good translation. The only other person described in the same way as Joseph is Rachel (Genesis 29:17). What does that tell us?

**Verses 7–9:** In verse 4 we saw that Joseph "found grace in his [master's] sight." Now we see that Joseph also found grace or favor in his master's wife's sight. So what?

Joseph responds to her demand by saying, "My master has entrusted me with everything he has and hasn't kept anything from me" (paraphrased). How does that explain why he cannot lie with Potiphar's wife?

When he says he cannot sin against God, which sin does he seem to have in mind, adultery or violating his master's trust (which is not to say that he would commit either)? What is the significance of each?

Contrast Joseph's behavior with Judah's. Might this be part of the purpose of chapter 38?

Verse 9 is the first time that Joseph has said anything about God. What might his response to Potiphar's wife show us?

**Verses 10–12:** How long did Potiphar’s wife go on trying to seduce him? Why do you think Joseph didn’t say anything to Potiphar about his wife’s behavior?

A better translation of “about this time” (verse 11) would be “as usual.”

Notice a parallel between Joseph’s first difficulty and this: in both he loses his cloak and, as the next verses show, in both it is used as a testimony against him. Does that parallel tell us anything?

We see very similar wording in verses 6 and 12: “he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand” (verse 6) and “he left his garment in her hand” (verse 12). Is the writer making a point with that wording? If so, what is it?

**Verses 13–18:** Obviously Joseph’s master’s wife tries to establish an alibi in verses 14 and 15. But what else is she trying to do? Why does she say what she does to the other servants in verse 14?

The Hebrew word translated “mock” in verses 14 and 17 is used in Genesis 26:8 to refer to sexual intimacy and in Genesis 21:9 to refer to insulting behavior. Why does she use a word that has both meanings here?

**Verses 12–18:** Compare Moses’s account of what happened between Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (verses 12–14) with the story she told the other servants (verses 14–15) and with the story she told Potiphar (verses 17–18). What do the differences between those stories show us?

**Verses 19–20:** In the Mosaic law the usual penalty for rape of one free person by another was death (see Deuteronomy

22:23–27). Though that law is not yet in force in Israel and though Egyptian law would be the relevant law in this case, it would be surprising if the penalties weren't similar. If the rape of a free person by another free person was that serious, how much more serious would the penalty for attempted rape of a free woman by a slave be? Why does the master deal so leniently with Joseph?

**Verses 21–23:** How is this a repetition of what we have already seen? Is this an expression of the same sentiment we see in 1 Nephi 1:20? What do these verses foreshadow?



THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 12

Genesis 40–45

## Genesis 40

**Verse 1:** How long do you think “after these things” might represent, a long time or a short time?

Why do you think we hear nothing further about Potiphar’s wife and what became of her?

**Verse 2:** Note that *butler* is probably better translated “cupbearer,” and *baker* is probably better translated “royal scribe.” These are important palace officials. Does that suggest anything about the prison director’s thoughts about Joseph?

Why doesn’t the writer tell us anything about how the butler and the baker have made Pharaoh angry?

Are we supposed to see a parallel between the servants of Pharaoh, who (literally) “sinned against their master,” and Joseph, who has refused to do so because it would be a sin against God (Genesis 39:9)?

What do you make of the fact that in Genesis 39:22 Joseph was put in charge of all the prisoners, but here he must wait on two of them? Has his status changed, or does this say something about these two prisoners?

**Verse 3:** In whose prison is Joseph? Why is Potiphar's name absent but his title used?

**Verse 5:** The Egyptians believed that "sleep puts us in real and direct contact with the other world where not only the dead but also the gods dwell."<sup>1</sup> How is this relevant to the butler's, baker's, and Pharaoh's dreams? Does this explain their sadness or frustration (verse 6)?

Why does verse 5 remind us that these men are in prison?

**Verse 8:** In response to the baker's and the butler's sadness at not having an interpretation of their dreams, Joseph asks, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" How does that compare to his response to his own dreams in Genesis 37:5–10? What does this tell us about Joseph?

**Verse 15:** The word *dungeon* translates the same Hebrew word that is translated "pit" in 37:22, 24–25, and 29.

What are the parallels between the story of chapter 37 and the story of chapters 39 and 40? What do those parallels show?

**Verse 16:** What is the baker's motivation for asking for an interpretation of his dream?

**Verse 23:** Do you think the butler forgot—indeed, "did not remember . . . but forgot"—Joseph after only three days?

## Overall questions for Genesis 40

Why would the butler and the baker have had any confidence in Joseph's interpretation of their dreams?

From this chapter, what do we see about life under the pharaoh?

Why did the Lord have Joseph interpret two dreams, especially when one was anything but good news?

Notice the skillful use of language in this story: Pharaoh will lift the head of the butler (dealt kindly with him, verse 13), and he will also lift the head of the baker (have him killed, verse 19). And this usage occurs in a story about a person, Joseph, who has been cast down (twice) and whose head will be lifted by God.

The phrase “lift the head” can be seen as a summary of this part of the story and a foreboding of what is to come: if we didn’t already know the end of the story, we might well wonder, “In which way is Joseph’s head going to be lifted?”

Treating this chapter as a story in itself, what does it suggest about hope?

How did Joseph probably feel at the end? How is this experience of waiting for what will apparently not come to pass like that of previous patriarchs? Did Jesus later have experiences like that? Other prophets? So what?

## Genesis 41

**Verse 1:** What does the phrase “two full years” tell us?

**Verses 1–8:** Why do the cows come up out of the river? Of what significance was the Nile River to the Egyptians?

What did the number seven mean in Egypt? What did cows signify in Egypt? They were used more for plowing than for

eating by the Egyptians as well as by the Hebrews, so they probably do not represent food themselves. How are the cows connected to the corn (grain) of the second dream?

Pharaoh says that no one can interpret his dream, suggesting that some have tried or that some have been asked to and said they could not. (See also verses 15 and 24.) How would Pharaoh have been able to tell whether an interpretation by one of his magicians was accurate?

**Verse 9:** What faults is the butler remembering? Why does he begin his story this way? Why not just tell the story rather than mention his faults?

Why do you think he remembers Joseph at this point rather than earlier? How will doing so benefit him?

**Verses 10–13:** Many interpreters believe that “a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard” is disparaging, intended to show Joseph as insignificant. Why would the butler do that?

What is the effect of having two different dreams interpreted, one positively and one negatively? Does that establish Joseph’s credibility? How so?

**Verse 14:** Of what significance is it that they called Joseph from the prison *hastily*? Is there a contrast here between the two years he waited (verse 1 of this chapter) and his summons before the pharaoh? If so, what is that contrast for? What does it do?

Hebrews were usually full-bearded, and Egyptians were clean-shaven. Why does Joseph shave? Why does the narra-

tor think it important for us to know that Joseph shaved and changed his clothing?

**Verse 16:** Notice the similarity of Joseph’s reply to the pharaoh and his reply to the butler and baker. Is Joseph’s reply somewhat confrontational, considering that he is speaking with the pharaoh? If so, what might that tell us about him?

How does Joseph know, before even hearing the dream, that the answer that Pharaoh will receive will bring him peace?

**Verses 25–36:** Notice the structure of Joseph’s reply to the pharaoh:

1. In verses 25–27, he gives Pharaoh the key to interpreting his dream: cows = years and ears of corn = years. He explains that the two dreams have the same meaning.
2. In verses 28–31, Joseph explains the meaning of the symbols as they relate to each other. Why does the emphasis fall on the famine rather than on the good years?
3. In verses 32–36, he gives Pharaoh advice about what he should do to deal with the predicted famine.

Notice also that each of the three parts of his response begins with an introductory sentence: “the dream is one” (verse 26), “What God is about to do, he showeth to Pharaoh” (verse 28), and “the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (verse 32). What is the point of these introductory phrases?

How did Joseph, a slave recently retrieved from prison, have the temerity to give the pharaoh advice about how to respond to the predicted famine? He was only asked to interpret the dream, but he goes much further than offering an interpretation.

When Joseph speaks of God, he uses the term *ha elohim*, “the God.” When Pharaoh speaks of God, he uses the same term but without the article: simply “God.” Is that difference significant?

**Verses 26–31:** Why does Joseph describe the bad cows and ears of corn but not the good ones? Similarly, why does he give us one sentence about the years of plenty but five about the years of famine?

**Verse 36:** In Leviticus and Numbers the verb translated “perish” is used when speaking of being cut off from Israel. It has been used twice before in Genesis, in Genesis 9:11 and 17:14. Why does Moses use that particular verb here?

**Verse 37:** Why did the pharaoh see Joseph’s interpretation as good?

**Verse 38:** What is the pharaoh asking his servants when he asks, “Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?”

**Verses 39–41:** Joseph has now been in three houses in Egypt: Potiphar’s house, the prison house, and Pharaoh’s house. Are there parallels between the things that happen to him in each of these? If so, what might those parallels thematize?

In verse 40, the pharaoh tells Joseph that he will be in charge of everything except what? Does the writer intend us to see a parallel with his situation in Potiphar's house?

In verse 41, the pharaoh says, "See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt." Why the redundancy, given what he said in verse 40?

**Verse 42:** Are we supposed to see any connections between the clothing that Joseph receives here and the clothing he has had before, such as the "coat of many colors"?

**Verse 45:** Is there any problem with Joseph taking an Egyptian wife? If so, what evidence is there for the problem? If not, why not, given Isaac's fear that his son would not marry within the family?

What does Joseph's assumption of an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife tell us about what is happening? (Notice that in verse 55, though Pharaoh has given Joseph an Egyptian name, he refers to him by his Hebrew name.)

**Verse 51:** Joseph names his son Manasseh, meaning *forgetting*, "for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." We can easily understand why Joseph would celebrate the birth of his son by naming his son in gratitude for forgetting the labor he has performed as a slave, but why would he also give thanks for forgetting his family?

What is the significance of naming his second son a name that means fruitful? Does he intend more by that name than that he will have descendants through him?



## Genesis 42

**Verse 1:** Why does Jacob reemerge as an important character in the story?

What does his reproach, “Why do ye look one upon another?” (in other words, “Why are you standing around staring at one another?”), tell us?

**Verse 4:** Does Jacob continue to treat the sons of Rachel differently than his other sons? What evidence in the story is there of how Benjamin’s brothers responded to his special status? What are we supposed to conclude from that?

**Verse 9:** Of what significance is it that Joseph remembers his dreams about his brothers (chapter 37) instead of remembering that they sold him into slavery?

Why does he accuse them of being spies? Why does he keep repeating that accusation (see also verses 12, 14, 15, and 20)?

The verse explains the accusation by referring to the dreams. How do his brothers explain his accusation?

Do the dreams he had explain the demand he makes of them to bring his younger brother?

**Verse 11:** How is it relevant that they are all the sons of the same man? Is the fact that Joseph is also the son of Jacob, their father, important to understanding what Moses wants us to see here?

**Verse 13:** Why do the brothers offer this unsolicited information about the family? What result does it have?

**Verses 14–16:** Is Joseph giving his brothers “payback” by imprisoning them?

Though the Talmud (the traditional Jewish interpretation of the first five books of the Bible, the Torah) was written much later than Genesis, it gives us an idea of how the Jewish tradition has understood repentance and so a hint of how Old Testament people might have understood it. According to the Talmud, a person has repented if he faces exactly the same temptation and has as much power to succumb as he did when he sinned, but he abstains. Given this understanding, how does Joseph's proposal test the repentance of his brothers?

**Verse 17:** Why does Joseph have his brothers imprisoned?

**Verses 18–24:** What are these verses designed to show us?

**Verse 19:** Compare Job 29:12–13 and Proverbs 31:20. What point is our narrator making in this verse?

**Verse 20:** Joseph's promise is that if they return with Benjamin *they*, rather than the brother left behind, will not die. Of course, the implication is that if they do not return with Benjamin, they will die. We would expect him to threaten to kill the captive brother if they don't return. Why does he make this unusual threat?

**Verse 21:** We learn here something we did not see in chapter 37: Joseph pled with his brothers when they threw him into the pit. Why did Moses keep that information back until now—or is Joseph's memory adding details that may not have happened?

**Verse 24:** Why do you think Joseph weeps? Why do you think Joseph had Simeon bound rather than one of the other brothers?

**Verses 27–28:** What do the brothers think when they discover the money in their sacks? Various motives have been offered for Joseph putting the money in their sacks: it was an act of brotherly kindness to show them that they were guests; it was, as they believed, to make them look like thieves; it was an imitation of the earlier situation in which they were willing to exchange Joseph for money and, so, a test: if they get money, will they abandon Simeon? Which of these do you think most plausible, or do you have another explanation?

**Verses 30–34:** Which parts of what happened to them do they leave out when they tell their story to Jacob? Why do they do that?

**Verse 37:** How is Reuben's offer related to what Jacob has suffered?

**Verses 36–38:** What is Jacob's response to the problem? Is he willing to send Benjamin to Egypt in order to ransom Simeon? What does that tell us? What did his response show Jacob's other sons?

Notice that Jacob says, "My son shall not go down with *you*" (italics added), suggesting obliquely that they are not his sons. What would justify such a suggestion?

## Genesis 43

Some have argued that this chapter and chapter 42 may be arranged in chiasms and that the chiasms of the two chapters echo one another.<sup>2</sup> Why might the writer have written the chapters in that way?

**Verse 2:** Why does Jacob tell them, “Go again, buy us a *little* food” (italics added)?

**Verse 3:** Why does Judah, rather than Reuben, the oldest, make the argument to take Benjamin to Egypt? See Genesis 42:37–38 and 35:22.

**Verse 6:** How should we understand Jacob’s complaint in this verse?

**Verses 8–10:** What is different in Judah’s plea this time? What changes Israel’s mind about allowing his sons to return to Egypt with Benjamin?

**Verse 9:** When Judah says “let me bear the blame for ever,” what is he offering his father? What does it mean to offer to bear the blame? Why isn’t this an empty offer?

**Verse 14:** Why does Jacob refer to Simeon as “your other brother” rather than use his name? In Hebrew, the construction is unusual. Literally, it says “your brother another one” rather than “your other brother,” as if to emphasize that Jacob doesn’t use Simeon’s name.

Compare Jacob’s prayer here to that in Genesis 32:9–12. Are there differences that add meaning to the story?

**Verse 18:** The sons are afraid that they will be taken as slaves and that their asses will be taken from them. What does their concern for their asses suggest about their wealth? Does that help us understand anything about the story of their encounter with Joseph?

**Verses 20–24:** What are we supposed to see in this scene? Joseph knows that his servants put the money in their sacks at his command. Why does he say, “Your God, and the God

of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks” (verse 23)? Is he lying? If not, what point is Moses making? Remember that the writer of these stories has to be reconstructing the conversations. No one described them as they occurred. So the writer has to tell the story and put into the mouths of those in it whatever words were most likely and best tell the story.

**Verse 29:** This is the first time that a relation between Joseph and his brothers has been mentioned in this part of the story. Previously the text has referred to merely *them* and “the men” but has not said anything about brothers. Why is “brother” and “mother’s son” introduced here?

**Verses 31–32:** Does Moses intend readers to see a contrast between this meal and that in Genesis 37:25?

**Verses 33:** Why does Joseph seat them in order of seniority, surprising them?

## Genesis 44

**Verse 2:** Why do you think Joseph has the servant put his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack rather than in one of the other brother’s sacks?

**Verses 1–10:** What is the point of Joseph’s test of his brothers?

**Verse 14:** I am fairly sure that this is the first time in the story that we are told that all of the brothers have fallen down before Joseph. Here we see the fulfillment of the dream of Genesis 37:6–7. How has Joseph changed since

then? How have the brothers changed? How has Jacob changed? What brought about that change?

**Verse 16:** To whom is Judah referring when he asks, “What shall we say unto my lord?” To Joseph, whom they stand before? To Jacob, to whom they must explain what has happened? To God?

**Verses 18–34:** This speech by Judah is the longest speech in Genesis. It has three parts:

1. a description of what has happened (verses 19–29)
2. a description of the effects of what has happened (verses 30–32)
3. the proposal of an alternative to keeping Benjamin as a slave (verses 32–33)

Since Joseph already knows what has happened to them, why does Judah repeat the story to him?

Why did Judah omit the accusation of spying from his story?

Is it significant that Judah is the person who stands as surety for the brothers’ return? How so?

Judah uses the word *father* fourteen times in his speech. What effect does he hope it will have? What effect does it have?

What do we see of Judah’s character in this speech? How does that compare to what we saw of him in chapters 37 and 38?

## Genesis 45

**Verses 1–2:** What finally moves Joseph to tears that he cannot control? (This is the third time that Joseph weeps—see Genesis 42:24 and 43:30—but it is the first time he weeps openly.) What are we to make of the fact that not only those in Joseph’s house, but also those in Pharaoh’s house as well as “the Egyptians,” heard him weeping?

**Verse 3:** Joseph says, “I am Joseph.” Then without a break he asks, “Is my father still alive?” What does this tell us?

**Verse 4:** Is Joseph still speaking through an interpreter, or has he switched to Hebrew? What basis in the text do you have for your answer?

How are they likely to react to “your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt”?

**Verses 4–5, 7:** Notice that in verse 4 Joseph speaks of being *sold* into Egypt, but in verses 5, 7, and 8 he speaks of being *sent* into Egypt. What does that change in the verb tell us? What way of thinking is behind that change?

Compare these instances of being sent to the sending mentioned in Genesis 37:13–14. What does this suggest about our intentions and purposes, about our goals and plans?

**Verses 14–15:** What has changed that makes this reunion possible? What has Joseph learned?

Given what his brothers did to him, how can Joseph no longer be angry at them?

Of what significance is it that at this point we learn “and after that his brethren talked with him”? Hadn’t they talked with him before?

## Overall questions for this lesson

The story of Joseph is the longest story in Genesis, longer than the story of creation, the story of Adam and Eve, the story of the flood, the story of Abraham, and so on. Why?

In spite of the importance of the story of Joseph to the book of Genesis, he is rarely mentioned in the Bible after Genesis. Why not?

In Genesis 15:13–14 the Lord told Abraham that the children of Israel would be strangers in a land that is not theirs for four hundred years. This story shows us the fulfillment of that prophecy. Why do you think the Lord planned to send Israel into Egypt and then into captivity in Egypt?

Why is Egypt a common symbol in the scriptures? For what does it stand?

The birthright is Joseph’s (1 Chronicles 5:2). Given that the Savior was born through the lineage of Judah (Matthew 1 and Luke 3), what is the significance of having the birthright? Why didn’t the Messiah come through the lineage of the birthright?

The connection between Joseph of old and the latter-day prophet Joseph Smith is obvious. (See, for example, 2 Nephi 3.) What kinds of parallels can you see between the two Josephs? Why do you think those parallels are there? What do they teach us?



Many have seen parallels between the story of Joseph and the life of Christ. They see Joseph as a figure of Christ. That Joseph is a savior of Israel is obvious. Can you think of any other parallels between Joseph and Christ? What is the point of such parallels? Why do the scriptures use types and shadows—figural language?

# Lesson 13

Exodus 1–3; 5–6; 11–14

Before looking in detail at the scriptures for this week, consider the following possible chiasmic parallels between the story of Moses's life and the story of Israel's experience. Of course, parallels are what we make of them. Some may see these as more tightly like one another than others do. Some may be skeptical about these chiasmuses, especially since one of them has missing parts. Some may see nothing at all. If you don't find these parallels interesting, or at least thought provoking, skip them and go on to the questions. If you do find them interesting, perhaps they will be useful for thinking about these stories—but don't make more of them than is reasonably possible.

## I. Moses's life

A: Moses is born.

B: Moses is introduced into a life in two communities (Israel and Egypt) via an act of violence, the killing of the children.

C and D: Moses is a member of both communities, but the dominant community is that of Egypt.

E: Moses is cast out of both Egypt and Israel by an act of violence, killing the Egyptian taskmaster.

F: Moses tends sheep in the wilderness.

G: Moses discovers who he is when he is called to lead Israel in a vision of God on Mount Horeb.

F': Moses travels through the wilderness to return to Egypt.

E': Moses reenters Egypt and Israel by an act of violence, the circumcision of his sons (Exodus 4:24–26).

D' and C': Moses is a member of both communities, but the dominant community is that of Israel.

B': Moses leaves his life in two communities via an act of violence, the killing of the Egyptian first-born.

A': Israel is born as a nation.

## II. Israel's life

A: Israel has its beginnings (is born) as the children of Jacob.

B: Israel is introduced into a joint citizenship through an act of violence, the kidnapping of Joseph and famine.

C and D: There are two communities, Israel and Egypt, but Egypt is the dominant community.

E: Israel leaves its dual citizenship and goes into the wilderness by an act of violence, the killing of the Egyptian firstborn.

X: Israel crosses the Red Sea on dry land, delivered by God.

F: Israel wanders in the wilderness.

G: Israel is constituted as a community, given the law in a vision of God on Mount Sinai.

F': Israel wanders in the wilderness.

X': Israel crosses the Jordan River on dry land, delivered into the promised land by God.

E': Israel is born as a nation with a homeland through an act of violence, the destruction of the Canaanites.

D' and C': Israel takes up dual citizenship; though it dominates, it is also Canaanite.

B': [This element is not in the story, but given what we have seen in the story of Moses, what might we infer belongs here?]

A': [This is also not in the story, but given what we have seen in the story of Moses, what might we infer here?]

III. Now think about how this general pattern might be a type or figure of other things. For example, is it a type of Christ's life?

A: Birth

B: Execution of the innocents

C and D: In this world, but not of it

E: Ministry

F: Transfiguration

E': Ministry

D' and C': In this world, but not of it

B': Crucifixion

A': Resurrection

IV. Can we see the pattern as a figure of every human life?

A: Birth in innocence

B: Coming to accountability—the violence of sin

C and D: Life in Babylon and the kingdom

E: Despair at our failings—something else?

F: Wandering in the wilderness

G: Epiphany: conversion, a change of heart

F': Wandering in the wilderness

E': Death

D' and C': Life in the spirit world

B': Judgment, often portrayed in scripture as something violent

A': Entrance into the Father's kingdom

Of course, there are other ways of thinking about the story of Moses and Israel in terms of figures or types. For example, as Mosiah 13:31; Alma 13:36, and Alma 25:15 show, we believe that the law of Moses is a figure of Christ.

You might wish to look at parts of that law to try to understand how they prefigure Christ. Some of the laws of sacrifice are obvious, but what about the other laws, such as the laws concerning leprosy?

For Christians, the only way to read Leviticus or Deuteronomy is figurally. Though we do not read those books looking for types of Christ, Jews sometimes read them figurally as well as literally.

One lesson of the story of Moses and Israel—and of Christ's life—may be that we cannot escape suffering, but must bear it. Our suffering can be a type of Christ's. (See Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 2:19–23; 4:13; and Jacob 1:8.) Could that typology be a comfort to someone who is suffering? How?

Before you read the story of Moses and Israel and the exodus from Egypt, read 1 Corinthians 10:1–6. How does Paul read this story? What does that suggest about how we can or should read it?

## Exodus 1

I am indebted to a friend, Arthur Bassett, for the inspiration of many of these questions.

**Verse 1:** In Hebrew, the first six words of this verse are an exact quotation of the first six words of Genesis 46:8: “These are the names of the children of Israel that came into Egypt.” Why does the writer or redactor make that rhetorical connection?

**Verse 5:** Given the Hebrew interest in numerology, it is probably significant that in Genesis 10 the nations of the world numbered seventy and in this verse the people of Israel number seventy. What might that suggest about the relation of Israel to the world?

Within the story of Israel that begins here, what does knowing that seventy persons came into Egypt tell us about the Israelites? Compare verse 7.

**Verses 8–10:** What does it mean to say that the new king did not know Joseph?

Why does the new pharaoh fear the Israelites?

Why does he say, “Let us deal *wisely* with them”? What does the word *wisely* suggest?

**Verse 11:** What was the first solution to the “Israelite problem”? How would that have supposedly solved Egyptian fears?

**Verses 15–16:** Why is Pharaoh willing to allow the women to live but not the sons?

**Verses 17–21:** What does this tell us about the Hebrew midwives? How is the midwives' reward (see the footnote to verse 21) appropriate considering what they have done?

**Verse 22:** Does the way that Pharaoh kills the children foreshadow what will happen to his army?

## Exodus 2

**Verse 3:** The Hebrew word translated “ark” is used only here and in the story of Noah. How is this ark a figure of Noah's ark? How is Moses a figure of Noah? How is each of them a figure of Christ?

**Verses 9–10:** What kind of household was Moses raised in, Israelite or Egyptian? When did he become a son of the pharaoh's daughter? When did he get the name Moses? What does the name mean in Egyptian? (See the LDS footnote for verse 10.) What does it mean in Hebrew? How is each of these meanings significant to the story?

**Verses 11–15:** It is apparent that Moses knew he was a Hebrew. Why does he kill the Egyptian?

How are the Egyptian smiting the Hebrew and the Hebrew smiting another Hebrew parallel? How do you explain the difference in the way that Moses handled each?

What does the man mean when he responds to Moses in verse 14? Why does he seem bitter towards Moses?

What does the beginning of verse 15 tell us about the man who threatened Moses in verse 14?

Why did Pharaoh want to kill Moses?



When Moses sits down by the well, what stories ought we to remember from Genesis? Are there any parallel stories in the New Testament? How does each help us understand the other?

**Verses 16–22:** Why does Moses begin this part of the story by telling us that he was dealing with the family of the priest of Midian? Why is his priesthood significant? (See D&C 84:6.)

In verse 18, the priest of Midian is called Ruel, meaning “friend of God.” We will see him called Jethro, meaning “excellence,” in Exodus 3:1. Why does Moses refer to him by two names? Might there be a reason for using one name in some places and the other name in other places?

Is it significant that Jethro is part of the household in which the covenant descends? What does that tell us about the covenant and the priesthood?

Why do we hear nothing or almost nothing about Moses’s children later?

Why does Moses tell us so little about his life in Midian? Where is Midian? Who are the people of Midian? (See Genesis 25:2 and 37:28).

**Verses 22–25:** Of what significance is it that the Lord remembered the covenant?

How is the covenant relevant to their bondage and to the Lord’s response to that bondage?

What does Moses mean when he says, “God had respect unto them,” in other words, respect for the children of Israel?

## Exodus 3

**Verses 1–6:** The JST says that “the presence of the Lord” appeared in the burning bush. What does that mean? Why say “presence of the Lord” rather than *Lord*? Is there a difference?

What is the significance of Moses removing his shoes? Why do we remove our shoes in holy places?

Why does the Lord introduce himself as he does: “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”?

Why is Moses afraid to look at God?

**Verses 7–10:** How does what the Lord says here relate to the covenant that he made with Abraham?

**Verse 11:** How would you put Moses’s question in your own words?

**Verse 12:** How is this an answer to Moses’s question, “Who am I?”

What sign does the Lord tell Moses will be a sign that the children of Israel have been delivered by God’s power? What is the significance of that sign?

**Verses 13–14:** Why does Moses ask about the name of God?

Why does the Lord answer, “I am”? What does that title signify? How is it meaningful to this situation? Is it partially a response to Moses’s question, “Who am I?” (verse 11)?

**Verses 15–16:** The Lord repeats his instructions here. Why?

**Verses 18–19:** Does the Lord tell Moses to misrepresent his intentions when he tells him to tell Pharaoh that the Israelites are going to go three days into the wilderness to sacrifice? Why does the Lord tell Moses that Pharaoh will refuse his request? Why have Moses make the request if the Lord knows that Pharaoh won't grant it?

**Verses 20–22:** What does the Lord mean when he says, "I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians"? Does he mean that the Egyptians will like the Israelites?

Why does the Lord promise the Israelites treasure? They will not be able to use it in the wilderness.

What does he mean when he says, "Ye shall spoil the Egyptians"?

## Exodus 5

**Verses 1–19:** What does Moses ask Pharaoh to do for the Israelites? How does he respond?

**Verses 20–21:** How do the people respond to Moses and Aaron? Is this, perhaps, what Pharaoh was hoping for?

**Verses 22–23:** What is Moses's complaint? What prompts the complaint? How does this compare to such things as Abraham bargaining with the Lord (Genesis 18:23–32)?

What does this suggest that Moses had expected? What do you think he hopes to gain by this complaint?

Why did the Lord put Moses in a position that caused the people to be burdened and to complain about him?

## Exodus 6

**Verse 3:** What does the change that the JST makes teach?

**Verses 6–8:** The promises that the Lord makes to Israel in verses 6 and 8 are reasonably clear, but what is he promising in verse 7? What does such a promise mean?

**Verse 9:** Why do the children of Israel not listen to Moses? What does it mean to say that they didn't listen to him?

What does the word *hearken* mean, and why is that verb so often used to describe our relation to the Lord and his prophets?

**Verses 9–13:** What does Moses mean, when he says that he has uncircumcised lips (verse 12)?

Why is the charge to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt directed to both the children of Israel and to the pharaoh rather than only to the pharaoh?

## Exodus 11

**Verse 2:** Why does the Lord instruct the Israelites to borrow jewels and gold from their neighbors?

**Verse 3:** What is the import of this verse?

What does it mean to say that the Israelites were favored in the sight of the Egyptians and that Moses was a great man in Egypt?

**Verse 4:** Is it significant that the plague will come at midnight?

**Verse 5:** Why is the firstborn the one to be killed? Can Christians understand this as having something to do with the sacrifice of Christ? If so, how, since the death of these children is not an atoning sacrifice, is it?

How do you understand that God has initiated a massacre of innocents—or *can* we understand it?

**Verse 7:** How do you explain this verse given that the scriptures also teach that God is no respecter of persons?

## Exodus 12

**Verse 2:** Why does the Lord make this month the beginning of months for Israel? What is the significance of this change of the calendar? What does it signify with regard to Christ?

**Verses 3–6:** Can you explain in your own words what the instructions are for the Passover lamb? Do these instructions have any figural significance?

**Verse 7:** Why was the blood to be put on the doorpost and on the lintel?

**Verse 8:** What does the unleavened bread symbolize? (See verse 34.) Is it a figure of anything in Christ's life or service? What about the bitter herbs?

**Verse 11:** Why must they eat the Passover lamb with their loins girded, their shoes on, and their staffs in their hands?

Why must they eat it in haste? Does that mean that they should eat the meal rapidly?

**Verse 14:** This verse says that the covenant people must celebrate the Passover forever. Why don't we celebrate it if we are the modern-day covenant people? Is there any reasonable sense in which the ordinance of the sacrament is a celebration of the Passover feast?

What about the differences between the two ordinances?

**Verse 31:** At what time of day does Pharaoh tell Moses and Aaron that the Israelites can go? So what?

**Verses 37–40:** How many Israelites leave Egypt? Were there non-Israelites with them? Do you suppose that they, too, had put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts?

How long had the children of Israel been in Egypt?

Look back at Genesis 15:12–14. What do you make of that prophecy? Why did it occur in “an horror of great darkness”?

**Verses 48–49:** What does verse 48 describe?

What does it mean to say that one law shall be to the home-born and the stranger? Who is the stranger?

## Exodus 13

**Verse 2:** What does it mean to sanctify the firstborn? Why should they be sanctified? What is the figural significance of sanctifying the firstborn? How would one sanctify a firstborn child?

Is the sanctification of Israel's firstborn related in any meaningful way to the deaths of the firstborn in Egypt?

**Verses 21–22:** What might the cloud and the fire signify?

## Exodus 14

**Verse 5:** Why does Pharaoh change his mind about letting the Israelites go?

**Verses 11–14:** Explain the Israelites' complaint in your own words. Put Moses's response in your own words. What does he mean when he says, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord"?

Does this interchange between Israel and Moses typify anything that we see in our own lives?

**Verse 15:** Does the Lord rebuke Moses in this verse for telling the Israelites to stand still?

**Verse 28:** Is there a connection or parallel between this drowning and the drowning of the Israelite children in chapter 1 (verse 22)? What is the meaning of such a parallel if there is a parallel? See if you can understand what the writer wants us to understand by showing us that parallel *without* thinking about how the one event justifies (or doesn't justify) the other.

# Lesson 14

Exodus 15–20; 32–34

As ever, there is a great deal of material in this reading. As you read the chapters assigned, ask yourself what kinds of parallels, types, and other meanings you see. How do these things help us understand our own lives? How do they help us understand our relation to Christ?

To help you think about that more profitably, also ask yourself, What did these things mean to the Israelites when they happened? What might they mean to Jews today? Thinking about how someone else understands these things might help us see things we would otherwise miss.

To try to keep the length of these study materials manageable, rather than asking questions about particular verses, I will give an overview of selected chunks of verse and then ask questions about them.

A hint for reading the story anew: as you read, remember that the story was written for theological purposes rather than for historical ones. The writer is telling the story of Israel so that we will learn something about God and his relation to his people, not so that we will know the facts concerning Israel's movement from Egypt to Canaan. That is not, of course, to say that the events didn't happen. It is just to say that the writer, traditionally assumed to be Moses but also redacted by later editors (as was the



Book of Mormon), tells us the things he does—and, presumably, omits the things he does—in order to fulfill his purposes. As you read, therefore, ask yourself about the theological purposes of the things you read: What is the narrator showing us about God’s relation to Israel? About Israel’s relation to God?

## Exodus 15

Moses and Miriam rejoice in song that the Israelites have been saved from the Egyptians (verses 1–21). The bitter waters of Marah are made sweet, and the Israelites are promised health (verses 22–27). Were I to choose a theme for this chapter as well as chapter 16 and the first part of 17, it would be “The Lord provides for his people.”

How would Israelites have understood this miracle? How would Jews understand it today? What can the miracle of the waters of Marah symbolize for a Christian? Is it reasonable, for example, to compare the tree to the cross?

How does the promise made in verse 26 compare to the blessing promised the descendants of Lehi over and over again in the Book of Mormon: “If ye keep my commandments, ye will prosper”? What does that commandment mean to the Israelites? To the Lehites? To us?

Notice that this way of making covenants—the promise of obedience by the inferior party brings the promise of blessing and judgment by the superior—is common in all Old Testament covenants, as it is also throughout the ancient Near East. How far can we go in assuming that

the properties of covenant peculiar to that culture at that time are properties of all covenants with God?

Why doesn't the narrator tell us anything about how the Israelites responded to God's offer of a covenant relation in verse 26?

## Exodus 16

When the Israelites hunger and complain, the Lord appears to them and promises manna and quails.

Are the Israelites exaggerating when they complain that in Egypt they had plenty of meat and could eat bread until they were full (verse 3)?

Why does Moses promise that Israel will "see the glory of the Lord" (verse 7)? Isn't it strange for them to receive such a blessing in response to their murmuring? Few righteous today receive that blessing. Why was it given to murmuring Israel?

The experience of Israel here at a place called Sin (a name that has nothing to do with our word *sin*) anticipates the experience that they will have at Sinai when the Lord will appear to Israel. Why does the Lord give them this preview, as it were?

What did the manna and the quails mean to ancient Israel? What might they mean to Jews today? What things might they mean to us?

What is the point of having manna last only one day, except on the Sabbath, when it lasts two?

What does the story in verses 22–30 teach? Remember that this is prior to the time when the Lord gave Israel the Ten Commandments. Does this story tell us anything about the Sabbath? What might it suggest about the rest of the Ten Commandments?

## Exodus 17

The Israelites thirst and complain; the Lord provides water (verses 1–7).

What do the stories of chapters 15 through the first half of 17 have to do with the story of the drowning of the Egyptians?

Is it significant that the Lord provides water, then manna and meat, and then water?

How are the stories of chapter 15–17 related to each other?

Note that in verse 2 Moses equates Israel’s quarrel with him, on the one hand, and them testing (“tempting”) the Lord, on the other.

Compare and contrast the Israelite motif of them doubting Moses, followed by proof that God is with him, with the Nephite motif of prosperity, followed by pride and then war. What do these suggest? Are they versions of the same cycle? How so or not so?

Why does Moses name the place “Testing and Contention”? Is it significant that Moses has reversed the order of the events: first they contended with him, then they tested the Lord?

Amalek attacks and is defeated (verses 8–16).

Why do you think the ancient Israelites kept this record in their holy books? In other words, how was it spiritually or theologically relevant to them? Or was it? Was it perhaps more politically relevant to them than spiritually? How might it be relevant to us, if at all?

Might the fact that the Amalekites are descendants of Esau be one reason for keeping a record of this battle, the first battle of Israel as a nation? What purpose would it serve in that case? Is there anything important spiritually that we learn from the story if we think of it in terms of that purpose?

What is the point of Moses's name for the altar he has built, "the Lord is my ensign"? What do you make of Moses's explanation in verse 16?

## Exodus 18

Jethro comes to meet Moses, bringing Moses's wife and sons (verses 1–12). Jethro counsels Moses on how to be a judge (verses 13–27).

How do the stories of Amalek and Jethro contrast? What does that contrast teach us about Israel's relations with others?

Why is it important that Moses learn to be a judge before he receives the law? What does that say to us about our own responsibilities?

As a Midianite, Jethro is a descendant of Abraham's wife Keturah (Genesis 25:1–6). Is Moses's marriage into Jethro's family theologically significant? Does it tell us anything

about the fate of Abraham’s family? If so, how is that related to the Abrahamic covenant?

Is it significant that Moses is reunited with his family at “the mount of God” (verse 5), Mount Sinai? How might this unification of the two sides of Abraham’s family be relevant to the Sinai covenant that is about to be given?

How is the information of D&C 84:6–14 relevant to what we see happening in this reunion of Moses and his family?

Why does Jethro rather than Moses offer the burnt offering (verse 12)? Has the priesthood been continued through a line that is not part of the Abrahamic covenant?

Does Israel distinguish between sacred and civil law? So what? Does that tell us anything about how Israel understood its covenant with the Lord?

On what authority can Jethro tell Moses that God *commands* him to take Jethro’s advice?

## Exodus 19

The Lord reveals his covenant with Israel to Moses: they are to be a peculiar (in other words, special or valued) treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (verses 1–6; see also Deuteronomy 14:2). With the older meaning of King James English, *peculiar* does not suggest “odd,” as it does for us. Moses reveals the covenant to the people and returns to the mountain to tell the Lord of Israel’s response (verses 7–8). The Lord tells Moses that he will speak to Israel from a cloud and that the people must purify themselves and wait for his appearance on the third

day. He also tells Moses to set up limits so that no one will come onto the mountain (verses 9–13). Moses returns, and on the third day a cloud descends on the mountain and a trumpet is heard coming from it. Moses is called back to the mountain (verses 14–20). Moses is told to tell the people not to come up on the mountain and to have the priests purify themselves (verses 21–25).

Note that André LaCocque argues that the Mosaic law was originally understood as something much more like Wisdom literature—sound advice for living a holy life—than like juridical law, that it came to be understood in juridical terms only after the return from exile.<sup>1</sup> He quotes Rolf Knierim: “The motivation for observing the law is not fear of punishment but the desire to conform to the will of God.” If that is true, then when Jesus preached against the ancient Pharisees, he was not introducing something new but calling Israel to return to the original understanding of the law. One could probably say the same thing about Paul’s teaching.

In Exodus 19:5, the root of the word translated “obey” means “hear.” What do hearing and obeying have to do with each other?

The word translated “peculiar people” means “enclosed” or “kept secret.” The sense is that the people of Israel are a prized and special treasure. What makes them special? Does their specialness imply that they are morally superior to others? Why or why not?

What does it mean to be a kingdom of priests (verse 6)? (The phrase “kingdom of priests” appears to refer to Is-

rael as a whole rather than saying that it will be a kingdom in which there are some priests.) With what is the Lord making a contrast? In other words, what would a kingdom be that wasn't a kingdom of priests? If Israel were itself a nation of priests, if everyone were a priest, then presumably they would be priests *for* someone else. For what people would Israel serve as priests? Does this have latter-day implications?

What do you make of the promise in verse 11 that the Lord will appear to *all* of Israel? When he does appear, how does he do so (verses 18–19)?

## Exodus 20

The Lord gives Israel the Ten Commandments (verses 1–17). The people fear, and they beg Moses to be their intermediary (verses 18–21). Moses returns to the mount, and the Lord repeats the first and second commandments (verses 22–23). The Lord gives instructions for how the altar is to be built (verses 24–26).

John I. Durham calls the Ten Commandments “Yahweh’s Principles for Life in Covenant.”<sup>2</sup> Does thinking of the Ten Commandments in those terms give us a different perspective on them? How so?

What do you make of the fact that the first commandment does not say that the Lord is the only God, but that he is the only God whom we may worship? What does it tell us about Israel that, in essence, is defined by the fact that it worships Yahweh, the Lord?

Why are the second (no graven images) and fourth (remember the Sabbath) commandments so much longer, more expanded, than the other eight? Ought we to infer anything for ourselves from this?

Given ancient Near Eastern culture and society, we ought to be surprised that the fifth commandment (honor your parents) specifically mentions both the father and the mother. (Compare Leviticus 19:3, which reverses the order: “mother and father.”) What do you make of this exception to the norm?

Why does the Lord use adultery as perhaps *the* predominant figure of sin against him and as a symbol of idolatry? (See, for example, Jeremiah 3:1 and Isaiah 57:1–13.)

Deuteronomy 14:2, which duplicates the language of Exodus 19:5–6, suggests that the Law itself is a sign of Israel’s calling to be a treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. How would the law be such a sign? How might we understand our own commandments as a sign of our status before God? Compare Romans 3:1–2, where Paul answers the question, “What is the advantage of being a Jew?” by saying “chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” The Greek word translated “oracles” means, literally, “messages.” Presumably that includes the commandments.

How are the commandments a sign of our covenant status? What would it mean for us to be a treasure, a kingdom of priests and priestesses, and a holy nation? How would we go about being that?



Why do you think the Lord reiterates the commandments against idolatry so soon after giving them the first time?

## Exodus 21:1–23:19

These chapters contain particulars of the Mosaic law.

How are the Ten Commandments related to the laws that follow? Notice that Exodus 21:1 describes the things that follow as *judgments*, which could also be translated “acts of justice” or “ordinances.” What does that suggest about how we should understand the laws?

Why are both laws (such as a city’s ordinances) and rituals such as baptism called ordinances?

In the beginning, the firstborn son of each family in Israel was dedicated to the service of the Lord (Exodus 22:29). How is that like the order of the priesthood under the patriarchs? How do the several stories of second-born sons receiving the blessing fit into this pattern?

What are we to make of the fact that Moses did not receive the priesthood through the lineage of the firstborn?

As the Firstborn of the Father, Christ offered his life as an atoning sacrifice. Does that pattern illuminate the meaning of the killing of the firstborn in Egypt?

Later the tribe of Levi was called to take the place of the firstborn (Numbers 3:11–13), and each Israelite family had to ransom its firstborn by making an offering to the Levites in recognition of their service as replacements for the family’s firstborn son (Luke 2:22–24).

### Exodus 23:20–33

The Lord promises that an angel will lead Israel, that they will have health, and that they will drive the Canaanites out of the promised land.

### Exodus 24

Moses and the seventy elders go up the mountain, though only Moses is allowed to approach the Lord (verses 1–2). Moses returns, tells Israel what he has received, and the people covenant to obey the commandments they have received (verse 3). Moses and the priests offer sacrifice to seal the covenant (verses 4–8). Moses and the seventy elders have a vision of the Lord and take part in a covenant meal (verses 9–11). Moses is promised tablets of stone, a law, and commandments, and he goes up onto the mountain for forty days (verses 12–18).

### Exodus 25–27

Israel is commanded to build a tabernacle.

### Exodus 28–31

Aaron and his sons officiate in the tabernacle, the fittings of the priestly robes and the tabernacle, and the ordinances prescribed for the tabernacle, particularly ordinances of atonement. The commandment to keep the Sabbath holy is reiterated (Exodus 31:12–17). Moses receives “two tables of testimony” (Exodus 31:18).

Why do you think the Lord reiterates the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy?

Is it significant that he reiterated the commandments against idolatry just before giving the particulars of the law and that he reiterates the Sabbath commandment at the end of giving it?

Whose testimony is engraved on the stone tablets? What might that testimony be of?

The word translated “testimony” in Exodus 31:18 can also be translated “warning.” How might the tablets have served as a warning?

## Exodus 32

The people are concerned with Moses’s delay; Aaron builds the golden calf and proclaims a feast day (verses 1–6). The Lord threatens to destroy the Israelites for their idolatry, but Moses intervenes and pleads for them (verses 7–14). Moses returns to the Israelite camp. In his anger, he breaks the tablets, then burns the golden calf and has the children of Israel drink the ashes (verses 15–20). The Levites slay 3,000 Israelites in retribution (verses 21–29). Moses pleads for forgiveness for Israel, offering his life for them (verses 30–35).

Some Jewish commentators argue that Aaron did not make a calf for Israel to worship as an idol. (The wording of Exodus 32:4–5 is the key to their interpretation.) Rather, they say, he made a calf to serve the same purpose served by the cherubim on the ark—namely, as a symbol of God’s resting place. (See Exodus 25:18–19.)

Nevertheless, the Israelites worshipped it. What might that suggest about Aaron? About Israel? When are we like Aaron? Like Israel?

Where did the Israelites get the ornaments that they melted down to make this calf? What purpose was that gold supposed to have served? (See, for example, Exodus 25:11, 24, 28–29, 31–32.)

### Exodus 33

The Lord tells the Israelites to leave for the promised land, but he threatens to have an angel lead them rather than lead them himself (verses 1–3). The people strip themselves of their ornaments as a sign of remorse (verses 4–6). Moses speaks with the Lord in the tabernacle and pleads with the Lord to be with Israel (verses 7–23).

What does it mean for a leader to plead for the people? What is the point of arguing or bargaining with God, as Abraham did in Genesis 18 and as Moses does here?

Do these kinds of stories give us direction about whom we ought to plead for?

### Exodus 34

Moses returns to the mountain with two tablets of stone (verses 1–4). He encounters the Lord (verses 5–9). The Lord makes a new covenant with Israel and promises to protect them (verses 10–12). He demands that they destroy the idols of those they conquer (verses 13–17) and that the firstborn of all their cattle be sanctified to him (verses

19–20). He gives them other commandments (verses 18, 21–27). Moses returns to Israel with the new covenant; his face glows (verses 28–35).

Be sure to read the JST expansion of this chapter. Compare D&C 84:18–27. How does this new covenant differ from the first covenant?

# Lesson 15

Numbers 11–14; 21:1–9

Besides the chapters of Numbers assigned for this lesson, I also recommend Numbers 16, 17, and 20.

It is unfortunate that we have no lessons from Leviticus. Though it is not immediately obvious how we should understand those scriptures and apply them to ourselves, the exercise of doing so can be very beneficial.

For these study notes and questions, I have depended heavily on study notes prepared by my friend Arthur Bassett several years ago. But I've edited and expanded them since then—more than once—so I am no longer sure who wrote what. So I take responsibility for these, though I'm not sure how much credit I can take.

## God's wrath

Before looking at the assigned readings, consider a topic that comes up frequently in the Old Testament: divine anger. The received wisdom in our culture is that the God of the Old Testament is a god of wrath and the God of the New Testament is a loving God—though each is the same God. Part of this confusion may stem from our not understanding the subtleties of love and what it means for God. Or we may be guilty of oversimplification, assuming that we already understand what anger is, since we have

experienced it so often in our own lives. Therefore, when God shows anger, we think of him as being vindictive and cruel at times. But, following Paul's lead (found in his teachings on sorrow; see 2 Corinthians 7:10), just as there are two types of sorrow—godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world—there might also be two types of anger—godly anger and the kind we commonly experience in our own lives. The second kind most of us know well. The first may be entirely foreign to our nature and understanding. Its foreignness would require that we come to scriptures that speak of God's wrath with a prayerful heart in an honest attempt to learn.

Here are some questions that may help us understand that second kind of anger:

1. Is there a substantial difference between our anger and God's anger? What causes both? What is the end desired in each? Is one largely *self-centered* and the other primarily *other-centered*?
2. How does love figure into God's anger? Is there a relationship between his anger and his constant reference to mercy and long-suffering?
3. What does the Lord mean when he says, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" (Revelation 3:19)? What does love have to do with chastisement? How can one truly love someone who has chastised him or her? What is the love shown immediately after chastening (D&C 121:43) designed to accomplish?

The word *rebuke* in Revelation 3:19 translates the Greek word *elencho*, the ordinary meaning of which is to show or demonstrate or prove something, to convince of wrongdoing. The word *chasten* translates the Greek word *paideuo*, which means “to educate,” “to teach to be responsible.”

4. What is the relationship between chastisement and broken hearts and contrite spirits?

What do a broken heart and a contrite spirit have to do with coming to love and understand God?

Why does the Lord instruct the Nephites that he wants a sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (3 Nephi 9:20)?

What is the connection between sacrifices—ancient and modern—and broken hearts and contrite spirits?

The word *contrite* literally means “bruised or crushed; worn or broken by rubbing” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Does that definition add anything to your understanding of what the Lord requires?

5. Does God’s anger in the Old Testament, especially in the Old Testament works we are studying, have anything to do with the fact that he is in the initial stages of bringing an entire covenant people to be?

Do you think that he would appear as wrathful if he were dealing with a single individual?

6. How much of what we perceive to be anger is really guilt on our part, a perception that he is angry rather than real anger on his part?



## Numbers 11

**Verses 1–3:** Each previous time that we have seen a story of the disaffection of the children of Israel, it has been for some specific complaint: no water, no bread, etc. Here, however, no reason for the disaffection is specified. What is the cause of Israel’s complaint this time?

Notice the narrator’s explanation of the name that Moses gives to the place, Taberah, meaning “fire.” How is fire symbolically important? Consider the fire associated with God, for example: at the burning bush, and later the entire mountain of Sinai; the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites by night; burnt offerings; the golden calf; and in statements such as “God will come in a pillar of fire” (D&C 29:12), “I will cause that your heart will burn within you” (D&C 9:8), “the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10), “a refiner’s fire” (D&C 128:24), “he will baptize you with . . . fire” (Matthew 3:11), the residence of God is like a sea of glass and fire (D&C 130:7), and so forth.

How is Moses’s role in this story different than it has been in the previous stories of Israel’s complaints?

How is that role the same here and in Exodus 32?

**Verses 4–6:** Verse 4 tells us that it was “the mixt multitude,” or rabble, that began to complain rather than Israel. What does that tell us? Does it change the meaning or application of the story?

Does verse 10 contradict verse 4 as to who was complaining? Compare verses 4–6 to the complaint in Exodus 16:3. How are they the same? How different?

**Verses 10–15:** In previous cases, when Israel complained, Moses pled with God for them. Here (verse 10), he is also angry? Why? Are these Israelite grumblings different from the previous ones?

Does Psalm 78:17–19 help us understand what is going on here? If so, how?

Moses questions his ability to lead Israel by questioning the Lord: “Why have you done evil to me? Why haven’t I found favor in your sight?” (Leviticus 11:10). Is Moses justified in questioning the Lord?

Why does Moses want the Lord to kill him (verse 15)? How serious do you think Moses was? Was he just being hyperbolic?

Are we supposed to admire Moses here, or is the Bible showing Moses as a human being who tires and gets irritated? If the latter, why?

Does this and the story that follows (verses 16–17) suggest, perhaps, that Moses has not been heeding Jethro’s advice about leading by delegating?

**Verses 16–17:** What was the purpose of the seventy men who were called to help share the leadership with Moses? Are these the same seventy elders who were with Moses on Mount Sinai, who also saw the Lord (Exodus 24:9–11)?

What is meant by “the spirit which is upon thee” (verse 17)?

Why does the Lord speak in this way—“I will take some of the Spirit that you have received and put it on the Seventy”—as if we couldn’t each have the Spirit equally? Does that way of speaking about the Spirit teach us anything?

For example, does it say anything about what it means to share in both the administrative responsibilities and in the Spirit needed to carry out those responsibilities?

**Verse 18:** Why do the people have to sanctify—in other words, cleanse themselves—before they eat the flesh that the Lord is going to provide? Do we sanctify ourselves before partaking of the flesh provided by the Lord? Can you give specific examples of what that sanctification would entail?

**Verses 19–20:** Is the flesh to be provided a blessing or a punishment?

What do you make of what the Lord does here? Is he being portrayed as petulant?

**Verse 25:** What might be meant by “they prophesied and did not cease”? What does it mean to prophesy? (Is Revelation 19:10 relevant here?)

**Verses 26–29:** Why is this story included?

What do you make of the fact that those who received the spirit of prophecy were *not* those who had been chosen to be leaders, among the Seventy?

What is Moses asking when he asks Joshua, “Enviest thou for my sake?” (Numbers 11:29.)

How do you explain Joshua’s response to the report that Medad and Eldad, two of the elders of Israel, were prophesying in the camp (verses 27–29)?

Is it common to be jealous when someone else has a power that we think has been reserved to us?

What does Joshua's response imply about Israel's concept of a prophet? Do we sometimes see this attitude reflected among church members today?

What would it mean for every person to be a prophet?

The Lord promised Moses that part of the Spirit he had received would be shared with the Seventy (verse 17; see also verse 25). Do we see Moses wishing that the Lord would give all of Israel a share in that Spirit? If so, what does that mean?

What is Moses wishing for when he says, "Would . . . that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (verse 29)?

## Numbers 12

**Verses 1–3:** What might have caused Miriam and Aaron to turn against their own brother (verses 1–2)? Is there any connection between this and Joshua's jealousy in chapter 11?

Biblical scholars are divided on the identity of the "Ethiopian woman"—more accurately "Cushite woman," though Cush was in Ethiopia. However, *Cushite* may also refer to the region of the Cassites, east of Babylonia. Few believe that this wife is Zipporah.

Is the complaint that Israel raises in verse 2 a separate complaint or part of the complaint in verse 1?

Why might it be difficult for anyone to recognize a prophetic calling in one's own brother? Note that Psalm 69:8 and John 7:5 both imply that Jesus's own brothers did not believe in his divine calling. How could that possibly be?

Why does the writer—is it Moses or a later redactor?—include the parenthetical note of verse 3, that he was the meekest of all men? Is this supposed to tell us anything about what happens next?

**Verses 6–9:** In his rebuke to Aaron and Miriam, how does the Lord distinguish Moses from other prophets?

What does the Lord mean when he says, “Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

What is the significance of the Lord’s departure from Israel’s camp (verse 9)?

**Verses 10–11:** Why is only Miriam punished with leprosy? Might it have anything to do with Aaron’s calling as the high priest, and the requirements regarding a high priest—that he be without blemish?

Does the fact that she is mentioned first in the complaint (verse 1) suggest that perhaps she was the leader of this attack on Moses?

Is it significant that Miriam’s skin becomes “white as snow” and that the Cushite wife of Moses, about whom she complained, was probably dark-skinned?

**Verses 11–13:** What do you make of Aaron’s and Moses’s responses?

**Verses 14–15:** What is meant by the Lord’s comparison between what had happened and a father spitting in the face of his daughter?

Is the punishment laid down in these verses a substitute for leprosy or an additional punishment?

## Numbers 13

**Verses 1–20:** Moses sends spies from each tribe to investigate the land of Canaan. The only one who returns confident that the land can be occupied is Caleb (of the tribe of Judah, verse 6).

Is there any typological significance in the fact that Joshua (meaning “Jehovah helps”; also translated “Jesus”) of the tribe of Ephraim (a son of Joseph) is one of the spies?

Why does Moses change Oshea’s name (which means “help”) to Joshua?

About what time of year did this spy trip occur (verse 20)? So what?

**Verse 6:** Caleb is identified as a leader from the tribe of Judah, but in Numbers 32:12 he is also identified as a Kenezite, in other words, as a descendant of Kenaz, the youngest son of Esau (see Genesis 36:10–11). What does this tell you about the tribes of Israel and their relation to the descendants of Esau? What might that say about the contemporary idea one sometimes hears that the difficulties between Israel and Palestine are a result of the difficulty between Jacob and Esau?

**Verse 21:** Use the map in your Bible to see how much of the land of Canaan those chosen for this mission spied out.

**Verses 30–31:** What accounts for the difference between Caleb’s recommendation and that of the rest?

**Verse 32:** To whom do the Israelites report about Canaan in verse 32? To whom had they previously reported? What does that difference suggest?

In verse 31, when the spies say “they are stronger than we,” does *we* refer to the spies, to the Israelites as a whole, or to the Israelites and God? What does each answer tell us?

How do you explain the seeming contradiction in verse 32: the land eats up its inhabitants, and the people who live there are of great stature?

## Numbers 14

**Verses 2–3:** What lament from the Israelites has been added to that of wanting to return to Egypt? How do you explain this addition?

**Verse 4:** When the Israelites suggest choosing a captain for themselves who will lead them back to Egypt, the word translated “captain” suggests a tribal leader who was both a military leader and a judge.

**Verse 6:** Tearing one’s garments is a sign of distress or mourning. Why do Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes?

**Verse 8:** What does it mean for the Lord to *delight* in a people? Why that word rather than something like “approve of”?

**Verse 9:** What does Joshua mean when he says that the Canaanites are bread, in other words food, for the Israelites?

**Verse 10:** Why do the Israelites suggest stoning Joshua and Caleb? To this point we have seen stoning as punishment only for transgressing Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:13), killing someone using an ox (Exodus 21:28), sacrificing children to Molech (Leviticus 20:2), divining spirits (Exodus 20:27), and blasphemy (Exodus 24:13–23). Do the Israelites be-

lieve that Joshua and Caleb have transgressed one of these? For example, do they think that the two of them have done something comparable to transgressing Mount Sinai or blasphemy? If not, on what grounds do they believe that Joshua and Caleb should be stoned?

**Verses 10–20:** What prevents the congregation from stoning Caleb and Joshua? How is that significant?

What is “the glory of the Lord”?

What does the Lord threaten (verse 12)?

As we have seen several times before, here we see Moses pleading with God, arguing with him. What does that tell us about our relation to God? About the prophet’s relation? Note that Moses’s argument when he pleads for God’s mercy doesn’t change much from what it always is: “Think of what the Egyptians will say if you kill the Israelites now, after having freed them and promised them their own land.” Why does he think that God would or should worry about what other people think about him?

**Verses 21–37:** Just as the Egyptians had rejected ten miracles before they would let Israel go, Israel failed to hearken to the Lord and his miracles ten times (verse 22). If that is significant, in what way?

What does the Lord mean when he says that Israel has tempted him, in other words, put him to the test? Why are they punished for testing God?

What do you make of the parallel in these verses that explicitly compares God to the Egyptians: as the Egyptians



wouldn't let Israel go from Egypt, God will not let them come into the promised land (verses 23–25)?

Who escapes this condemnation (verses 24 and 30)?

Why does the Lord swear by himself? (In the Bible, God uses this phrase only here, verse 28, and in verse 21). What does that mean?

Why were Caleb and Joshua the only two to be allowed to enter into the rest of the Lord in Canaan?

What age restriction is placed upon the Israelites regarding who would be allowed into the promised land (verse 29)? Given that restriction, how old would the oldest of the Israelites be—with the exception of Joshua and Caleb—when they came into the land (verse 33)?

What does God mean when he says that their children will bear the whoredoms of the parents (verse 33)?

What happened to the spies who brought back a negative report (verses 36–37)? Why?

**Verses 39–44:** How do you explain the sudden outward repentance on the part of some of the Israelites (39–40)?

Why do you think the Israelites suddenly wanted to go into the land when only two out of the twelve spies had brought back a positive report (verse 40)?

Why do you think they wanted to go even after Moses told them the Lord wouldn't go in with them?

Note the first reference, in verse 44, to the ark of the covenant being used as a weapon, i.e., as a way of bringing God into the battle.

## Numbers 21:1–9

The Israelites were fighting their enemies as early as the first year or so after leaving Egypt (verse 3). Whom had they previously battled, when Aaron and Hur held up Moses's arms (Exodus 17: 8–16)?

Nehama Leibowitz points out that in their previous complaints the Israelites had said: “Why did you—Moses—bring us out of Egypt?”<sup>1</sup> (See, for example, Numbers 16:13.) In verse 5, however, they use the plural: Moses *and* God have brought them into the wilderness. What does this change of pronoun suggest?

Does this change have anything to do with the punishment that follows?

Notice also what the Israelites are beginning to say about the manna (verse 5). The clause “our soul loatheth this light bread” could also be translated “we detest this worthless food.”

Why would the Lord send “fiery serpents” (verse 6)?

Leibowitz also points out that the verb here is not best translated “sent.” Rather, “let go” is better: he didn't stop them. Her understanding is that the Israelites are no longer satisfied to live on what the Lord provides (manna), but want a more natural life, so the Lord allows them to live a more natural life, not restraining the serpents in the desert.

Why do the Israelites accept the serpents as a just punishment (verse 7).

When Moses prays for relief from the serpents, why is he told to make a serpent of brass (verse 8)? What is the result (verse 9)? Why?

Have you ever seen this symbol of a serpent wrapped around a rod, called a *caduceus*? Where? (It is interesting to note that it is a symbol used by both the medical association and by the Romans as an identifying feature of the god Mercury. Later in the New Testament, in Acts 14:12, Paul is mistaken for Mercury. )

Why would God use this symbol when it is a representation of the very thing that is killing the Israelites? Why use it when we usually think of the serpent as a symbol for Satan?

The *Zohar* (the basic text of Jewish mysticism, also called *Kabbalah*) says: “‘Everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.’ Why? As soon as he (the victim) turns his eyes and sees the likeness of the serpent, he forthwith becomes filled with awe and prays to the Lord, knowing that this was the punishment that he deserved. As long as the son sees his father’s strap, he is afraid of his father . . . Regarding this it is stated: ‘When he looketh upon it, he shall live.’ He saw the strap with which He struck—and this led him to being redeemed.”<sup>2</sup>

Does this provide any insights for LDS readers?

What additional insights are added to this event by the prophets of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 25:20; Alma 33:19–22; and Helaman 8:14–15)?

What was it that healed those who looked upon it for help?

What was the final fate of the brazen serpent on the rod (2 Kings 18:4)?

Notice what can happen to relics: first they serve simply to remind, but over time they often come to be venerated and even worshiped in a manner such as the brazen serpent, to whom the Israelites “offered incense.” (Note: *nehushtan* means “a copper thing” [copper is the major ingredient of brass]—Hezekiah’s term of contempt for what had come to be worshipped as a sacred icon.) What, then, is the difference between the brazen serpent and the relics that God instructed Moses to put into the ark of the covenant? Why does God condemn one and commend the other?

Do we have relics? If so, what is their benefit? What is their danger?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 16

Numbers 22–24; 31:1–16

## Who is Balaam?

All of a sudden a non-Israelite prophet appears. Who is he? Relying on Numbers 23:7, Philip Budd suggests that Balaam is a Syrian.<sup>1</sup> Is he really a prophet? If no, why not? If yes, in what sense of the word? (Archaeologists have discovered an inscription mentioning Balaam in a probable temple complex in Transjordan. The inscription comes from the eighth or seventh century BC, and may or may not refer to the same person).<sup>2</sup>

New Testament writers took Balaam as a negative object lesson. Peter, speaking of those who left the church because of lust, refers to Balaam's "preferring the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15–16); Jude compares Balaam's transgression to Cain's (Jude 1:11); and the Lord, speaking to John on the Isle of Patmos, speaks of the doctrine of Balaam, who taught "the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication" (Revelation 2: 14). However, it is not clear from the text we have why they would do so (but as we will see, there is at least one hint).

Nehama Leibowitz suggests a comparison between Balaam and other prophets. In Jeremiah 1:4, Ezekiel 1:3, Hosea 1:1, and Joel 1:1, we see the calling of a prophet described in the same way each time: "The word of the Lord came unto

\_\_\_\_\_.”<sup>3</sup> Or we see something like Ezekiel 1:3: “The hand of the Lord was there upon him.” However, we don’t see anything like that in Balaam’s case. Instead, we see Balaam seeking out the Lord (Numbers 23:1–3, 14–16). As Leibowitz says of the prophets, “Far from seeking [the office of a prophet], it was thrust on them.”<sup>4</sup> The difference in wording may suggest that Balaam sought after the office.

Jewish commentators have also noticed that whereas the prophets mark their prophecies with “saith the Lord,” Balaam marks his with “Balaam . . . hath said.” (See, for example, Numbers 24:3.) But this difference isn’t unambiguous, for in Balaam’s third experience with the Lord we see that the Spirit came on him (Numbers 24:2) rather than him seeking after it.

So was Balaam a prophet or not? How do we understand Balaam’s relation to the Lord and to Israel? Does this help us understand, perhaps, the different things that the word *prophet* can mean in the Old Testament? How is that different from what we might at first assume?

As you think about Balaam, think also about Melchizedek and Jethro. Do they show us that the ancient world was different religiously than we might have thought?

## Numbers 22

**Verse 1:** Where was Moab? Who were the Moabites, and how were they related to Israel (Genesis 19:30–37)? Keep them in mind because Ruth, whom we will study later, is a Moabite, and Christ descends in part from that lineage.

**Verses 5–6:** Who was Balaam? What led Balak to believe that Balaam could stop the Israelites?

The phrase “in the land of the children of his people” should perhaps be amended to read “in the land of the children of Ammon,” making Pethor a place in Transjordan rather than in Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup>

**Verse 7:** The Moabites joined in this venture with the Midianites. Who were the Midianites? Where have we met them before, and why might they unite with the Moabites? What ancestor did they share in common? (See Genesis 11:27.)

Is it relevant that Moses took exile in Midian and married someone from there? Of course, Jethro, his father-in-law and a source of important advice (Exodus 18:13–27) as well as the Melchizedek Priesthood (D&C 84:6), was a Midianite. He also offered a sacrifice in which Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel took part (Exodus 18:12). What does that tell us about the Midianites?

The phrase “the rewards of divination” might be better translated “the price of divination.” What does that tell us? Does it tell us something about Balaam or about how Balak understood what Balaam did?

**Verse 13:** How do you account for the fact that God talks directly with Balaam? In other words, what seems to be Balaam’s relationship to God, and what was his answer to Balak’s emissaries?

What changes characterize the second delegation sent to Balaam—both in composition of the delegation and in the rewards offered? (Compare verses 7, 15–17.)



What indication is given that Balak is beginning to panic?

**Verse 18:** What does Balaam’s initial answer to the second delegation tell us about Balaam’s feelings then? What does the fact that he goes with the delegation tell us about his feelings? Are these two in conflict?

**Verse 20:** Why might the Lord have allowed Balaam to go with the second delegation sent by Balak?

Notice the change made in the JST: “rise up, if thou wilt go with them; but . . .” whereas the KJV has “rise up, and go with them; but . . .” How do *if* and *and* differ in meaning? Does the JST change make more sense of what is happening?

What caution does the Lord give Balaam?

**Verse 21:** In verse 20, the Lord prefaced his permission to go to Balak with “If the men come to call thee.” This verse says nothing about the men coming to call Balaam. It begins simply with “And Balaam rose up.” Is that significant? If so, what does it suggest?

**Verse 22:** The standard translation of this verse is “God’s anger was kindled *because* he went” (italics added), but it is difficult to see why God would be angry with Balaam for going when he had given permission for him to go. Timothy Ashley suggests that we can legitimately translate the phrase as “God’s anger was kindled *when* he went.”<sup>6</sup> In that case, we don’t know the cause of God’s anger at Balaam.

You may be interested to know that the word translated “adversary” is “satan,” though in this case the context makes clear that this was an angel of the Lord. The Hebrew word

*satan* is a general term for an adversary that we also use as the proper name of *the* adversary, Satan.

**Verses 23–33:** This is the only place besides Genesis 3:1 where the Bible depicts a talking animal. What do you make of the experience of Balaam and his donkey, of the seer who cannot see?

**Verses 34–35:** When Balaam becomes repentant, why does the angel tell him to go to Balak?

**Verse 37:** What does Balak think kept Balaam from coming promptly?

**Verse 41:** This is the first time that we come across the pagan god Baal. We will meet his followers often from this point. To find out about him, go to the LDS Bible Dictionary. For more information, see the entry “Baal” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.<sup>7</sup> Most libraries will have a copy.

## Numbers 23

**Verses 1–3:** What ritual does Balaam engage in before going to inquire of the Lord? Why does he call the offering *Balak’s* burnt offering? (Compare verses 3 and 6.)

**Verses 7–10:** What is the substance of the answer Balaam gives to the assembled elders of Moab and Midian?

The King James translation calls Balaam’s utterance a parable. “Oracle” and “discourse” are other translations. Balaam gives his prophecies in poetic form (Numbers 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–24), though the KJV doesn’t show that. How do you explain the ending of verse 9, in which Israel is portrayed as alone and insignificant, and the beginning

of verse 10, in which Israel is portrayed as innumerable? To whom and how could an innumerable nation be insignificant?

**Verses 11–12:** What might one expect if a king has been dealt with as Balak thinks he has been dealt with (verse 11)?

In verse 12, Balaam no longer uses Balak's kingly title in referring to him. (Compare Numbers 22:10.) What might this suggest?

**Verse 13:** Why does Balak move Balaam to another place to view the Israelites, hoping he will curse them from that location? In other words, what does he seem to hope this move will accomplish? Notice that seven more altars are built and seven more sacrifices offered at this new location. Why?

**Verses 19–24:** What new information is added in Balaam's second report to Balak?

**Verse 25:** Why does Balak tell Balaam that if he is not going to curse Israel he should at least not bless them?

**Verses 27–30:** Why is the location changed again? Is there perhaps something like Christ's temptation in the wilderness going on here, an analogy to Lucifer taking Jesus to three different locations to tempt him?

**Verse 28:** Balak has taken Balaam to three different places to offer sacrifice and to demand that God curse Israel: the high places of Baal (Numbers 22:41), the field of Zophim (Numbers 23:14), and the top of Peor (verse 28). Why has he moved him about this way? One commentator points out that the first was a place of worship of the god of fertility and material plenty, the second the place of worship of a god who foretold

the future (*Zophim* means “lookers” or “watchers”), and the third to the place of worship of a god of sexual license.<sup>8</sup> Does that help explain why Balak chose the places he did? How?

## Numbers 24

**Verses 1–9:** How is what Balaam does this time different from the previous two times (verse 1)?

Why does he mention that his eyes are open while he is in the trance (verses 4 and 15)? Is this a parallelism, and if it is, what are we to see from it?

Notice that Balaam uses a lot of figurative speech in this blessing. In verse 6, for example, there are four consecutive similes, all related to a well-watered garden. What is the symbolic significance of that theme? What is the theme of the end of verse 7 and verses 8–9? How are the themes of verses 5–7a and 7b–9 related to each other?

How is this blessing related to the Abrahamic covenant (e.g., Genesis 12:2–3)? It may be interesting to compare this blessing to the several versions of the Abrahamic covenant.

What is different in Balaam’s experience this time as he comes before the Lord? (Compare verse 9 with Judah’s blessing in Genesis 49:9.)

**Verses 10–11:** Striking one’s hands together seems to have been a sign of contempt. (Compare Lamentations 2:15 and Job 27:23.) Of whom or what is Balak contemptuous? Why?

Notice that Balak tells Balaam that God has kept Balaam from honor (verse 11). Do those who wish to serve often have to forego honor? Why?

**Verse 13:** Nehama Leibowitz notes that there is a gradual change in how Balaam responds to Balak (all translations are hers): “Can I say anything? Whatever God shall put in my mouth that I shall speak” (Numbers 22:38); “Surely that which God shall put in my mouth that shall I observe to speak” (Numbers 23:12); “Surely I have told you saying: All that the Lord shall speak that shall I do” (Numbers 23:26); and “I cannot violate the word of the Lord to do good or evil out of mine own heart; that which the Lord shall speak, that shall I speak” (Numbers 24:13.<sup>9</sup> Does that gradual change denote a change in Balaam? If so, of what kind? Is it for good or for worse?

**Verse 14:** Is Balaam giving comfort to Balak by saying, “This is what Israel will do to your people, but not until the last days”? In other words, “Don’t worry, all of this is a long time from now.” If so, might this be part of the reason that Balaam has become a negative figure for Israel?

**Verses 17–25:** What is to be the fate of the pagan nations, according to Balaam? When will this be fulfilled?

Who is the “Star out of Jacob,” the “Sceptre out of Israel,” that shall smite the corners of Moab? (This is among the earliest of the major Messianic prophecies given in the Old Testament. Note the references that parallel Judah’s blessing in Genesis 49:10).

Why Judah? Might the star in the eastern heavens that appeared at the birth of Christ have any association with this prophecy?

## Numbers 31

**Verses 1–6:** What is the composition of the army sent out against the Midianites?

It is ironic that Moses's last act before his death/translation is to respond to a call to send an army to destroy the Midianites. After all, he himself had been sheltered by them for forty years of his life and had married one of their daughters: his children are half Midianite.

What does it mean that the priests took “the holy instruments” into battle against the Midianites (verse 6)? Are the Israelites taking the ark of the covenant with them into battle? Why might they do this?

Is it significant that neither Moses nor Aaron goes with them into battle?

**Verse 8:** What finally happens to Balaam? Why might the Lord allow this? (See Deuteronomy 23:3–6 and Joshua 13:22; 24:10.)

**Verses 15–17:** Though this goes slightly beyond the assigned reading, do these verses give us any understanding of the earlier events? Do they help us understand Balaam's negative reputation in the New Testament?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 17

Deuteronomy 6; 8; 11; 32:1–4, 15–18, 30–40, 45–47

## Background

In these notes, as in the last several, I will make a few points based on some of the scholarly literature that is available. But it is important to recognize that those discussions are not particularly relevant to Sunday School classes themselves. We don't need them in order to understand the Bible as a religious text or to think about how its teachings apply to our lives. Scholarly information and ideas have an important place in our studies, and in my experience they can sometimes add significantly to our spiritual insights, but they are ultimately collateral to what we do in Sunday School. One need not be a biblical scholar to study and learn from the Bible.

The title of the book from which this week's reading comes, Deuteronomy, is the result of a third-century-BC Greek mistranslation of Deuteronomy 17:18. "A copy of this law" in Hebrew gets translated as "the second law": *to deuteronomion*. The Hebrew title of the book is simply "These are the words," in other words, the words of Moses, but it is also referred to as *Mishneh Torah*, meaning "second law," like the Greek title. The book has the form of a farewell speech by Moses: he bids Israel farewell and



binds them with covenant, calling on them to remember the Lord. (Compare King Benjamin's speech in Mosiah.)

Moses's audience is composed primarily of those born in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb remain of those who had known Egypt. The oldest in the group, with the exception of these two and Moses, would be sixty years of age (Numbers 14:29), so the entire camp of Israel would be relatively young. Moses, now 120 years old, would be twice the age of the oldest among them. (Remember, though, that ages in the Old Testament almost always have numerological significance as much or more than literal meaning. We don't know how old Moses was when he died, but we know that he had lived a full life and that he was much older than anyone else.) Deuteronomy is Moses's final plea to the children of Israel to abide by the laws of God and especially to remember the Lord's hand in their deliverance.

The key word throughout the book is *remember*. Compare the sacrament prayers, where that is also the key word. Why is remembrance so important? What should we remember?

I make somewhat of an exception to my general rule about ignoring biblical scholarship for the book of Deuteronomy because it is a particularly problematic text. The major problem is that it repeats the content of Exodus. Joseph Blenkinsopp compares Exodus and Deuteronomy in this way:<sup>1</sup>

*Exodus*

1–18 From Egypt to Sinai

19–20:21 Covenant and  
Ten Commandments20:22–23:33 Book of the  
Covenant

24 Concluding Ceremony

32–34 Aaronic Apostasy,  
Intercession of Moses,  
Renewal of Alliance (i.e.,  
Covenant)*Deuteronomy*1–4:43 From Sinai to  
Moab4:44–5:22 Covenant and  
Ten Commandments12–26 Deuteronomic  
Code27–28 Concluding Cere-  
mony9:7–10:5 Aaronic Apos-  
tasy, Intercession of Mo-  
ses, Tablets Rewritten

Blenkinsopp's chart shows that, except for moving the Aaronic apostasy and the renewal of the covenant to earlier in the story, the story told in Deuteronomy has the same structure as the story told in Exodus. Of course, it is possible that is exactly what happened, that the history of Israel had the same shape on its way from Egypt to Sinai and then on its way from Sinai to Moab. It is possible that the book is as historical as it seems to claim to be. I take that possibility seriously. However, most biblical scholars have been skeptical. For them, the parallels between the two histories suggest that the second narrative (Deuteronomy) was modeled on the first (Exodus) and so is problematic as a

history *in the way we think of history, though not necessarily problematic as ancient peoples thought of it.* Those skeptical of the book's historical accuracy have often linked Deuteronomy to the book of the law found during the temple's renovation at the time of King Josiah (2 Kings 22, especially verse 8) or to one of the other seventh-century-BC reforms.

Deuteronomy has also been linked with Israel's return from exile and the assumption that they reinterpreted the law based at least partly on their experiences in Babylon. (See Nehemiah 8). The assumption is that whenever Deuteronomy was written, it was a time period when leaders needed to justify religious reforms they made at that time, or that it was written after the exile to justify the returnees' domination over those who had stayed behind as well as to give Israel its own constitution, like what they had seen in Persia.<sup>2</sup> Among other things, André LaCocque discusses the possibility that, prior to the exile, the Mosaic law was not understood as law in our sense, but as law in a much looser sense, a sense closer to the understanding of Jesus and Paul: advice for living the good life rather than rules for regulating society.

From a theological or exegetical point of view, however, the problem with the scholarly view is that Deuteronomy is frequently quoted in the New Testament, particularly in Matthew and Hebrews. For example, when Jesus tells us what the first and greatest commandment is (Matthew 22:37–38), he is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5. What are we to make of the New Testament quotations of Deuteronomy if it is not what it claims to be? The problem isn't insuperable, but it is a problem.

Suppose we take Deuteronomy at face value. Then by creating a variation on Blenkinsopp's chart, we could get this version of Israel's history:

<b><i>From Egypt to Sinai</i></b>	Exodus 1–18
<i>First dispensation of the covenant</i>	
Covenant and Ten Commandments	Exodus 19–20:21
Book of the Covenant	Exodus 20:22–23:33
Concluding ceremony	Exodus 24
Aaronic apostasy, intercession of Moses, renewal of the covenant, tablets rewritten	Exodus 32–34 Deuteronomy 9:7–10:5
<b><i>From Sinai to Moab</i></b>	Deuteronomy 1–4:43
<i>Second dispensation of the covenant</i>	
Covenant and Ten Commandments	Deuteronomy 4:44–5:22 (note also 29:1)
Deuteronomic Code	Deuteronomy 12–26
Concluding ceremony	Deuteronomy 27–28

This purely speculative way of looking at the text assumes that Deuteronomy 9:7–10:5 is not presently where it belongs in the text. If it were at the beginning of the Deuteronomy story (as I have suggested in this chart), then it would be the point of overlap with the Exodus story.

Something like this understanding of the text accommodates our understanding that Moses received the covenant and law of the Melchizedek Priesthood, but because of the apostasy of Israel, that first covenant was replaced with the covenant and law of the Aaronic Priesthood. Nevertheless, a number of Latter-day Saint biblical scholars accept some version of the standard scholarly view, so we can assume that scholarly view is not incompatible with our understanding of the first covenant and the second.

## Deuteronomy 6

**Verse 1:** Perhaps the word translated “judgments” in verse 1 is better translated “ordinances.” How are judgments and ordinances related in such a way that either could be used to translate the same Hebrew word?

**Verse 2:** The use of the word *fear* to describe our attitude toward God is, I believe, unique to Hebrew. We use that word to describe our emotional state when we anticipate something bad or evil, and so does Hebrew (e.g., Genesis 31:31; Deuteronomy 5:5; 1 Samuel 7:7). However, Hebrew uses the same word also to describe the attitude we should have toward our parents (Leviticus 19:3), holy places (Leviticus 26:2), and God, his name, and his work (Psalms 112:1; 86:11; Habukkuk 3:2), though we would probably

describe that attitude as reverence. Why do you think that attitudes of fear and reverence were understood as variations of the same thing by the Hebrews?

How are our days prolonged when we keep the commandments?

**Verses 4–6:** These verses are called the Shema (from the first Hebrew word of verse 3, *hear*). Copies were placed in the phylacteries that were bound on the foreheads and arms (verse 8b). They were also the text of the mezuzot that were placed on the doorposts (verse 9a). Why do you think that these were chosen for daily reminders?

How can we be *commanded* to love someone, even God? Love is complicated, but it is not something that we just will to do, so how can it be commanded?

Some have suggested that we should understand all of Deuteronomy as an expansion of what it means to say that we should love God. It is as if verse 5 commands, “Love God” and the rest of the book says, “If you love God, then you will do X, Y, and Z.” How is obedience an expression of our love for God?

How are verses 5 and 6 related to each other? For example, does verse 6 repeat the same idea as verse 5 but differently?

What does it mean for the words that God commands to be in our hearts? Are *heart*, *soul*, and *might* three different things, or are they a poetic way of saying one thing? If the first, what is each? If the second, why does the Lord say this poetically?

**Verses 7–9:** Does the admonition of Moses in verse 7 still apply? How? If the commandment of verse 7 applies, why doesn't the commandment of verse 8 or that of verse 9?

We do not use phylacteries and mezuzot today. Why not? What is the relation between the covenant made with Israel here and our covenant? How do we know which parts of the ancient covenant we are still to obey and which parts are no longer required of us?

**Verse 13:** Why does Moses tell the Israelites to swear (make oaths) by God's name, when Christ tells us not to make oaths at all in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:33–34)?

Why do you think that part of the Mosaic law was changed? When did that change occur?

In what context did Jesus refer to verses 13 and 16? (See Matthew 4:7, 13. Note that in Matthew 4:4 he also quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 on that same general occasion.)

**Verse 20:** What were the Israelites instructed to reply when their children asked them the meanings of the testimonies and statutes and ordinances? Is there anything akin to this in our own family practices? Should there be? What events in our church past might be cited that would be equivalent to these?

## Deuteronomy 8

**Verse 2:** Why does the Lord desire to humble us? Why does he want to prove or test us? Doesn't he already know what is in our hearts?

What does verse 16 add to our understanding of why he says he intends to prove us?

**Verses 3 and 10:** Do these verses have any connection with the sacrament? If so, what might that be? In verse 3, the Lord speaks of manna as a test. How was it a test?

**Verse 4:** Note the information given in verse 4 that we haven't been given earlier. How is it relevant here?

**Verses 7–10:** How do you think a people who had spent their life in the desert would react to this description?

**Verses 11–17:** Why does the description of the bounty of the land end with a warning? Why do you think God's concern is justifiable? Do *we* react that way? Is there any connection between this and the story of Balaam (Numbers 22–24)?

**Verses 19–20:** In what ways do we perish when we do not obey the voice of the Lord?

## Deuteronomy 11

**Verses 10–12:** What is true of the land of Canaan that is not true of Egypt? Why does the Lord feel this way about this land?

**Verse 17:** Notice the Lord's warning about the rain. What is the connection between this passage and the tithing revival associated with President Lorenzo Snow, as depicted in the largely mythological film *Windows of Heaven*? Is there a connection between idolatry and the failure to pay tithing?



**Verse 24:** Note the boundaries that the Lord places on the promised land. Where is Lebanon? Where is the Euphrates? Israel would have to wait until the time of David before they would control this much land, and their control did not last long.

**Verses 26–29:** What does the Lord mean when he says, “I set before you this day a blessing and a curse”?

Verse 29 is obscure, but when Israel crossed over into the promised land, Joshua read the blessings from one mountain and the curses from the other. (See Joshua 8:30–35.) What is the significance of doing so?

## Deuteronomy 32

**Verses 1–43:** This is a song or poem of Moses. Most modern translations make that poetic structure more obvious, so if you wish to see it as a poem, you might consult another translation, such as the Catholic *New American Bible*. Why would the prophet address Israel in poetry?

Those interested in looking at this song more closely might enjoy reading pages 332–50 of Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim (Deuteronomy)*, translated by Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1993). There are, of course, also many other scholarly commentaries on and analyses of the song. Note for those with scholarly interests: there is considerable divergence for this song among the ancient manuscripts, with the Masoretic Text (that on which the KJV is based) probably being in the minority.

**Verse 2:** What does using rain and dew as a metaphor for doctrine, in other words, for teaching, tell us about it?

**Verse 4:** In what way is God a rock? Some have argued that *rock* is metonymic for “mountain.” If we accept that, what does it suggest?

**Verse 6:** This shows that the understanding of God as our Father is not a late invention. What do we learn by understanding that God is our Father, our Ancestor?

**Verse 8:** Why refer to God as “the most High”? What did that title tell the Israelites? What does it tell us?

**Verses 12–18:** In verse 15, the name Jeshurun means “the darling.” What story do these verses tell? What are they doing in this song, a song given by Moses prior to the entry into the promised land?

**Verses 26–27:** What change in the story of the poem occurs here? How is that important to the poem as a whole?

**Verses 30–38:** What is the difference between “their rock” and “our Rock”?

**Verses 32–33:** Why would Moses switch from the metaphor of the rock to the metaphor of the vine? What would a rock do for one? What would a vine do for one?

How does Jesus later play on the metaphor of the rock (Matthew 7:24–27)? On the metaphor of the vine (John 15:1–16)?

**Verse 47:** What does Moses mean when he says, referring to a study of the law, “It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life”? How can scripture study be one’s life? What

does it mean to treat the scriptures as a vain thing, rather than our lives? Are we sometimes guilty of this in our attitude toward scripture reading?

**Verses 49–52:** What ultimately happens to Moses, according to the KJV? What actually happened to Moses? (See the LDS Bible Dictionary under “Moses.”)

Why was it necessary for him to be translated, in other words, taken to heaven without death?

Why was Moses not allowed to enter the promised land (verse 51)?

## Deuteronomy 34

This chapter is not only the conclusion of Deuteronomy, but also the conclusion of the entire Pentateuch. Can you see things in this chapter that make it an appropriate conclusion to the five books of Moses?

Many scholars believe that there has been considerable tampering with this chapter. Can you think of reasons why they might think so? Why would this chapter be more likely to have been tampered with?

**Verses 1–4:** Where does Moses go when he leaves the Israelites? (Remember Deuteronomy 32:52.)

**Verses 5–6:** Knowing what we now know from latter-day revelation about his transfiguration (Alma 45:19; Moses 7:21–23), what are we to make of the KJV’s account of Moses?

**Verses 10–12:** Compare this tribute to Moses with the tribute paid to the Prophet Joseph (D&C 135).

# Lesson 18

Joshua 1–6; 23–24

## Joshua 1

**Verse 1:** Why is Moses referred to as the Lord’s servant but Joshua as Moses’s minister, official, or aide? Why not call Joshua Moses’s servant or, even better, the Lord’s servant?

Compare Exodus 24:13 and 33:11, as well as Numbers 11:28, but notice that in the latter two, though the King James translation uses the word *servant*, it translates the same word as “minister” here and in Exodus 24. According to Trent Butler, the word translated “minister” refers to someone like a young page who attends a king.<sup>1</sup> Why do these texts always use language that puts Joshua in an inferior position, even after Moses leaves?

**Verses 3–4:** What do you make of the fact that Israel never attained the borders described here? 1 Kings 5:1 describes Solomon as ruling this entire land, but rather than rule directly, he ruled through vassal states that owed him tribute. The people of Israel did not occupy that land even when Solomon controlled it.

**Verses 5–7:** What is the connection between the admonition in verse 5—“I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee”—and the command in verse 6: “Be strong and of good courage,” a command repeated in verse 7?

What does verse 5 tell us about how Israel understood the coming war?

**Verse 8:** Why does God tell Joshua to meditate on the law both day and night? Why would the prophet need to study the scriptures? We usually assume that he has direct contact with God, making the scriptures unnecessary.

**Verse 11:** Is it significant that Joshua tells the Israelites to prepare for three days?

The number three (like the numbers seven and twelve) is symbolically significant in the scriptures. How do we know when to understand it symbolically and when doing so is going too far?

**Verses 12–15:** Which of the tribes were given their land inheritance on the *east* side of the Jordan? If they already had their land inheritance, why did they have to cross over to the other side of the Jordan?

**Verses 16–18:** What was the response of the Israelites to Joshua? What is the significance of the fact that they also tell Joshua “be strong and of good courage”?

## Joshua 2

**Verse 1:** Who is Rahab, and where does she live?

She is called Rachab in Matthew’s genealogy of Christ; she is the mother of Ruth’s husband Boaz (Matthew 1:5). Note also that James, the brother of Jesus, uses her as an example of great faith (James 2:25). Why would the Lord choose this woman as one of his notable progenitors?

**Verses 23–24:** What report did these spies bring back to Joshua?

### Joshua 3

The crossing of the Jordan is the central event of chapters 3–5. Why was that event so important to the Israelites?

Is there anything of similar importance in LDS history? What might be similarly important to an LDS community's, a family's, or an individual's history?

**Verses 1–4:** What was the signal for the camp of Israel to move toward the promise land?

What was the distance they were to keep behind the ark? (Note a cubit is approximately one-half a yard.) Why were they to keep so far behind? Why are the children of Israel to follow the ark into the promised land?

**Verse 5:** When Joshua commands Israel, “Sanctify yourselves,” to prepare to cross the Jordan River, what is he commanding them to do? Why are they to do that?

When and how should we sanctify ourselves before certain events and activities? What kinds of things that we do require sanctification?

**Verse 7:** Why was it important that the Lord magnify Joshua in the sight of Israel? How would the miracle of crossing the Jordan River show “as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee”?

**Verses 8–17:** What are Joshua's instructions to the priests who carry the ark? To the Israelites?

Of what is the miracle of the ark a sign (verse 10)?

Arthur Bassett has pointed out that we can see in this event a prefiguration of the baptism of Jesus: the second Joshua (Jesus) comes to the same river to be baptized of John (Matthew 3:13–17). The second Joshua (Jesus) then splits not the river but the heavens in a metaphorical sense, revealing God’s acceptance of him (Matthew 3:16).

## Joshua 4

**Verse 2:** Here we see the reason for the twelve men chosen in the previous chapter (3:12). Are they symbolic in the crossing?

Why is symbolism at an event like this needed? What role does symbolism play in religious life in general?

**Verses 5–9:** What change in Joshua do we see in these verses?

**Verses 10–19:** We have the same story repeated twice in these verses, though somewhat differently. What do you make of that repetition?

What effect did this crossing of the Jordan have on the children of Israel in terms of their attitude toward Joshua (verse 14)? Why is that important?

The story of this chapter is somewhat confusing, probably because of differences between ancient editors of the text. The result of the confusion is that it appears that Joshua built two stone memorials, one in the river bed of the Jordan (verse 9) and one on dry ground (verses 20–24). Is this another repetition of the same story, as in verses 10–19, or are we looking at two different stories? How would you

decide? What does each version (one memorial or two memorials) make to our understanding?

## Joshua 5

**Verse 1:** We see here that the hearts of the kings of the Canaanites melted and they lost their spirit when they saw the Israelites. Why?

**Verses 2–7:** The Hebrew word translated “sharp” in the King James Version could also be translated “flint.” The Israelites had metal knives. Why did they have to use flint knives for this circumcision?

Why was it necessary for the male Israelites to be circumcised now? Does that necessity tell us anything about how the Israelites were keeping the Abrahamic covenant to this point?

**Verse 10:** How are the crossing of the Jordan River, the circumcision of all Israelite males, and the Passover connected? In other words, why do they all occur at the same time?

**Verses 11–12:** Why is it noteworthy that Israel could eat the produce of the land (verse 11)? When did the manna stop coming to Israel? Why? Unleavened bread and parched corn seem to have been normal food for travelers.

**Verses 13–15:** Compare this vision to other prophetic visions, such as that of Moses at the burning bush or that of Balaam. How are they similar? How different?

## Joshua 6

**Verses 2–5:** What is the plan of attack for Jericho? Why do you think this plan was given? What does it signify? Why



is the ark of the covenant part of the procession around Jericho?

**Verse 10:** What do you think the psychological impact would be of being in the city of Jericho, watching the Israelite army marching around the walls in silence, except for their trumpets, for six days?

**Verses 18–21, 24:** What is to be saved and what destroyed in the siege of Jericho? What reason might one give for the brutal assault of Jericho? (See the notes below for more information about the meaning of destruction in the ancient Near East.)

**Verses 22–23, 25:** What happened to Rahab and her family?

## A note on destruction in the Old Testament

Almost anyone who reads the Old Testament is shocked at some of what happens, particularly at the almost total destruction that Israel wreaks on the Canaanites and others against whom it goes to war. How can this be something that was ordained by God? we ask. I don't have an answer to that question, but I do have some information that will put these destructions in a context and, perhaps, help us better understand what the meaning of those stories is and what they tell us about Israelite history and about the self-understanding of ancient Israel, even if we still do not understand what to make of the events.

*The Anchor Bible Dictionary* says:

In Mesopotamia, property that was reserved for a god or king might be placed under a taboo and was then

known as *asakku*. To misappropriate it was to violate the taboo and incur a penalty, which apparently varied, but could be death if the circumstances warranted. A priestess who repeatedly steals the *asakku* is burned, and a man who takes booty previously declared *asakku* is “not to be spared,” but possibly has his death sentence commuted.

In the Bible the same institution is called *hrm*, but the term is used only of taboo property reserved for God. Reservation is achieved by total destruction, as in the case of the apostate city (Deut 13:13–16), and the same applies where the enemy is declared *hrm*. Consequently, taking enemy property as booty instead of destroying it amounts to misappropriation of *hrm*, a crime that will incur divine anger (1 Sam 15:1–33).

When Achan takes booty from Jericho, in spite of the city’s having been declared *hrm* (Josh 6:17), divine anger manifests itself in military defeat for Israel (Josh 7:1–12). In punishment, Achan is to be stoned and burned, along with his family, livestock, and possessions, including specifically the *hrm* property taken by him and also the tent in which it had been concealed (Josh 7:22–25).<sup>2</sup>

The word *hrm*, is translated as “accursed” (as in Joshua 6:17), but also as “dedicated thing” (as in Ezekiel 44:29).

As we have seen, property is dedicated to God—recognized as his property—by destroying it. Thus, the destruction of the Canaanites may be an example of how ancient Near Eastern cultures recognized the sovereignty of God and

that victory over an enemy belonged to him, meaning that it was not a means by which Israel could enrich itself.

In addition, verses such as Deuteronomy 28:21–23 and Jeremiah 28:53–57 teach that if Israel apostatizes she will be destroyed, both by natural disaster and by conquering enemies. The destruction of Israel’s enemies may be a figure of Israel’s destruction, a warning.

## Joshua 23

*The Jerome Biblical Commentary* notes that much of Deuteronomy follows the pattern of the covenant renewal ceremony that seems to have occurred in Shechem each year.<sup>3</sup> (See Joshua 24.) That ceremony has at least these elements:

- A narrative of sacred history
- The stipulations of the covenant
- The promises that fidelity to the covenant will bring
- The curses that infidelity to the covenant will bring

Where do you see these elements in chapter 23? Where else do you see them in scripture? Where do you see them in your own religious experience?

**Verses 2–16:** This is the beginning of Joshua’s farewell address. Compare it to Moses’s final address in Deuteronomy. What instructions does he give to the Israelites regarding those who previously occupied the land?

**Verse 3:** How does Joshua define Israel in this verse? How might that definition be relevant to us?

**Verse 6:** Once Israel has conquered the land, what kind of courage is required? If Israel is in control of the land and is the majority in the land, why does obedience require courage?

**Verse 7:** The phrase “come not among” has sexual connotations. Why might that be? How are those connotations literal? How symbolic?

How are “these nations, these that remain among you” a danger to Israel? What is comparable to them in our own religious experience? According to this verse, what makes Israel unique in the world?

**Verse 8:** Here, too, we find a phrase with sexual connotations: “cleave unto.” Why does the Lord use marriage as a symbol of his relation to Israel? What can we learn by examining the metaphor?

**Verses 12–16:** What does he promise Israel if they do not follow the Lord’s instruction to them?

**Verses 30–35:** Note that Joshua performs the ritual at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, as instructed by Moses: the blessings of the law and the curses of the law are read in full. What was the point of this ritual?

## Joshua 24

**Verses 1–28:** Summary: In his final address, Joshua reiterates the entire history from Abraham to his own time and then challenges Israel to follow either the gods that Abraham’s father served and those of the Egyptians or the Lord. What do you make of that challenge?

Is it significant that the choices were narrowed so that in each case the deities to choose from were those of Abraham's ancestry and did not include the gods of the Canaanites?

**Verse 2:** What does "the other side of the flood" mean? Does *flood* refer to Noah's flood or to the Euphrates River?

**Verses 26–27:** What monument does Joshua build to record this event? Why did he build it? Why did Joshua build so many monuments?

**Verse 28:** What major service did Joshua accomplish for the Israelites?

**Verses 29–33:** What three famous people are laid to rest in the concluding chapter of Joshua? How is that significant? In other words, why should we care? Why are all of them buried in Ephraimite territory?

**Verse 32:** What do you recall about the city of Shechem (Genesis 33:18–20 and chapter 34)?

Joseph had been there before as a young boy. What had happened when he was there the first time? Is that relevant to our understanding of this chapter?

# Lesson 19

Judges 2; 4; 6–7; 13–16

## Judges

The translation “judge” is misleading, for it suggests that the person it describes had judgment as his or her primary duty. However, the judges of Israel lived in a time before the powers of government had been separated into anything like legislative, executive, or judicial functions. As a result, “leader” or perhaps even “chief” would be a more accurate translation, for the people that the King James translation calls “the judges of Israel” were leaders more than they were judges. They were leaders of the groups they oversaw, persons to whom one could go for advice and good judgment, who would consult the law and use it to give wise advice or to make a wise decision—that more than someone whose job was to apply the law to a case and render a judgment of guilty or innocent. When necessary, these leaders might act as military leaders.

In addition, the word *judge* is misleading because of the way we think about law and judgment. We understand the rule of law and the function of a judge under that rule. However, the ancients did not see government as a matter of the rule of law. Of course, they knew what laws were. But whereas we understand ourselves to be governed by laws that are created and administered by people, they

understood themselves to be governed by people who had the wisdom or the right to make laws, or who had the ability to interpret the previous decisions of other judges and the documents (such as religious texts) that were relevant. In general, the law was what the ruler or a god said, not what the judge administered (though this changes in the direction of our understanding after the exile).

For the Israelites, the judge (whether one of the judges in this part of the Old Testament, or a patriarch such as Abraham, or a prophet such as Moses, or a king such as David, or someone like a tribal chieftan, as in Judges) was only a representative of the true ruler, God (and he or she was also a representative of the people before God). The law was that which God decreed. When the judge was called on to give advice or decide a dispute, that meant that though we think of law in impersonal, even objective terms, the Israelites always thought of it as coming from a person through a person: the judge, or God, or God through the judge.

Note also that the period between the reign of the judges, with Othniel as the first judge and Samson as the last (with gradually increasing numbers of judges as time progresses), is historically much more murky than much of the rest of the Old Testament.

As we will see in probably every lesson from the Old Testament, as Moses had promised, when Israel was faithful to its covenant, it prospered; and when it was unfaithful, it was subjected to its enemies. Compare and contrast this Old Testament pattern with the Book of Mormon pattern of pride and destruction.

The book of Judges is strange in many ways, not the least being that the people we find as judges are often not admirable: perhaps Ehud, the assassin (Judges 3:15–22); certainly Jephthah, a man who acted with incredible stupidity (Judges 11:1, 30–39); and Samson, a thoughtless profligate (Judges 14). In at least one case they are not whom we expect even if admirable: the woman Deborah. What point is the narrator of Judges making by telling us of these people? The writer is doing more than just recounting the objective history of Israel; he chooses the stories he tells us for a reason. What might it be?

Judges 2:1–5, 10–16 is a good synopsis of the material in the reading for this lesson. If you were to write one sentence that encapsulated what you see in those verses, what would it say? See also Judges 6:1–8 for another synopsis.

Let's look at three of the judges Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. Doing so will help us understand better the time of the judges.

## Deborah

What does it mean to say that Deborah was a prophetess (Judges 4:4)? The word is used in five other places: Exodus 15:20; 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22; Nehemiah 6:14; and Isaiah 8:3. Do any of those help us understand what it means?

Read what the Bible Dictionary in the back of the LDS edition of the scriptures says about what the word *prophet* means. Does that description preclude women from being



prophets? How does our use of the word today differ from its use in the Old Testament?

What is the point of the story of Deborah?

## Gideon

When the angel of the Lord calls Gideon (Judges 6:11–16), why does he call him a “mighty man of valour”? All we have seen Gideon do so far is thresh wheat in a place that he hopes will not be found by the Midianites.

What is Gideon’s response to his call? Where have we heard this before? Why does the Lord keep calling men who have what we would describe as a poor self-image (such as Enoch and Moses)?

How did the Lord reduce the number of Israelites who were to go into battle (Judges 7:3–7)? *Why* did he do so (Judges 7:2)?

What specific things can we learn from the story of Gideon?

## Samson

The story of Samson is not an uplifting story. He betrays his covenants, he marries a non-Israelite, he breaks his Nazarite vow, and finally kills himself in the act of avenging himself by killing three thousand people. Why does the Bible not only include it, but also give us a great deal of detail about Samson’s tenure as judge?

# Lesson 20

Ruth; 1 Samuel 1

The story of Ruth occurs “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). The books of the Old Testament are not, strictly speaking, in chronological order. Indeed, from here on out, you may wish to consult the Old Testament chronology in the LDS Bible Dictionary if you wish to see the historical connectedness of the various stories.

What do Naomi, Ruth, and Hannah have in common? Why is it appropriate that this lesson is about these three women?

The story of Ruth is completely different from any of the stories we have read so far. God is only mentioned obliquely and plays no intervening role in the story, nor do any of his prophets or judges. It is not about a struggle between the forces of good and evil. It is a simple love story of sorts, about common people living common lives. They are not the heroic (or anti-heroic) individuals we have seen so far in the Old Testament. Why is this book scripture? How do we see Jesus Christ in it?

The book of Ruth is short enough to be read aloud in one sitting. Try doing so, preferably with someone else, perhaps your spouse or children, or a good friend. Try reading for the full impact of the story. If you are the reader, you may even want to practice once or twice before you read it aloud for someone else. But as you read out loud, don't stop here

and there to discuss what this or that might mean. *After* you've read the whole thing aloud, discuss it. See whether the experience of reading it aloud and hearing it read aloud doesn't give you a feel for the story as a whole that you might otherwise miss.

As mentioned, in one sense—in the sense that he doesn't explicitly appear in the story—the Lord isn't part of this story except as a kind of shadow. References to him appear in Ruth 1:6, 8, 9, 13, 16, 17, 21; 2:4, 12, 20; 3:10, 13; and 4:11, 12, 13, 14; but none are references to his commandment or revelation or expectation. Instead, with only a couple of exceptions in chapter 1, the references either mention the Lord's blessing or use his name as part of a covenant.

In another sense, however, the story is about nothing but the Lord. One way to understand the story of Ruth is to see it as a story that exemplifies the ways in which human beings can imitate God. This is most obvious by the way in which covenant and blessing are at the very heart of the story. We see a covenant between Ruth and Naomi, a covenant that goes beyond the clearly righteous behavior of Orpah. We see Boaz called on to fulfill his covenant obligation. But we also see blessing in each of these things, the way in which each person goes beyond the minimum requirements of covenant.

Here are some things to think about after you've read the story aloud or heard it read aloud.

In chapter 1, Naomi complains against the Lord. Is her complaint a sinful act? Compare this with Moses's complaint in Numbers 11, Job's complaints against the Lord, and Joseph

Smith's pleas in Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–6. When is it sinful to complain (as Israel did in Numbers 11)? When is it not sinful to complain?

How does the rest of the book of Ruth answer Naomi's complaint? Does the Lord tell her not to worry and make everything as it was? How does he take care of her complaint? What might these things have to say to us?

How is the covenant that Ruth makes with Naomi like the covenant Israel has made with the Lord? How is it like any covenant with the Lord?

How does the covenant Israel has made with the Lord become a blessing to Ruth and Naomi through Boaz? What covenant is Boaz fulfilling?

How is it fitting that this story be the story of King David's ancestors and, therefore, the story of the Savior's ancestors?

In the genealogy given for Jesus in Matthew, only five women are named: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. (Notice that two of these women are not Israelite by birth.) Why is Ruth one of those mentioned? What do these women have in common? So what?

One of the most important words of this book is the Hebrew word *chesed*. The word appears in Ruth 1:8, 2:20, and 3:10. It is variously translated as "kindness," "kind dealings," and so on. It can also mean "beauty," "favor," "good deeds," "mercy," and "pity." Its connotation is that an act goes beyond what is expected or required.

In Ruth 1:8, Naomi prays that the Lord will deal kindly with Orpah and Ruth, and the rest of the story shows us how

that prayer is fulfilled, not through direct intervention by the Lord but by the kind dealings of Boaz (2:20) and those of Ruth (3:10). How do Ruth and Boaz go beyond what is required? How do they deal kindly with one another? How does the Lord go beyond what is required through them? How is that an example of his kind dealings? Does this help us better understand grace?

Compare this story of a woman whose husband has died with that of Tamar (Genesis 38). What does that comparison show us?

## Ruth 1

**Verse 1:** Why did Elimelech and Naomi settle in Moab, and what is unusual about that?

**Verse 2:** Ephrath is the ancient name for Bethlehem. (See Genesis 35:19.) Why is that important?

**Verses 4–7:** How does the writer gradually let us see Ruth's character in these verses?

**Verse 4:** Why would Elimelech's sons marry Moabite women when it was prohibited by Israelite law? Or was it? What about Moses?

**Verse 6:** What took Naomi back to Bethlehem after her ten-year sojourn in Moab?

**Verse 11:** Why does Naomi tell her daughters-in-law, when they want to go back with her, that she has no more sons in her womb? For a possible explanation of this see Deuteronomy 25:5–6.

**Verse 13:** What does Naomi mean when she says “the hand of the Lord is gone out against me”? (Note that she repeats this in verses 20–21.)

**Verse 19:** Why do her friends in Bethlehem question her identity?

**Verse 22:** Given the previous several verses, do you think it is more likely that at this point Naomi thought of Ruth as an asset or more of a burden?

## Ruth 2

**Verse 1:** Note the meaning of Boaz’s name in the footnote of the LDS edition of the scriptures. Does his name tell us anything about the story? Does it suggest anything about him?

**Verse 2:** What was the law of the harvest among the Israelites regarding gleaning (Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19, 22)? What seems to have prompted this law?

Why would it be Ruth rather than Naomi who suggests she go glean in the field? How would Ruth, a Gentile, know of this law?

Is there anything comparable to gleaning in our lives?

**Verses 11–12:** Ostensibly, why did Boaz favor Ruth?

**Verse 14:** Might there have been more to the situation than Boaz said? If so, what?

**Verses 15–16:** What special instruction does Boaz give his workmen regarding Ruth?

**Verse 17:** How much did Ruth glean? How much is that in terms that we understand?

**Verses 19–20:** Why is Naomi excited that Ruth has been in Boaz’s field?

Notice the significance of “next kinsmen” in footnote 20b.

**Verses 21–23:** These verses speak of “young men” and of “his maidens.” What does that tell us about the harvesting process in ancient Israel?

### Ruth 3

**Verse 1:** What does the phrase “seek rest for thee” imply? How can marriage be called a rest?

**Verse 4:** The phrase “uncover his feet” is obscure, and scholars are not universally agreed concerning its meaning. Some have suggested that this is merely a euphemism for seduction. How would you use the text itself to argue against that suggestion?

**Verses 8–11:** What was Boaz’s reaction to finding Ruth at his feet? How did Boaz know that Ruth was not a “loose woman”? What is Ruth’s reputation among the people of Bethlehem?

**Verses 12–14:** What is all the business about “the kinsman’s part” that Boaz keeps referring to? (Though this story seems to come from an earlier time, see Deuteronomy 25:5–10 for related customs and laws.)

**Verse 16:** Why does Naomi ask Ruth, “Who art thou, my daughter?”

## Ruth 4

**Verses 1–12:** The kinsman has a problem. If he redeems Elimelech's property, which he has not only the right but a certain amount of obligation to do, then he will end up with a piece of property that he will have to turn over to Naomi's sons should they return, since it is their inheritance. So if he buys the property, he ends up with an additional wife, but perhaps without any additional property. In addition, that wife may produce more sons, requiring him to split his inheritance further than he must now split it. So when the kinsman backs out, Boaz is next in line to marry Ruth, which he does.

Notice that with the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, the genealogical lines of Abraham and Lot come together.

**Verse 8:** It is unclear why the kinsman took off his shoe, but it may have something to do with the idea that only the owner of a piece of property has the right to put his foot on it. By handing the shoe to Boaz, he renounced all rights to it.

**Verses 14 and 17:** According to the law, how is Naomi involved in the heritage that results from the union of Ruth and Boaz?

**Verse 17:** Why do they say that a son is born to Naomi rather than to Ruth? Why is Naomi given precedence over Ruth in the story?

What important Israelite is born to this family? What relationship is Ruth to King David?

What future king will be born to this lineage (Matthew 1:5)?



## 1 Samuel 1

**Verse 1:** Why is Samuel's genealogy important?

What is unusual about the lineage and place of abode of Elkanah? Hint: what does the fact that he is from mount Ephraim tell us about his genealogy? What does the fact that he is descended from an Ephrathite tell us? Why would one not normally find these two together?

It seems not unusual for a person from one Israelite tribe to live in the territory of another. This may help to explain why, in the Book of Mormon, Lehi—who is from Manasseh—is living in Jerusalem, which is in the land of the tribe of Judah.

**Verse 2:** Does this verse give us any clue as to why Elkanah has two wives?

**Verses 2 and 5:** What group that we have met before does Hannah belong to?

**Verses 3–6:** Where before have we seen a relation like this between two wives?

Why is it such a terrible thing for Hannah to have no son? What does it mean to say that Elkanah gave Hannah “a worthy portion”? Why might he give Hannah a measure that was significantly different from that which he gave to Peninnah and her sons?

**Verse 3:** A medieval Jewish rabbi (Yalkut) said of verse 3 that it teaches us that prayer is more important than sacrifice because the verse says that Elkanah went up “to worship and to sacrifice” rather than “to sacrifice and to worship.”

Even if you don't agree with this interpretation of the verse, what do you think of the idea? Might prayer (worship) be more important than sacrifice? If so, how so? What counts as worship? What counts as sacrifice?

**Verses 4 and 7:** How is the relationship between Hannah and Peninnah like that of Sarah and Hagar, of Rachel and Leah? What might lead to this type of jealousy?

**Verses 7–8:** What do we see here of Elkanah's relation with Hannah?

**Verse 8:** What does Elkanah mean when he says, "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?"

**Verses 9–18:** Hannah promises that she will give her son for temple service. But since he was the firstborn son in a Levite family, he was already obligated for that service. So what is Hannah promising more than would happen anyway?

In verse 11, there is an indication that she is pledging her son as a Nazarite (also spelled "Nazirite"). Read about the Nazarite vow in your Bible dictionary and in the references mentioned there. You might also want to look in a larger Bible dictionary. It might be fruitful to compare the story of Samuel with the story of another Nazarite, Samson. In fact, that comparison may be part of the reason that the story of Samson is included in the Bible.

**Verse 9:** Why do you think the priest at the temple sat by the doorpost, in other words, at the entrance? What might that have signified?

**Verse 11:** Whose example is Hannah following? (See Judges 13:1–5.)

**Verses 12–14:** Why does Eli lecture her on drunkenness?

**Verse 16:** Note the term “daughter of Belial.” We will see it (and “sons of Belial”) often in the Old Testament. See footnote 16b.

**Verse 17:** What blessing does Eli give Hannah?

**Verse 20:** How is Hannah’s prayer fulfilled?

Why does she name her son Samuel, in other words, “name of God”?

**Verses 21–24:** How long does Samuel stay with his parents?

How does his experience differ from that of Samson, who was also a Nazarite?

What does the fact that Hannah is willing to give up her only son tell us about her? How is she a type of the prototype of God?

**Verse 23:** What is Elkanah saying when he says, “Only the Lord establish his word”?

**Verses 24–25:** Why does Hannah take three bullocks and sacrifice only one?

# Lesson 21

1 Samuel 2–3; 8

One can reasonably argue that the book of Judges shows us the decline of Israel to a situation in which they had to have a king to lead them, and that the treatment of women that we see in Judges is a sign of that decline. One can also argue that Ruth is a response to that theme in Judges. How does the story of Hannah fit into such a theme?

## 1 Samuel 2

**Verses 1–10:** These verses are a song, perhaps not one that Hannah composed, but one she knew already and applied to herself, much as we might choose to sing a hymn that reflects our circumstances. Note the parts of this song: thanksgiving (1–2), a warning to the arrogant (3), the reversal of fortune (the high are brought down, the low are exalted, 4–8), and an expression of confidence (9–10). (The song is, roughly, chiasmatic.) What is the overall theme of the poem? How does this song fit Hannah’s situation? How might it also be important to us? Are there parts that seem not to be relevant to Hannah’s situation? If so, what do you make of that?

**Verse 1:** Most commentators suggest that the metaphor “mine horn is exalted in the Lord” is that of a proud animal carrying its head high. (Compare Psalms 92:10 and 89:18.)

Does that make sense to you? Do you have an alternative interpretation?

**Verse 3:** Against what does the Lord warn here? How does the poem explain that warning?

The King James Version reads, “The Lord is a God of knowledge,” but literally translated it would say, “The Lord is a God of knowledge knowledge.” Hebrew sometimes uses a duplicate verb to connote plurality. Some translators take this to mean “all-knowing,” but others believe that the duplication of the verb indicates the quality rather than the quantity of his knowledge: “true knowledge.” Which interpretation do you think best fits the context here? Remember that the question is not, “Which interpretation makes the most theological sense to you?” Answering that question tells you about your doctrinal and theological beliefs, but it doesn’t necessarily help you understand what the text is saying. The text may not conform to our theologies. The important thing is to understand what the text says. Then we can explore whether we understand things differently, whether we might need to revise our theology, and so on.

**Verses 4–5:** In verse 4 and the first half of 5, we have examples of God knowing how to weigh actions and respond. In both cases, the strong become weak and the weak become strong. However, at the end of verse 5, the order is reversed: the weak become strong and the strong become weak. Can you see any reason for that change?

**Verse 5:** This verse clearly applies to Hannah’s situation, but why does her song also include so many things that do not apply to it? This verse of the song speaks of a barren

woman who has borne seven children, but 1 Samuel speaks of Hannah as the mother of six children, including Samuel. What do you make of this difference?

**Verse 6:** Some doubt that this verse refers to actual death and resurrection. Why might they doubt? What alternative understanding is possible? On the other hand, might we think that the verse really is about real death and real resurrection?

**Verse 10:** How do you explain the reference to a king at the end of this verse when Israel didn't have a king at this time?

The Hebrew for "his anointed" at the end of the verse is *mesiho*, a variation of the title *masiah*, or *messiah*. This appears to be the first time that the phrase is used in the Old Testament.

**Verse 11:** Notice the simplicity with which the narrator tells how Hannah kept her promise. Notice, too, the contrast of this verse with the song that came immediately before it. What is the effect of that difference?

**Verses 12–17:** Why do we have so much detail about the sins of Eli's sons? What does it mean to say that they did not know the Lord?

Compare verses 13–15 to Leviticus 7:23–36; 17:6 and Deuteronomy 18:3. What specific sin do we see here? At the end of verse 14 we read, "So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither," after a description of how the priest in Shiloh chose meat for the priests. What is the point of that clause?

Leviticus tells us that the priests were to receive the breast and the right thigh of sacrificed animals (Leviticus 7:28–36).

Deuteronomy tells us that they were to receive the shoulder, the jowls, and the stomach of oxen and sheep (Deuteronomy 18:3). It appears that at the temple in Shiloh there was still another way of dispensing the meat of sacrificial animals to those officiating: a worker would stick a three-pronged fork into the boiling pot, and whatever he pulled up was for the priest. In every case, however, the fat—highly prized because of its high caloric value—was reserved to be burned on the altar for the Lord.

**Verse 18:** Once again, we have one short verse describing Samuel’s service, in contrast to the many verses that describe the service of Hophni and Phinehas. Once again, that contrast lends emphasis to this verse. The literary structure here is interesting and, I think, informative: verses 1–10 are parallel to verses 12–17, and verse 11 is parallel to verse 18. It’s as if the writer is saying: “Hannah praised—and Samuel served; Eli’s sons blasphemed—and Samuel served.” What is the effect of that parallel? What does it say to us?

**Verse 22:** What sin do Eli’s sons commit? Why is it such a serious sin.

Most traditional Jewish commentators have found the sin so repugnant that, rather than believing that the verse means what it says, they have assumed that it means something else, such as the sons somehow delayed the women who worked in the temple.

**Verse 25:** Here is another translation of the first part of this verse: “If a man sins against the man, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who intercede for

him?”<sup>1</sup> What’s the point of this comment and question in the story? What’s the answer to the question?

**Verse 27:** Who is this “man of God”? Is he a prophet? If he is, why do we not know his name? If he is not, how do we explain what he says to Eli? What is the status and place of the prophets during the time of the Judges? What does the word *prophet* mean in this context?

**Verse 29:** How has Eli honored his sons more than the Lord? How might we do the same thing?

**Verse 30:** Does this verse show us the Lord changing his mind? If so, how do you explain that? If not, why not?

**Verses 30–36:** What do you make of this horrible curse? What is Eli’s sin? Is it more than not disciplining his sons? Does your answer to this question change your thinking about the answer to the question about verse 29?

## 1 Samuel 3

**Verse 1:** Notice how we have seen Samuel grow: in 2:18 we saw him serving before the Lord; in 2:26 we see that he continues to grow and that he was pleasing to the Lord and to the people; here we see him ministering with Eli.

The word translated “precious” could also be translated “rare.” What are the different meanings that *rare* might have in this context?

What does it mean to say that the word of the Lord is rare, which is not the same as saying that it was absent? Why might the word of the Lord have been rare or precious in



those days? Why is it important to the story we are reading for us to know that the word of the Lord was rare then?

**Verses 2–4:** Why might Samuel have been sleeping near the ark? In addition to the practical reasons for doing so, is there any symbolic significance to the fact that he was? (Where was the ark kept?)

Samuel’s answer to the Lord means “Behold, here I am,” or even “See me here.” In Arabic, one answers a call even today with something similar—“Ready”—and that is part of the import of this response.

In scriptures we find this phrase commonly used when prophets respond to a call. For other examples of the phrase, see verse 11 of this chapter; Genesis 22:1; 27:1, 18; 31:11; 46:2; Exodus 3:4; Isaiah 6:8; and 2 Nephi 16:8. We also see it in Moses 4:1 and Abraham 3:27, in the calling of the Savior and in Satan’s rebellion. Compare what happens here to what happens in Genesis 22, where we see the same kind of language in another case, and Genesis 3:9–10 and Exodus 20:18–21, where we see cases in which people don’t respond to a call from the Lord in this way. What might it tell us that Samuel and other prophets respond this way? In other words, what kinds of things are implied by the answer “Here I am” or “Behold me here”?

When do we say to the Lord some equivalent of “Here I am, ready”? Do our covenants imply that this should be our response to the Lord’s call? Is everything we are asked to do by someone with church authority a call from the Lord? If not, how do we decide what is and what isn’t? Might a person reasonably accept every call extended even if she

doesn't believe that every call is a call from the Lord? Why? How does one go about turning down a call if he feels that call is not an inspired one?

Why does the Lord call Samuel over and over? Why not just tell him the first time who it is that calls?

**Verse 11:** What is the “thing” that the Lord is going to do? Is he referring to the capture of the ark or to that and all of the events surrounding that capture—the defeat of Israel, the death of Eli and his sons, and so forth?

**Verse 13:** The Lord says that Eli didn't restrain (literally “rebuke”) his sons, but we saw him doing so in 1 Samuel 2:23–25. How do you explain this seeming contradiction?

**Verse 14:** Does this verse mean that there could be *no* way of expiating Eli and his family? What way might there be?

**Verse 19:** Why do you think the writer has placed such emphasis on Samuel's growth?

**Verse 20:** There are two explanations of the Hebrew word for prophet, *nabi*. One is that it means “one who is called.” The other is that it means “one who calls or invokes.” Does one or the other strike you as more plausible? If so, is the other one also informative?

How might thinking about the meaning of this word help us understand better the prophets we sometimes see in the Old Testament, such as the mysterious person in 1 Samuel 2:27?

Does the meaning of this Hebrew word for prophet shed any light on our understanding of contemporary prophets? Given the meaning of the word, who might be considered to be a prophet?

## 1 Samuel 8

Samuel was judge of the people as well as a prophet. What do you think his duties were as a judge that differed from his duties as prophet?

Compare chapters 7 and 8. What does chapter 7 show Israel doing? What are they asking for? What is Israel doing in 8? What are they asking for? What is the narrator trying to show with this contrast? Compare Israel's attitudes in these two chapters with Hannah's attitude in her song. What are the parallels? The differences?

**Verse 1:** Does Samuel step down as judge or appoint his sons as assistants? At this point in his life, how does Samuel differ from Eli?

**Verses 3–5:** Is the elders' request reasonable under the circumstances? What reasons do they give for their need of a king? (See also verse 20.)

**Verse 6:** Why is Samuel displeased?

**Verse 7:** How is the request for a king a rejection of God? Is there anything parallel in our own lives or circumstances? The chances that we will have a king are slim, so how are the Lord's teachings about kings relevant to us? What might they imply for those in a contemporary democracy?

**Verses 10–18:** What problems with having a king does this verse identify?

**Verse 20:** Is this an afterthought, or is it one of the people's sincere reasons for wanting a king? If the latter, what is wrong with the request?

# Lesson 22

1 Samuel 9–11; 13; 15–17

Though the lesson assignment doesn't include chapters 12 and 14, the manual recommends them as supplemental reading. We need to read them to see the full story. There is quite a bit in this section, from the choice of Saul as king, to his usurpation of Samuel's authority and consequent loss of authority, to the choice of David to replace him, to Saul's madness, to the story of David slaying Goliath. Rather than try to cover all of that material, these study questions will focus on chapters 9–10, 13, and 16: Saul's selection and downfall and David's election.

## 1 Samuel 9

**Verse 2:** The Hebrew phrase translated “a choice young man” contains a hendiadys: Saul is “young and *tob*.” What the word *tob* means is debatable. Some translate it here as “handsome,” others as “impressive,” others as “good.” The root of *tob* means “pleasant,” so perhaps the majority of translators assume that the *tob* means “good-looking,” as it appears to be used here, particularly since the final comment of the verse is about physical appearance. (Compare this verse to 1 Samuel 10:23–24.) Why would Saul's handsomeness be relevant?

**Verses 5 and 21:** What attributes of Saul's character do we see here?

**Verse 8:** Why is the servant so intent on visiting the seer?

According to David Tsumura, at the time a shekel was 11.4 grams of silver, less than five dollars today, but it is difficult to know what its purchase value was at the time.<sup>1</sup>

**Verse 9:** What is the difference between a prophet and a seer? What is the difference in the connotation of each term?

**Verses 22–24:** Note: the footnote tells us that *parlour* could also be translated “dining area.” However, most scholars believe this was a sanctuary building on the city high place. (See verse 25.) Probably on the grounds of the holy site in the town (the “high place”), Saul is treated like the guest on whom everyone else has been waiting. What is the significance of that for Saul? For us?

## 1 Samuel 10

**Verses 1–7:** This appears to be the first anointing recorded in the Old Testament. T. N. D. Mettinger suggests that anointing by a prophet was the sign that God had made a covenant with the person anointed.<sup>2</sup>

Compare verse 1 to 1 Samuel 9:16. Why does Samuel refer to Israel as the Lord’s inheritance? What is the purpose of the signs that Samuel gives Saul? What does it mean to say that Saul “shalt be turned into another man” (verse 6)?

**Verse 9:** What does “God gave him another heart” mean? Is this the same thing spoken of in verse 6 or something else?

**Verses 11 and 27:** How do those who know Saul respond to his change?

**Verse 12:** Why do people ask, “Is Saul among the prophets?” Why are they surprised at his behavior?

**Verses 18–19:** Why does Samuel give this speech before he chooses the king?

**Verse 20:** The phrase “was taken” suggests that the tribe of Benjamin was chosen by lot. Similarly, in the following verses we see the family of Mari chosen and Saul chosen by lot from that family. Why does Samuel make this decision by casting lots? Why not just announce that the Lord has revealed that Saul is to be king since the decision has already been made?

**Verse 21:** What attribute of Saul’s character do we see here?

## 1 Samuel 13

The Philistines have occupied Israel, and Saul’s reign is closely connected to the role of the Philistines in Israel. In the first four verses we see Jonathan, Saul’s son, attack and overcome one of the Philistine garrisons (or perhaps destroy a marker designating the area as Philistine territory). (By the way, that Saul has a son old enough to lead an army into battle ought to make us wonder what 1 Samuel 9:2 meant when it described him as young.) In verse 5, the Philistines gather an army to put down this rebellion. In verse 6, the people of Israel, fearing the coming Philistine attack, hide in the rocks and caves. Samuel has made an appointment with Saul to meet in Gilgal after seven days. He is coming so that Israel can, through him, seek the Lord’s guidance and blessing in dealing with the

Philistines. But he fails to keep the appointment and those who have been following Saul—the Israelite army—begin to scatter. As you read the following verses, keep this background in mind.

**Verse 3:** To whom is Saul referring when he uses the name *Hebrews*, usually a disparaging term in the Old Testament?

**Verse 5:** Note that thirty thousand chariots is almost certainly an exaggeration, probably a multiplication by ten or more. But even three thousand chariots is an enormous number by ancient standards. Recall that Sisera had only nine hundred (Judges 4:3). Whichever number we take, what point is the writer making?

**Verse 8:** What is the effect of Samuel’s nonarrival on Saul’s troops (“the people”)?

**Verse 9:** Why does Saul offer the burnt offering?

**Verse 10:** What is the significance of the timing of Samuel’s arrival? Has he come late on purpose?

**Verses 11–12:** The word translated “forced” in verse 12 means exactly that: Saul says that, given the circumstances, he made himself do what he didn’t want to do. The writer has gone out of his way to show us the bind Saul found himself in so we will be sympathetic to Saul when he feels he has to offer the sacrifice himself. Why would the writer do that when the prophet condemns what Saul did? Why does Samuel react so strongly?

Saul is not of the Levite lineage and, therefore, has no priesthood right to make the offering. But is that mistake the real issue here? Is it that for which Saul is punished?

The writer of Samuel has placed this story immediately after the account of Samuel's admonitions to the people regarding a king, though several years intervene between those admonitions and this story. (See 1 Samuel 13:1.) In other words, the writer probably could have placed several other stories between chapters 12 and 13. Why did he juxtapose these two stories in this way? Does that juxtaposition help us understand the point the writer is making?

**Verses 13–14:** The king was appointed through the prophet. Now he is replaced through the same prophet because he usurped the position and authority of that prophet—though we have no record of a commandment to Saul that he is directly contradicting, and offering sacrifice before battle was a normal thing to do. What did God command Saul that he did not obey?

The wordplay in these verses is interesting: because Saul did not do what the Lord commanded, the Lord has commanded or appointed a new person to do what he commands. Is Saul's punishment commensurate with his sin? How so or why not?

Compare this story to the story of Saul and Agag in chapter 15. How are these stories the same? What do they reveal about Saul?

## 1 Samuel 16

**Verse 1:** "I have rejected" is, literally, "I have already rejected."

Why did Samuel mourn for Saul? Why did the Lord reprove him for doing so? Samuel anointed Saul to be captain, in



other words, a prince (1 Samuel 9:16), but he will anoint David to be king. Yet Saul was anointed in response to the people's demand for a king. What is the difference between the positions to which each was anointed, and how do you explain that difference?

**Verse 2:** How does Saul feel about Samuel? What does this tell us about Saul's response to the news that he had been rejected by the Lord? (Compare 1 Samuel 15:26–31.)

**Verses 4–5:** Why were the elders of Bethlehem afraid when Samuel showed up? How would Samuel have come if he were *not* coming peaceably?

Why do the elders and the family of Jesse need to sanctify or consecrate themselves? What do you think they would have done to do so?

What effect would Samuel's demand have on those to whom he spoke?

**Verses 6–7:** On what basis does Samuel seem to be making his decision?

**Verses 7 and 12:** In verse 7 the Lord tells Samuel that he doesn't judge by outward appearance. Yet in verse 12, the first thing that Samuel notices is how good-looking David is. (Recall that the same was true of Saul, and the same word appears: *goodly*, *tob* in Hebrew.) What do you make of this? How do you reconcile these verses?

In terms of the lesson taught by this story, why is it important that Samuel's choice be rejected by the Lord?

**Verse 10:** Seven sons was an ideal, the perfect number. Does it mean anything that David comes after, in excess of, the seven?

In 1 Chronicles 2:15, David is said to be the seventh rather than the eighth son. We have no way of knowing whether the chronicler was simply mistaken or the author of Samuel has added to the number of sons to make a point. And, of course there are other possibilities.

**Verse 11:** Why hasn't Jesse called David in for Samuel to consider? Why does Samuel forbid them to sit down to the feast until David has been brought? So what?

**Verse 12:** Once again we see the theme of choosing the youngest (Jacob over Esau, Ephraim over Manasseh, Nephi over Laman). Why is that such an important theme in our oldest scriptures? What does it say to *us*? To whom are we as elder brethren and sisters?

**Verse 13:** Has Samuel invited anyone other than Jesse's sons to the sacrifice?

Is David anointed to be king here, or is Samuel doing something else?

**Verses 17–23:** Why has the writer included this story? What does it show us about Saul? About David? Does it help prepare us for anything that is to come?

When Saul was chosen, Samuel cast lots before all of Israel in order to make that choice, and the people ratified the choice. However, Samuel had previously anointed Saul. In this chapter we see David's anointing, an anointing that is followed quite a bit later by the ratification of the choice by

Israel (2 Samuel 5:1–3). In both cases, the anointing was relatively private. How do you explain this sequence: private anointing followed by ratification? What is the connection between the anointing and the choice of the people?

# Lesson 23

1 Samuel 18–20; 23–24

As you read these chapters, ask yourself why they are included in scripture. Do they testify of Christ? If so, how? Do they serve some other purpose?

History is important in its own right, but it isn't clear why this particular history is important as scripture. How would you explain its importance? Perhaps the answer is "Ultimately this isn't an important story," but that ought to be our last conclusion rather than our first, the conclusion we come to only after the others fail. After all, people have found meaning in these passages for millennia, and the original editors thought it important to include this story. It would be brash, to say the least, to dismiss the collective judgment of millions of people without good reasons for doing so.

Though David has been anointed to be king, he does not become king immediately. A great deal happens before he is finally made king. (See the list of events at the end of these study questions.) These chapters are devoted to the events of that time. Do you think that this interval of about ten years was necessary to David's development? Was it necessary, instead, for some other reason? Was it, perhaps, unnecessary?

Perhaps what happened didn't have to happen this way. What alternatives were there?

## 1 Samuel 18

**Verses 1–4:** The language used here is the language of love, romantic language. It was common in the ancient Near East to use romantic language to describe the relation of a king to his subject.

The verses may also have political connotations, as the covenant that Jonathan and David make suggests. After all, it is not only a covenant between the two of them. Jonathan makes a covenant not only with David, but also between his house and the house of David (1 Samuel 20:16, 42).

In these verses, when Jonathan gives David his clothing, including his robe, bow, and girdle, he is probably giving David the signs of his royal position, thereby recognizing David's right to the throne. What is the writer showing us about David and Jonathan at a personal level? What more is he showing us? (Compare 2 Samuel 1:26.)

**Verse 17:** Does David have any reason to suspect that Saul will break this promise? (Compare 1 Samuel 17:25).

**Verses 20–25:** Why does Saul offer Michal to be David's wife? Why does David say he cannot ask for Michal?

Why does Saul ask for such a strange substitute for a dowry? If we ignore Saul's intentions, is there any symbolic significance to what he asks for? Is it comparable to anything we have seen before in the Old Testament?

**Verse 27:** Why doesn't Saul renege on his promise to give Michal to David as a wife?

**Verses 28–29:** Notice that, from Saul’s point of view, David has won the loyalty not only of the people, but also of his son and his daughter. David is not just a threat to Saul’s seat on the throne; he is a threat to his status as a father. But, even worse, from Saul’s point of view David has also separated him from the Lord. We have seen Saul become more and more isolated; now he is alone. So what?

## 1 Samuel 19

In this chapter, how many times does Saul try to kill David? Who saves him? So what?

**Verses 20–24:** What do you think is going on here? Compare the question, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” in verse 24 to the same question in 1 Samuel 10:11. What is the difference in the two instances of the question? What is the writer of 1 Samuel trying to show us?

## 1 Samuel 20

**Verses 1–23:** What is David trying to find out by this elaborate stratagem? Why is it necessary?

**Verses 24–29:** How can David be hiding from Saul in a field one minute and, nevertheless, be expected to eat at the king’s feast the next?

**Verses 30–34:** Does the stratagem work? What does Saul try to do to his son Jonathan?

## 1 Samuel 23

**Verse 1:** Why would the Philistines attack threshing floors?

**Verse 3:** Why are David's men afraid?

**Verse 6:** Read 1 Samuel 22:9–20 to understand who Abiathar is and why he is coming to David. Why do you think it is important that when Abiathar came to David he had an ephod in his hand? (If necessary, read about the ephod in your Bible dictionary.) What might have been attached to the ephod? See also verses 9 and 10.

**Verses 12 and 19–20:** Why might these people have been willing to betray David?

## 1 Samuel 24

Given what happens in this chapter and what Saul says in verses 16–22, why did Saul continue to chase David and try to kill him?

**Verse 5:** Is there a connection between David cutting Saul's robe and 1 Samuel 15:27, where Saul tears Samuel's robe? How does David use the piece of the robe he has cut off? (See verses 11–12.)

**Verse 21:** Notice the irony of what Saul asks. What does this suggest about his understanding of his son's relation with David?

## David's flight from Saul

Just reading the story of David, we may miss some of what it implies, such as the length of time between David's flight from the palace and when he became king, a period of about ten years. (He was about twenty when he was forced to leave Saul's palace, and he was thirty when he became

king, 2 Samuel 5:4.) The list of events, below, is incomplete. In spite of that, reading over it will give you a good idea of David's wanderings and trials between the time that he left the palace and the time he became king.

How does seeing the long time that David was in flight change your understanding of the story, if it does?

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1 Samuel 9:12–18   | Michal helps David escape from Saul at Gibeah. He flees to Ramah to see Samuel.   |
| 1 Samuel 19:18–24  | Saul and David meet at Ramah, Samuel's hometown.  |
| 1 Samuel 20: 1, 16 | Jonathan and David make their covenant at Gibeah  |
| 1 Samuel 20:6, 28  | A family feast at Bethlehem   |
| 1 Samuel 20:25–42  | David and Jonathan part at Gibeah.  |
| 1 Samuel 21:1–9    | David flees to the priest Ahimelech in Nob, a priestly city on the Mount of Olives, the place of the primary religious sanctuary at the time.   |
| 1 Samuel 21:10–15  | David visits Achish, king of Gath, a Philistine city and the hometown of Goliath. He is carrying Goliath's sword, and he is alone. When the young men of the city recognize him, he feigns madness and Achish |



- casts him out of the city. See Psalm 34.
- 1 Samuel 22:1–2 David hides in the cave of Adullam. See Psalm 57.
- 1 Samuel 22:3–4 David visits the king of Moab at Mizpeh (Kir-haraseth), where he leaves his parents for safe-keeping.
- 1 Samuel 22:5 Prompted by Gad, David returns to Judah. See Psalm 52.
- 1 Samuel 22:11–19 Angry with Ahimelech for providing sanctuary to David, Saul kills the priests and razes the city of Nob.
- 1 Samuel 23:1–12 David saves the city of Keilah (near Adullam, to its south) from the Philistines.
- 1 Samuel 23:14–23 David is betrayed to Saul by the Ziphites. (Ziph was just southeast of Hebron.) See Psalms 11 and 54.
- 1 Samuel 23:24–26 David escapes into the wilderness of Maon. (Maon was a few miles due south of Ziph.)
- 1 Samuel 24:1–15 David encounters Saul at Engedi but spares Saul's life. See Psalm 142.

- 1 Samuel 25:1 After Samuel's death, David flees to the wilderness of Paran (the Negeb Desert). See Psalms 120 and 121.
- 1 Samuel 25:2–42 David visits the shepherd Nabal at Carmel (due south of Hebron, in the Negeb). Nabal turns David and his men away. Nabal's wife, Abigail, intercedes on her husband's behalf. Nabal dies, and David marries Abigail.
- 1 Samuel 26:1–15 David encounters Saul again and spares his life again.
- 1 Samuel 27:2–5 David returns to Achish, the king of Gath. See Psalm 56.
- 1 Samuel 27:6–12 Achish takes David and his men on as mercenaries and gives David the city of Ziklag to live in.
- 1 Samuel 29 At Aphek, Achish excuses David from his service because Achish's men are suspicious of the Israelite mercenaries. Because of this, David is not present at the battle of Gilboa, where Saul and his sons, including Jonathan, are slain.

- 1 Samuel 30:1–8 On his return to Ziklag, David finds that the Amalekites have burned the city and taken the women and children captive.
- 1 Samuel 30:9–19 David rescues the captives at the river Besor.
- 1 Samuel 30:26–31 David returns to Ziklag and divides the spoil among the elders of Judah.
- 2 Samuel 1:1–10 After two days in Ziklag, David learns of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan and Aphek.
- 2 Samuel 2:1–3 David moves to Hebron and is anointed king.

### A book recommendation

If you are interested in understanding better how the writers of the Old Testament wrote and in seeing masterful analyses of some of the stories in these chapters, consider reading Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Alter has also published *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton, 2000).

# Lesson 24

2 Samuel 11–12; Psalm 51

## 2 Samuel 11

**Verse 1:** What do you make of the fact that the story is set at the time of the year when “kings go forth to battle” but David sent his army to battle and stayed behind himself? What is the writer telling us about David when he says, “But David tarried still at Jerusalem”? (Note: presumably the time when battles could once again commence was at the end of the rainy season, approximately the beginning of May.)

**Verses 2–5:** How do you suppose that David could see Bathsheba bathing? Where do you think people would usually have bathed? How do you think David’s house was situated relative to the other houses?

What does verse 4 suggest about why she was bathing?

Why is it significant that Uriah was a Hittite (or, more likely, descended from an earlier Hittite immigrant)? Who were the Hittites? The Hittite empire no longer existed at this time, so what does it mean to call Uriah a Hittite? Since the name Uriah means “the Lord is light,” he appears to be an Israelite, though calling him a Hittite makes him a foreigner. Do you think that might have had anything to do with the way that David dealt with him?

How is verse 4 ironic? What would the punishment be if Bathsheba were found to be pregnant and, therefore, to have committed adultery? Does Bathsheba betray her husband willingly? In other words, given David's position of authority, was this a case of adultery or of rape? What evidence in the story can you adduce for your answer? Does David intend to continue the relation after his initial encounter with Bathsheba?

**Verses 6–11:** What is David trying to do in these verses? What is his ostensible reason for summoning Uriah? What is his real reason? Why did David send Uriah a *mess*, literally, “a gift”?

Though the gift was probably of food (compare Genesis 43:34), the words “of meat” are added by the translators; that is why they are in italics. At the time of the King James translation, the English word *mess* meant “what is set before you” (from the French *mets*), so it meant “a serving of food.” It is where we get the military term “mess hall.”

It may be that men in battle were expected to abstain from sexual intercourse. (See Deuteronomy 23:10 and 1 Samuel 21:5.) How would that explain the encounter between David and Uriah? If that is true, would there be any advantage to David to have Uriah break the law (beyond making it possible to attribute the pregnancy to him)?

How does Uriah's behavior (verses 9–11) contrast with David's? Why do you think he stayed in the guardroom at the king's door rather than going home?

**Verse 13:** Why does David make Uriah drunk? Does that make what David is doing even more tawdry?

**Verse 14:** What do you make of the fact that David has Uriah carry the letter ordering Uriah's own death to Joab?

**Verse 15:** Specifically what does David ask Joab to do? How does this compare with his treatment of Saul in 1 Samuel 24?

Why does David want Uriah killed? Had Uriah lived, could he have prosecuted David for adultery/rape? Were such charges against the king possible?

How has David changed? What do you think accounts for this change?

**Verses 16–17, 20:** What does Joab do instead of what he was commanded? How do you explain the difference? What would David's plan have cost the army? What would it have cost Joab?

What does Joab's action cost the army? What does it cost him? How many people has David had killed so that he can have Bathsheba?

**Verse 19:** Why does Joab think that David will be angry?

**Verses 20, 23–24:** The servant doesn't follow Joab's instructions. Why not? What does he do instead? What are both he and Joab afraid of? What does that suggest?

**Verses 25–26:** What is disgusting about David's message to Joab? Compare David's response to the news of Uriah's death with Bathsheba's. What does this comparison show?

**Verse 27:** In particular, what displeased the Lord? Literally, the text says that "David did evil in the sight of the Lord." The word translated "evil" can also mean "injury" (e.g., Jeremiah 39:12), "distress" (e.g., Amos 6:3), or "disaster"

(e.g., Isaiah 45:7). Has the Lord's prediction of what would happen to Israel if it had a king come true? How?

## 2 Samuel 12

**Verses 1–7:** Notice that the ability of the prophets to rebuke the kings makes Israel different from other ancient societies. What does that say about the structure of Israelite society? About Israelite values? Does it teach us anything about the cultures in which we live?

How might a contemporary prophet rebuke the government? Is such rebuke necessary?

In David's mind, how serious is the oppression that he hears about in Nathan's story? How does David describe the rich man who has taken the pet lamb?

What do you make of the difference in punishment decreed in verse 5 and that decreed in verse 6? What does verse 7 tell us about Nathan?

**Verse 9:** How many of the Ten Commandments did David break?

How does David's disobedience mean that he despises (i.e., has contempt for) the Lord? Is all disobedience contempt? If not, why not? If so, how so?

**Verses 10–11:** David decreed that the rich man must make a fourfold restitution. Does the writer intend us to see the deaths of three of David's children (Bathsheba's baby; Amnon, 2 Samuel 13:29; and Absalom, 2 Samuel 18:14—and Tamar's fate was equivalent to death in ancient Israel,

2 Samuel 13:20) as any kind of parallel? In any case, what are we to make of this kind of decree? Does God punish us by causing evil to happen to us?

**Verse 13:** What does it mean to say that the Lord has put away (literally “gone beyond”) David’s sin? Does it mean that David will not be punished? What else can it mean? How do you reconcile what we read here with what we find in D&C 132:39?

**Verse 14:** This verse contains a translation problem. The Hebrew literally says that David blasphemed the enemies of the Lord. Trying to deal with that, the King James translators changed the text so that it says that David caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. However, most scholars believe that the Hebrew text we have was “corrected” by a scribe or that an error was made in copying. They assume that the text originally said that David blasphemed the Lord. Why do you think they make that assumption? How might David have blasphemed the Lord?

Many believe that the verse as we have it was added by later editors. How does whoever wrote this verse see the world differently than we do?

**Verse 18:** What do the court officials fear David will do when he hears that the child is dead? Why might they think that?

**Verse 20:** The law of Moses forbids washing and anointing oneself and changing clothing during mourning. Why do you think David does these things?

Why does he cease to mourn for the child before the time of mourning is over?



**Verse 23:** When David says, “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me,” what does he mean?

**Verse 24–25:** David names Bathsheba’s second child Solomon, meaning “peaceful.” (See 1 Chronicles 22:9.) However, some contemporary scholars argue that the name may actually mean “his replacement.” Either way, why do you think David gave him that name?

Nathan gives the second son another name: Jedidiah, or “beloved of the Lord.” Why do you think Nathan gives him that name?

**Verse 28:** What point is Joab making here? How does what he says relate to what we learned in verse 1?

**Verse 30:** It is possible that “their king” should have been translated *Milcom* or *Moloch*, the name of the Ammonite god. If so, David’s behavior violates the law (compare Deuteronomy 7:25–26).

A talent is approximately sixty pounds. Why would David have placed a sixty-pound crown on his head?

**Verse 31:** What did David do to the captives? (Compare 2 Samuel 8:2.)

## Psalm 51

The heading was added by later scribes, so it doesn’t establish that David was, indeed, the author of this psalm, though he may have been. The psalm is about sin, but it isn’t necessarily about the specific sin of David. Of course, it may be. But there are two ambiguities in this psalm: we

do not know that David is the author; we do not know that the sin of which it speaks is David's sin of rape and murder.

The literal translation of the last part of the heading would be "When Nathan the prophet came unto him [David] as he had gone in to Bathsheba." How do the two events, David going in to Bathsheba to have sexual intercourse and Nathan going in to David to condemn him, compare to one another? Why would David preface the psalm with that comparison, assuming that he did?

The general structure of the psalm is (1) verses 1–2: the theme of the psalm, an appeal for mercy and to be made clean; (2) verses 3–4: the appeal for mercy; (3) verses 5–8: a confession of sin; (4) verses 9–14: a request to be made clean and a promise to praise; (5) verses 15–19: a vow to sacrifice; (6) verses 20–21: a prayer for Jerusalem. Does this structure suggest anything about how we should understand the psalm as a whole?

Why does a psalm of contrition end with a prayer for Jerusalem?

**Verse 1:** The writer is praying for mercy (*chesed*) and loving-kindness (*racham*). *Chesed* occurs frequently in the Old Testament and is difficult to translate into English. (See the notes on Ruth, lesson 20.) It can be translated "mercy" or "grace," and it implies steadfast love. *Racham* is an intensive form of a word that in its other uses means "womb" or "bowels." Why would a word that means "womb" or "bowels" in Hebrew come to mean "compassion"?

What are mercy, grace, and compassion? Why do we need them in our relations with each other? In our relation with God?

We could translate “blot out my transgressions” as “expunge my rebellions” or “undo my covenant breaking.” What is the suppliant asking for? What does this tell us about repentance and forgiveness? The Hebrew word translated “sin” here (meaning “rebellion” or “covenant breaking”; see 2 Kings 3:4–5) also occurs in verse 3, where it is translated “transgressions.”

How is sin rebellion? How is it covenant breaking? Is *all* sin covenant breaking? Is it all rebellion?

**Verse 2:** The writer has spoken of forgiveness in terms of having mercy, blotting out, washing, and cleansing. Why does he use so many different words for forgiveness (and also for sin)?

**Verse 3:** Why is it important that the petitioner acknowledge the sin?

The word translated “acknowledge” is, literally, “know.” In what sense does someone asking for forgiveness know her sin in a way that he or she didn’t know it before?

**Verse 4:** Could David say that he has sinned *only* against God? Didn’t he also sin against Uriah and Bathsheba? If this psalm were written by David, how could he say this?

If we assume that “done this evil in thy sight” is parallel to “my sin is ever before me” in verse 3, the writer is saying that what he did, he did with God watching. What point is he making about sin?

**Verse 5:** What is the point of this verse? Is the writer making excuses for what he did, or is something else going on here?

Even those scholars who believe in the doctrine of original sin don't believe that this verse is about original sin. But if it isn't, what *is* it about?

**Verse 6:** What does it mean to say that the Lord “desires truth in the inward parts”?

**Verse 7:** The word translated “purge” means literally “un-sin.” What is the import of the word *unsin*?

What is hyssop? How was it used? (See Exodus 12:22; Numbers 19:6; and Leviticus 14:4.)

What do these parallels tell us about how the writer understands his sin?

**Verse 8:** What does the writer mean when he asks the Lord to make him hear joy and gladness?

What is he talking about when he refers to his broken or crushed bones?

**Verse 10:** Why does he have to ask for a clean heart and a right spirit? Why can't he make his own heart clean and renew his own spirit? What does that teach us about our own sins?

**Verse 11:** What does it mean to be cast from the presence of God?

How do we enter into that presence?

**Verse 12:** Another translation of the second half of this verse is: “Let a willing spirit uphold me,” a request to have a

spirit that responds willingly to what is right. Which translation do you think is more consonant with the gospel?

**Verse 13:** What reason does the writer give for why he should be forgiven?

**Verse 14:** What is the righteousness of the Lord that the writer will sing about?

**Verse 15:** Why would the Lord have to open the writer's lips? Can't he praise God if he has not been forgiven? Why or why not?

**Verses 16, 19:** Why does the writer say that the Lord doesn't want sacrifices in verse 16 and then, in verse 19, speak of him accepting legitimate or righteous sacrifices?

In these verses, how does the writer understand the connection between keeping the commandments and the sacrifices of the temple? Compare Psalm 50:7–14.

**Verses 18–19:** What does this prayer for the temple have to do with the preceding prayer for forgiveness? Some believe that these verses were added later, as a prayer for the restoration of the temple after its destruction by the Babylonians. If so, then the person adding them took the psalm to be not only an expression of individual remorse, but also an expression of Israel's collective remorse. How is it legitimate to understand the scriptures to apply to more than one event?

# Lesson 25

## Psalms

### Overview

One traditional understanding of the book of Psalms, often called “the Psalter,” divides it into five sections. The assumption is that there is an analogy between the Psalter and the five books of Moses: Psalms 1–41, Psalms 42–72, Psalms 73–89, Psalms 90–106, and Psalms 107–50, with Psalm 150 being the closing doxology for the whole collection. Those who accept this division understand the first and second psalms to be an introduction to the Psalter as a whole, so some manuscripts and translations give the number *1* to the psalm we number *3*. If you are reading a Psalter and the chapters and verses don’t line up with your expectations, see if adding two to the psalm number corrects things.

It is obvious that Psalms was created from previous collections of hymns. See the psalms of Asap (Psalms 73–83) and of Korah (Psalms 42, 44–49), as well as the “Songs of Ascents” (Psalms 120–24). The duplication of some psalms is further evidence that the collection we have was created from earlier collections. Compare Psalms 14 and 53, Psalms 70 and 40:13–17, and Psalms 108 and 57:7–11.

Traditionally, most of the psalms in book 1 (Psalms 1–41) are ascribed to David, and most of them address Yahweh.

In contrast, in book 2 (Psalms 42–72), most of the psalms are addressed to Elohim, and though eighteen of them are ascribed to David, the rest are ascribed to other authors. (Notice that Psalm 72:20 tells us that we have come to the end of the psalms of David, even though eighteen psalms after that are attributed to him, more evidence that this is a compilation from other sources.) Book 3 (Psalms 73–89) includes only one psalm of David, and most of its contents are addressed to Elohim. Books 4 (Psalms 90–106) and 5 (Psalms 107–50) are a mixture of things, so it is difficult to pick out defining features. Some manuscripts include a 151st psalm, a hymn of David describing his fight with Goliath.

There are five general categories of psalm, though a number of psalms fall outside these categories. The categories are the psalm of praise (e.g., Psalms 8 and 115), the psalm of lament (e.g., Psalms 14 and 33), the psalm of instruction (e.g., Psalms 37 and 73), the psalm of thanksgiving (e.g., Psalms 34 and 67), and the liturgical psalm. How many of our hymns fit into those categories? Do we have other kinds of hymns as well?

As noted, though tradition describes the Psalter as a whole as “the psalms of David,” only the headings of slightly less than half of them (seventy-three, to be exact) ascribe particular psalms to David, and we cannot be sure that David actually wrote all of the psalms ascribed to him. Some have suggested that David was the author of some of the psalms and the compiler of the whole. However, not only were many of the psalms written before the reign of David, but there is also evidence that a number were written

later. It is possible that David wrote some of the psalms, edited some existing psalms for his use, and adopted some existing psalms with little or no change. It also appears that other writers added psalms to the collection and perhaps rearranged it.

Whatever other uses the Psalter may have had, it is clear that many of the psalms were for use in the liturgy of the temple. Part of the temple service in Jerusalem included singing or chanting by a Levite choir accompanied by instruments, and the Psalter includes the hymns this choir sang.

Though the psalms are poetry, Hebrew poetry does not rely on rhyme and meter, as does standard English poetry. That is probably because, unlike the Greeks, from whom we've inherited our view on these things, the Hebrews did not distinguish between prose and poetry. "Poetry" wasn't a category of writing in Hebrew. It is probably more accurate to think of what we describe as Hebrew poetry as material written in a higher rhetorical style. That heightened style was created by using a variety of rhetorical figures. Most Mormons have heard of chiasmus, but it was only one of many ways that those writing in Hebrew played with language to heighten their style. Other ways included acrostics, repetition, alliteration, ellipsis, word-play, personification, paring words, matching the gender of words, clustering similar images, developing metaphors and similes, and inversion. However, parallelism leads the list by a long distance.

Parallelism is the feature of Hebrew poetry that usually carries over in translation. Here are several examples:



Psalm 1:1

Blessed *is* the man that  
walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
nor standeth in the way of sinners,  
nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

Psalm 1:6

For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous:  
but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Psalm 15:1

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?  
who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

Presumably, these parallels were parts for the choir, with part of the choir singing or chanting one line and another part of the choir singing or chanting the parallel line—but that is, at best, an educated guess. We don't know what ancient Hebrew temple music sounded like or how the liturgy of the ancient temple functioned.

## Psalm 45

Obviously we cannot read and think about each of the psalms in one lesson, so we have to choose one on which to concentrate. More or less at random, I chose Psalm 45, though according to the United Bible Society's handbook for Psalms many take this to be the most secular of the psalms.<sup>1</sup>

That judgment is based on the fact that the psalm is about the king and his bride. It is a hymn of praise to be sung at a royal marriage. So Psalm 45 raises interesting questions, and I think it also gives us good practice for learning to see the scriptures in terms of types and shadows.

This psalm may have been originally written for the wedding of an Israelite king. That is why some describe it as secular. Given the warlike character of the king (see verses 4–6) and that his bride may be from Tyre (verse 12), many have conjectured that the king and queen in question are Ahab and Jezebel. If so, it is surprising, perhaps even shocking, that this has been included in scripture. How could a love poem about the marriage of two people who turned out to be quite wicked become a scriptural hymn praising God with little or no change of the wording?

As odd as that might seem to us, since Hebrews 1:8–9 quotes verses 6–7 of this psalm and uses those verses to refer to Christ, we cannot doubt that, whatever its original context, this psalm was later understood as more than a love poem.

The idea that the Lord is a bridegroom and Israel is the bride is a common one in scripture, both ancient and modern. It is part and parcel of the Hebrew way of speaking about a sovereign and his people. We find it in scriptures such as Hosea, in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13), and in many other places (such as D&C 109:72–74).

Why is the marital relation such an important type of our relation to the Lord? For example, how does the marriage

covenant exemplify the covenant that the Lord has with Israel? How does the relationship between the Lord and Israel and between the Lord and the Church exemplify the marriage relationship? As you read this psalm, see if there are different ways that you can understand what you read. How many different meanings can you see in it?

## Superscription

The word *shoshannim* means “lilies.” Presumably this was the name of the tune to be used for this psalm. Though not a translation, we can understand the superscription to mean “Instructions for the director of the choir and orchestra: this is to be sung and played to the tune ‘Lilies’; it was written by the sons of Korah; it is a song of instruction [or skill or reflection—the meaning of the word is not clear]; it is a love song.”

**Verse 1:** The Hebrew word translated “inditing” by the King James translators is a difficult word to translate because this is the only place in scripture where it occurs. However, it is related to a word that means “saucepan” and has a root meaning “to boil.” Presumably, it means “overflowing” or “stirred up.”

To what do you think “things which I have made” refers? What is the singer saying in this verse?

**Verse 2:** Look ahead a verse or two. To whom is this part of the poem dedicated? Whom is it praising?

We have seen before the Israelite tradition that kings are better looking than others (e.g., 1 Samuel 9:2; 16:12). How

does that apply to the Lord? On the other hand, Isaiah says of the Lord, “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). How are we to understand that? Can you square these two ideas? What symbolism can you see in describing the Lord as handsome? What symbolism can you see as describing him as homely?

What does it mean to say that grace is poured into a person’s lips? What does it mean to say it of the Lord?

Why does the concluding clause of the verse begin with *therefore*? That word tells us that the writer is proving or demonstrating something. What would that be? What does “grace is poured into [*onto* would be better] thy lips” mean? How would we take it in ordinary speech? Might it have more significance than that for us?

**Verses 3–5:** Why would this be praise of an earthly king? Why would it be appropriate at his wedding? How does it apply to the heavenly king? How is it appropriate of his covenant relation with us?

**Verses 6–7:** Though the King James translation has “Thy throne, O God,” most other translations have “Thy throne from God.”

What is a “right sceptre”?

What does it mean to say that the king has been anointed with “the oil of gladness”?

In what sense has a king been anointed above his fellows?

How do these ideas apply to the Savior? Why does Hebrews 1:8–9 quote these particular verses?

**Verse 8:** What is the point of this verse? How can we understand it in relation to the Lord?

**Verse 9:** When the writer says that the king has king's daughters "among thy honorable women" (in other words, among his wives), what point is he making? Anciently one sign of a king's nobility and power was the size of his harem. Do you think the writer may be using that image? Is there any way to put this into equivalent contemporary terms?

What does it mean to say that the queen is clothed in the gold of Ophir?

What point is the writer making in this verse, and how can we understand that as a type of other things?

**Verse 10:** The poet turns from the bridegroom king to the bride. She appears to be homesick, longing for her family and familiar surroundings. Why should she forget her own people and her father's house? How might we apply that to ourselves? Are we ever homesick for life without the Lord? If you think the answer is yes, explain what you mean. If you think the answer is no, explain why not.

**Verse 11:** What does it mean for the king to desire the bride's beauty? How might the Lord desire our beauty? What could our beauty be for him?

Literally this says that the bride must "bow down" to the groom. You can see why the King James translators translated that as "worship." Can you think of other ways they could have translated it? In other words, what things can bowing down signify here?

**Verse 12:** Why is it significant that people give the bride gifts and that the rich seek favors from her? How does that apply to ancient Israel? To latter-day Israel?

**Verses 13–15:** How might we apply this description of the bride’s clothing to ourselves and our circumstances? How might we apply to ourselves the promise that the bride and her bridesmaids will be taken into the palace?

**Verse 16:** Though it is ambiguous in English, in Hebrew the writer turns his attention back to the king in this verse. “Instead of” means “in the place of”: where your fathers ruled, your children will rule. For the king, this is a promise that his dynasty will continue. What does that mean when we apply it to the Lord? To ourselves in our relation to him?

**Verse 17:** Why is it important for one’s name to be remembered? How do we remember the Lord’s name? How are our own names remembered?

## Another translation

Sometimes it is helpful to look at another translation. Doing so can help us understand the King James translation better. Here is the translation of the Amplified Bible, so-called because it adds explanatory words and phrases, amplifying the translation. I have made a few minor alterations in the translation to increase its clarity.

Compare this translation to that of the King James Version of the Bible. Do you learn things by that comparison that you wouldn’t have seen without it?

## Psalm 45

1 My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my psalm to a king. My tongue is like the pen of a ready writer.

2 You are fairer than the children of men; graciousness is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.

3 Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and your majesty!

4 And in your majesty ride on triumphantly for the cause of truth, humility, and righteousness (uprightness and right standing with God); and let your right hand guide you to tremendous things.

5 Your arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under you; your darts pierce the hearts of the king's enemies.

6 Your throne from God is forever and ever; the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.

7 You love righteousness, uprightness, and right standing with God and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.

8 Your garments are all fragrant with myrrh, aloes, and cassia; stringed instruments make you glad.

9 Kings' daughters are among your honorable women; at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

10 Hear, O daughter, consider, submit, and consent to my instruction: forget also your own people and your father's house;

11 So will the king desire your beauty; because he is your Lord, be submissive and reverence and honor him.

12 And, O daughter of Tyre, the richest of the people shall entreat your favor with a gift.

13 The king's daughter in the inner part [of the palace] is all glorious; her clothing is inwrought with gold. [Revelation 19:7, 8.]

14 She shall be brought to the king in raiment of needlework; with the virgins, her companions that follow her, she shall be brought to you.

15 With gladness and rejoicing will they be brought; they will enter into the king's palace.

16 In the place of your fathers shall be your sons, whom you will make princes in all the land.

17 I will make your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise and give you thanks forever and ever.



THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 26

1 Kings 3; 5–11

## The story

This week's lesson focuses on the construction of the first temple. Previously there had been many places for offering sacrifices and several buildings that we would call temples. But this is the first one built on the site traditionally associated with Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. As this temple came to prominence, it overshadowed the others, and by the time of the return from Babylon, it became the only one recognized. The first two chapters of 1 Kings are the background for the building of that temple.

Chapters 1–2 deal with the final days of David, when his son Adonijah, aided by the captain of the army, Joab, and one of the two chief priests, Abiathar, attempted a coup. Nathan and Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, entered into their own counterplot, telling David (who had previously promised that Solomon would be king) what Adonijah was doing. David's solution is to have Zadok, the other chief priest, anoint Solomon co-regent.

Historical side note: By the way, the term *Sadducee* in the New Testament may mean "Zadokite," reflecting their desire for a legitimate priesthood holder, a descendant of Zadok (who was the first temple's high priest), to occupy the office. After the exile in Babylon, Ezekiel declared that only

descendants of Zadok could perform all of the priestly duties in the temple, yet the high priest of the temple in the first century was not a Zadokite but a Hasmonean. (However, the origin of the name *Sadducee* is unclear; I give here a traditional explanation of the name, but not the only reasonable one.)

As part of internal intrigue and treachery, in 175 BC the priest descended from the line of Zadok, Onias III, was replaced with his brother, Jason (who bought the office), by Antiochus IV, king of the Seleucid empire. Israel was part of the Seleucid empire at the time. (The Seleucid empire was one of four kingdoms into which Alexander's empire had been divided at his death in 324 BC.) In turn, Jason was replaced with Menelaus in 171 BC, but Menelaus was *not* a descendant of Zadok, as was required. Menelaus also obtained the office by bribing Antiochus IV, offering more than Jason did.

In 164 BC, led by the Hasmonean family, Israel revolted against Antiochus IV. In response Antiochus IV allowed them to throw out the usurping high priest, Menelaus. But since the priests descended from Zadok had all fled to Elephantine, in Egypt, there was no one left in Jerusalem to serve as high priest. So the Hasmonean family took the office, with the understanding that they were doing so only temporarily. They would officiate in the priestly office until a descendent of Zadok could be found to be made the high priest. By the time of Jesus, no such descendant had been found, so the Hasmoneans continued to occupy the high priestly office, though many Israelites refused to recognize them as legitimate. Thus, though Zadok makes only a short appearance here, he was very important to Israel's later history.

By the beginning of chapter 3, Adonijah and Joab have been killed and Abiathar (from Eli's posterity) has been banished from the court (and he is later executed). That means that Zadok is the sole priest over Israel, and it fulfills the prophecy pronounced on Eli (from whom Abiathar descends, 1 Samuel 2:30–35).

### 1 Kings 3

**Verses 1–3:** Why do you think that the writer refers to “Pharaoh’s daughter,” never using her name? How would Israel have felt about the king marrying the daughter of their former masters? What would that marriage show about the present relation of Israel to Egypt?

Note that the phrase “city of David” reflects 2 Samuel 5:6–9, in which David’s men take Jerusalem as his possession. David creates the capital city of Jerusalem.

Leviticus 17:3–4 forbids Israel from offering sacrifice any place but at the tabernacle. How do you understand that, given the sacrifices we have seen offered, including by prophets, at other places before this? How does that prohibition help us understand what these verses tell us?

Notice also that the term translated “high places” doesn’t necessarily designate a high place, nor does it necessarily refer to places of idolatry. Its most obvious use is simply as a reference to places in other cities where sacrifices had been offered.

It is easy to see, in the end of verse 4, the editing of a later person. For the later editor, sacrifice at any spot other than the Jerusalem temple is unacceptable, but he has to deal

with the fact that Solomon offered sacrifice at another place because that is the location of Solomon's dream. Many scholars believe that the rule against sacrifice at any place but Jerusalem is a later revision of Leviticus, reflecting the choice of Jerusalem as capital, rather than a Mosaic law. These verses are evidence for that suspicion.

**Verse 7:** How seriously should we take Solomon's claim that he is only a little child? (Compare 1 Kings 11:42; 14:21.) What is the point of saying that he is young if he is old enough to have an adult son? What does this show us about Solomon?

**Verses 8–9:** Literally Solomon asks for a "listening heart." What does Solomon's request show about his character? What does he value?

**Verses 16–27:** How does Solomon's judgment show that he has the kind of wisdom needed to govern a kingdom?

## 1 Kings 5

**Verses 3–5:** Why did David's involvement in war prevent him from building the temple? What might this teach us about our own lives? What is required to build the kingdom of God?

## 1 Kings 6

**Verse 7:** What is the significance of the claim that no iron tools were heard on the construction site of the temple?

**Verses 12–13:** What does it mean to walk in the Lord's statutes? To execute his judgments?

What is the significance of the promise that the Lord makes here?

What does it mean for Israel to be forsaken by God? What does it mean for an individual to be forsaken by him?

What is the connection between the righteousness of the individual and that of the community? How are they related?

**Verses 23–25:** Except that they were winged creatures, we know little about the cherubim. Since each wing was five cubits wide, the four wings together would have been twenty cubits wide, assuming no space between them. Since the holy of holies was twenty cubits wide, we have to make that assumption, which means that the wings of the cherubim stretched entirely across the room. Why do you think the Lord had them place cherubim in the holy of holies?

How does this commandment accord with the prohibition against graven images in the Ten Commandments?

## 1 Kings 7

**Verse 7:** This verse tells us that Solomon’s throne room was part of the temple. What does that say about the Israelite understanding of the relation of religion and the king?

**Verse 44:** Why do you think the “sea” had twelve oxen underneath it? Why oxen rather than another animal?

## 1 Kings 8

**Verses 15–53:** How does this dedicatory prayer compare to other temple dedicatory prayers, such as that of the Kirtland Temple or of the new Nauvoo Temple?

Why is the king rather than the high priest or the prophet offering the dedicatory prayer for the temple?

The word *name* occurs in this prayer fourteen times (verses 16–20, 29, 33, 35, 41–44, and 48). Why so often?

Notice the things that Solomon prays for: that the Lord will keep the covenant he made with David (verses 25–26), forgive trespasses between Israelites (31–32), forgive the sins that had caused Israel to lose battles (33–34), forgive the sins that had brought a drought (35–36), and forgive their sins that might cause other disasters (37–40); besides praying on behalf of non-Israelites who come to Israel “for the name’s sake” (41–42), he prayed for victory in battle (44–45), restoration after captivity (46–51), and for the prayers of the Israelites to be heard by the Lord (52–53). How are our concerns like Solomon’s? How different?

What can you see in this prayer that is emblematic of Israel’s relation to Christ?

Do you think that Solomon’s prayer for restoration after captivity was prophetic? Did he have the captivity in mind that was to occur almost 500 years later, at the time of Zedekiah? What justifies your answer?

**Verses 62–63:** Why sacrifice so many animals? What would that show? Are these numbers literal, or do they perhaps serve another purpose? If they serve another purpose, what is it?

## 1 Kings 9

**Verse 1:** Originally the word *Zion* referred only to the southern portion of the hill on the south side of Jerusalem.

The name was extended to include the temple compound and, finally, all of Jerusalem. How is its historical meaning relevant to its contemporary meaning?

**Verse 2:** The Lord appeared to Solomon at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:5) and promised Solomon wisdom. Here we see the Lord giving him that wisdom. How is the Lord's promise related to the completion of the temple? Does that tell us anything about the kind of wisdom Solomon was given?

**Verse 3:** Why can only the Lord make something holy (*hallowed*)?

Solomon's temple was destroyed when Israel was carried into captivity in Babylon. So what does it mean for the Lord to say that he has put his name in that temple forever and his eyes and heart will be there perpetually?

**Verses 4–5:** Why does the Lord say that David walked before him “in integrity of heart, and in uprightness”? Isn't that an odd way to describe David after he raped Bathsheba and had Uriah killed? (See 2 Samuel 7:16 and 1 Kings 22:4 for the promise that the Lord made to David.)

## 1 Kings 10

Why are verses 1–11 included in the story? Why are verses 12–13 included? Verses 14–23? Verses 24–29?

## 1 Kings 11

**Verses 1–4:** In 1 Kings 9:6–9, the Lord warned what would happen if Israel departed from the Lord. In Deuteronomy 7:3–4, Israel was warned of what would happen if they



married *strange* (that is, foreign, non-Israelite) people. What do you think that warning meant, given the number of marriages we have seen between prominent Israelites (such as Moses) and non-Israelite women?

How do you think it was possible for Solomon to become an idolater? Is there anything comparable that happens in our lives, something that probably seems natural to us and probably requires no conscious decision?

In what sense was David's heart whole but Solomon's was not?

**Verse 3:** The numbers 700 and 300 are probably not meant literally. Nevertheless, it wasn't unknown for kings to have huge harems as demonstrations of their wealth, power, and prestige. Is there a relation between Solomon's desire to demonstrate his power (something a king needs to do) and his turn to idolatry?

The writer of this story imputes merely base motives to Solomon, but we can imagine that Solomon saw matters differently: The marriages were politically strategic. The shrines he had built around the city had two purposes. First, they allowed those from other lands who had come to Jerusalem the possibility of worshipping their own gods—an early version of freedom of worship. Second, by locating them outside but near the city, and by making their presence a matter of privilege rather than right, they showed that those gods were subject to Yahweh. If those were Solomon's motives, what was wrong with what he did?

**Verse 9:** How do you explain the fact that Solomon twice had a vision of the Lord and, nevertheless, turned from him?

**Verse 12:** What principle do we see at work here? Can you think of other instances of this principle, positive and negative?

**Verses 15–17:** This may be the same war described in 2 Samuel 8:13–14. In verse 17 notice that, as it does throughout ancient Near Eastern history, Egypt serves as a refuge for those who flee Israel and its neighbors. (See also verse 40.)

**Verse 14:** The Hebrew word translated “adversary” is *satan*, the word from which we get the name for Satan. To whom is Satan an adversary?

**Verses 15, 23–24:** Is it significant that two of those who come against Solomon were made enemies by his father?

**Verse 27:** How is this a reason for Jeroboam’s revolt? What is missing?

**Verses 30–31:** How does this event compare to 1 Samuel 15:27–28?

**Verses 31 and 37:** In the first of these verses, Jeroboam is given ten tribes to rule over. In the second, he is given rule over all that he desires. Are these the same?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

## Lesson 27

1 Kings 12–14; 2 Chronicles 17; 20

The material of this lesson, especially that of chapters 12–13, is important to understanding the rest of the Old Testament, for the eighty years that it covers details the split that occurred between the ten tribes of Israel in the north and the tribe of Judah/Benjamin in the south. Since these accounts, like the rest of the Old Testament, were edited many years later (for example, after the return from Babylon) by descendants of those in the southern kingdom, you should think about what their point of view would have been and how that might have shaped their version of the story, the only version we have. There is no factual, objective account of the division, only this one written by someone on one side of the division and later edited by people also on that side of the division. On the other hand, the fact that, apparently, the original writer continually refers to *all* Israel—both the northern and the southern kingdoms—shows that he, at least, was not a simple propagandist for the south. He had the unification of Israel at heart.

After this lesson, the material we read will often not be in chronological order. You can use the Old Testament chronology in the LDS Bible Dictionary to see how the materials we study are related to each other chronologically.

## The story

Because it can be difficult to follow the story line, especially when reading closely, I preface these notes with an overview of the story. Perhaps that will help you keep the relation of events to each other clear.

1. After Solomon, original Israel splits into two factions. The first, in the north, is called Israel and is ruled by Jeroboam. The second, Judah, is in the south and is ruled by Rehoboam. (1 Kings 12:1–20)
2. Jeroboam builds temples in Shechem and Penuel. His hand is withered because he has demanded the arrest of a prophet who prophesies against the temple at Beth-el (which is supported by Jeroboam). Then he is healed by that same prophet. (1 Kings 12:21–13:34)
3. When Jeroboam's son, Abijah, becomes ill, Jeroboam sends his wife to the prophet Ahijah in Shiloh for counsel. However, instead of telling her what will become of their son, Ahijah tells her that Jeroboam's descendants will be destroyed. (1 Kings 14:1–20)
4. Judah takes up idolatry, and Shishak, king of Egypt, invades and pillages the Jerusalem temple. (1 King 14:21–31)
5. After three generations, Jehoshaphat, Rehoboam's great-grandson, reigns righteously, bringing peace to Judah and respect to Jehoshaphat from the kings of nations that had previously been enemies. (2 Chronicles 17)

6. The Moabites and Ammonites join forces to attack Israel, but Israel is saved by the choir! (2 Chronicles 20).

## 1 Kings 12

Verse 1: Why was Shechem important to the Israelites? Why might they have gone to Shechem to crown the new king? (See Genesis 12:6–7; 33:18–20; and Joshua 24:21–24.)

What point does Rehoboam make by going to Shechem to be crowned rather than to Jerusalem?

**Verses 2–4:** Why does Jeroboam return?

What do the people want Rehoboam to do? Are they negotiating the terms under which they will accept him as king?

Is it telling that they do not complain about Solomon's idolatry?

Are they asking for some form of self-rule or merely for leniency?

**Verses 6–7:** What did the elders demand? What are they trying to do in verse 7? What was their advice for Rehoboam's success? Are they telling him what he should do, or are they just answering his question at the end of verse 6, "How do ye advise that I may answer this people"? In other words, are they answering sincerely or merely giving strategic, political advice?

**Verses 8–11:** What does it mean in verse 8 that he "forsook the counsel of the old men" before he had spoken with the

young men? What did the young men advise? How do you explain this difference?

What do his counselors mean when they advise Rehoboam to tell Israel, “My little finger shall be thicker than my father’s loins”?

How could the king beat them with scorpions? (In other words, what is a scorpion in this context?)

How does the young men’s advice about who should be servants (which in Hebrew at that time meant “slaves”) differ from that of the elders?

**Verses 13–14:** How do you explain the difference in counsel that the two groups gave to Rehoboam? Why would each of the groups advising Rehoboam give the advice that they did? How do you explain his preference for the second group’s counsel?

**Verse 15:** Why would the writer attribute these events to the Lord? (Compare verse 24.) How much do you think God intervenes in the course of history? Why would he intervene in this case? What factors determine his intervention or nonintervention? *How* does he intervene when he does? For example, how might we see his hand in contemporary history? What are the implications of our understanding of how he intervenes in world history for how he intervenes in the history of the Church or in our individual lives?

**Verses 16–17:** How is the term *David* used in verse 16?

Why do the people attack David?

This is the moment when Israel is split, never to reunite until the Second Coming. Is this split a result of the decision to have a king? If so, how?

**Verse 18:** What happens to the tax collector sent by Rehoboam to gather the tribute?

**Verse 19:** What does the phrase “unto this day” tell us about the author of this account?

**Verses 20–21:** What does the text mean when it states that *none* followed Rehoboam but the tribe of Judah, when verse 21 tells us that Benjamin also followed?

**Verses 21–24:** What happens to the army that Rehoboam gathers to go to war against the north?

How might we understand these verses as telling us the point of the story we have just read? How might these verses constitute the writer’s “and thus we see”?

Does the writer of these verses intend to show us a brave king who takes the advice of the man of God, or does he intend to show us someone who, when the time comes to fight, is a coward? How would you give evidence for your answer?

**Verse 25:** Shechem was already an old city by the time of Jeroboam, so what does the writer mean here when he says that Jeroboam built it?

**Verses 26–27:** Why did Jeroboam think that the people would return to Rehoboam as their king if they worshipped in Jerusalem?

**Verses 26–29:** Why did Jeroboam build golden calves, or bulls, in Dan and Beth-el? Why in those two cities? Where



are they geographically? Where have we seen a golden calf before (Genesis 32)? So what?

Why would Rehoboam do this even after the Israelites had seen the Lord's reaction to the first golden calf?

## Thinking about the golden calf

Here are some things that will help you think about the complexity of the writer's claim that Rehoboam committed idolatry:

1. We have an image of twelve oxen in our temples. Some are golden. Why are they all right when Rehoboam's calf is not?
2. Contemporary scholars believe that the golden calves were *not* intended for idol worship, but were to serve the same function in Rehoboam's temple that the seraphim served in the Jerusalem temple.
3. The bull is a symbol of fertility (Job 21:10) and of power (Psalm 22:12).
4. Abraham sacrificed a calf when he offered the sacrifice in which his covenant was made (Genesis 15:9). The sacrificed calf was a sign of the covenant (Jeremiah 34:18).
5. A calf was sacrificed for an individual sin offering (Leviticus 9:2; see also 1 Samuel 16:2). A red heifer was sacrificed for the communal sin offering (Numbers 19:1–10). Calves and oxen were also used

for other sacrifices. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 15:19.)

6. Calves are a symbol of Joseph—Deuteronomy 33:17: “His [Joseph’s] glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns [Hebrew: “wild oxen”]: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.”

7. After noting the reference to the symbol of Ephraim as a bull (Deuteronomy 33:17), Andrew Skinner, former dean of Religious Education at BYU, writes:

See also the Hebrew of Gen. 49:24, in which the phrase *’abîr ya’akōb* is used, the literal meaning being “bull of Jacob.” The King James Version translates the phrase as “mighty God of Jacob.” The bull was a symbol for divine power in the ancient Near East. The earliest dated archeological object of Pharaonic Egypt—the Narmer Palette—depicts the bull as a symbol of the power of the first Pharaoh. The Canaanites of Ugarit worshipped their god El as a bull, and Baal was depicted as mounted on a bull.<sup>1</sup>

Even if the golden calves were ornamental rather than idolatrous, what was the danger of putting them in the northern temples?

**Verses 30–33:** Simon Devries summarizes the six complaints that the writer has against Jeroboam:

1. Since the calves were made in the same place, there was a religious procession to take one of them to Dan in the far north.
2. Existing open-air altars had been converted into temples by adding walls and a roof.
3. Anyone could become a priest, not just Levites.
4. Jeroboam changed the religious calendar.
5. Jeroboam went to the altar, though only priests were allowed to do so.
6. Country priests were brought to Beth-el to serve there.<sup>2</sup>

Why would Jeroboam have done these things? The writer gives Jeroboam's reforms a negative interpretation. Can you think of any possible positive interpretation, one that those in the northern kingdom might have given?

## 1 Kings 13

What is the point of this strange story? What does the writer intend us to learn from it?

Simon Devries says that this story "is about the marks of authentic prophecy—to be specific, the degree of obedience to which a genuine bearer of revelation is willing to commit himself."<sup>3</sup> Do you agree, or do you see the story having another point?

If Devries is right about the point of the story, what does that tell us about the sign of a true prophet?

**Verse 1:** Is it a problem that Jeroboam is burning incense on the altar? If it is, why doesn't the prophet mention it? How could it *not* be a problem?

**Verses 2–3:** What prophecy does this man make upon the altar, as it were?

**Verses 4–5:** What happens to Jeroboam as he puts forth his hand to stop these proceedings, and what happens to the altar? How is this like an earlier experience involving Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12)? Do you think that the writer wants us to see that parallel? If so, why?

**Verses 7–10:** Why does Jeroboam offer the prophet a gift, and why is the gift refused? Remember that we have seen people offer gifts to the prophets before, as tokens of respect, and the prophets have accepted them. That was the custom of the time. See, for example, 1 Kings 14:3. Why refuse this time?

**Verses 11–32:** Here we have one of the strangest stories of the Old Testament, with one prophet tempting another to disobey God—and succeeding. Note how the Prophet Joseph Smith changes this text (footnote 18b). What does his change add to the story? How does this change make sense in the story?

Why would one prophet of God lead another prophet of God astray? What was the reaction of the second prophet to the death of the first (13:29–32)?

**Verse 32:** Knowing the later meaning of Samaria to those in Judah, what does this verse tell us about the purpose of this story?

**Verse 33:** Of what is the writer accusing Jeroboam?

## 1 Kings 14

**Verses 1–4:** Why does Jeroboam send his wife to Abijah the prophet when their son becomes ill? In other words, why send his wife, rather than go himself? Why to Abijah specifically?

What does it mean when the text says, “Abijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age”? If he couldn’t see, why did she go in disguise?

Abijah and Jeroboam had been on friendly terms (1 Kings 11:29–39). What does the wife’s need to disguise herself suggest about their relation now? Why might that relation have changed?

**Verses 8–9:** Given what we have seen of David, how can the description of him in verse 8 be true? What if it isn’t true?

**Verses 10–11:** This description of the males in Israel as those who urinate against the wall and the house of Jeroboam as dung is blatantly offensive. Why does the prophet use that kind of language?

**Verses 13–14:** What does this tell us about Jeroboam’s son? Knowing this, why wouldn’t the Lord allow the son to live and rule? Is the point of this story to be found in verse 14: the Lord will choose the king, not the king? (Compare 1 Kings 11:29–40.) How is this relevant to us?

**Verses 15–16:** What does the phrase “beyond the river” signify? What event is the prophet foretelling?

Do you think that verse 16 is part of the original prophecy or something added by a later editor? Why?

**Verse 19:** Notice the reference (see footnote 19a) to records that we do not have. (For a complete listing, see under “Lost Books” in the LDS Bible Dictionary.)

**Verses 20–21:** Notice the shift from the history of the north to the history of the south. The writer is giving us a parallel history. We will see this repeatedly.

What is significant about the reference to Rehoboam’s mother (verse 21)? Why is this repeated in verse 31? What is the writer telling us about Rehoboam’s upbringing?

**Verse 24:** What important clue is contained in verse 24 as to why the Lord had cast off the nations that were in Canaan?

The term *sodomite* means “cult prostitute.” It translates a collective term that stands for both males and females. Cultic prostitution appears to have been the practice of ritual sexual intercourse at temples. There are serious debates as to whether the practice actually existed and to what degree, or whether it is a modern misunderstanding of ancient texts. The reasons for the practice are debated as much as is the question of its existence. Some argue that it was primarily to raise funds for the temple, others that it was part of fertility rituals, still others that it was an accusation made up by a nation’s enemies and didn’t really happen.

**Verse 25:** Jerusalem is sacked by the king of Egypt in the fifth year of Rehoboam’s reign, the first of many such sackings. Each time the pattern is the same: go to the temple

and the palace and take everything of value. What is the symbolic meaning of an army doing that?

We know from Egyptian records of the same time period that Shishak invaded not only Judah but also Israel. Why doesn't the writer mention that?

## 2 Chronicles 17

The lesson material shifts to Jehoshaphat, the great-grandson of Rehoboam (1 Kings 15:9–24). In the intervening years, Rehoboam's son Abijam and Rehoboam's grandson, Asa, ruled in the land of Judah. We have few details of their reigns except for the constant battles against Israel. Asa apparently tried to bring about religious reform, and the text speaks of him as having a "heart [that] was perfect with the Lord all his days" (1 Kings 15:14). In spite of his attempts, the high places were not removed. Neither does it happen under the rule of his son, Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat replaced the gold vessels in the temple for a time and then took them out again to bribe the king of Syria to attack Israel from the north in a two-front war. At that point the Lord sent Hanani the seer to rebuke Asa for relying on the king of Syria rather than on the Lord. In his wrath, Asa had the seer thrown in prison, and when Asa had reigned for thirty-nine years, he contracted a foot disease and died: "he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians" (2 Chronicles 16:12).

**Verses 1–7:** Note the reforms imputed to Jehoshaphat. What are the consequences of these reforms? (See verses

5–6, 10–13.) Why would such consequences come as a result of his righteousness?

Usually when we see the phrase “his heart was lifted up,” it has a negative sense, indicating pride. What is the difference when Jehoshaphat’s heart is lifted up (verse 6)?

**Verses 7–9:** What educational reforms did Jehoshaphat institute? Why would he turn so early to educational reforms? (See Deuteronomy 17:18–20.) What lesson is there for us in this?

## 2 Chronicles 18–19

Though these chapters aren’t part of the lesson materials, I recommend reading them. In them Jehoshaphat joins forces with Ahab, king of Israel, to battle against Syria. Ahab is one of the most wicked of Israel’s kings and the husband of Jezebel (who has become the personification of an evil woman). When the two kings are trying to decide whether to go to battle, Jehoshaphat summons all of the prophets he can find and taunts Ahab by asking whether there isn’t a prophet in Israel. Ahab says there is, but that prophet (Micaiah) always prophesies evil against him—which is once again the case when Micaiah is summoned.

As the combined forces of Judah and Israel battle with Syria, Ahab is indeed killed. Later, when Jehoshaphat returns from the successful battle, a seer rebukes him for forming a league with evil (Ahab) regardless of the cause.

In chapter 19, Jehoshaphat institutes judicial reform to bring judicial practice into line with the Mosaic law and to



get rid of corruption. He divides the courts into two parts, the religious courts, under Amaraiah, the chief priest, and the state courts, under Zebadiah, the leader of Judah. (We see here that the idea of separation of church and state, in this case probably resulting from conflicts of the interests of each in matters of the revenues accruing to them, has its beginnings in the Bible.)

## 2 Chronicles 20

**Verses 1–4:** What does Jehoshaphat’s response to the invasion of the Moabites and Ammonites tell us about him?

**Verses 6–12:** Why the list of questions at the beginning of the prayer (verses 6–7)?

Why refer to Abraham, and why describe him here as “thy friend for ever”? (Compare Genesis 41:8.)

For Jehoshaphat, what is one function of the temple (verse 9)? Is he appealing to the prayer that Solomon made at the temple dedication? (See 2 Chronicles 6:12–42.)

What event is verse 10 referring to?

**Verse 13:** It cannot be true that literally *all* the men of Judah, with their families, stood before the Lord to hear Jehoshaphat’s prayer. Who do you think his audience was?

**Verse 14:** Why would the answer to the prayer of Jehoshaphat come through someone else in the congregation? What might that teach us?

Why would Jahaziel’s genealogy be important enough to make it the preface to his proclamation? His genealogy goes

back to Asaph, one of the Levite musicians in the temple at the time of David. (See 1 Chronicles 25:1—what is the significance of describing the musicians as prophesying?)

**Verse 17:** Compare Exodus 14:13. Why is the language of the two similar? What point is the writer making for us?

**Verse 20:** Jehoshaphat's advice continues to be good advice. Notice the parallel: "believe in the Lord" is parallel to "believe [or 'have faith in'] his prophets," and "so shall ye be established" is parallel to "so shall ye prosper." What is the point of that parallel? (The Hebrew word translated "established" means "to confirm, to support," and it has connotations of certainty.) In this context, however, what prophets is Jehoshaphat talking about? Who makes the prophecy that Jehoshaphat asks Israel to rely on?

**Verse 21:** Why would Jehoshaphat appoint singers? What were they singing? Why that?

**Verses 22–23:** In what way is this a repetition of Joshua's attack on the city of Jericho? How are those two events similar? How are the two results similar?

**Verses 25–26:** What economic good came as a result of this invasion?

**Verse 28:** Note, again, the importance of music to the temple. Is music similarly important to us? In other words, for us, is it essential to worship, or is it merely ornamentation? What evidence would you produce to argue against someone who says that we use it merely ornamentally?

**Verses 29–30:** What political good came as a result of the battle?

How does the Lord answer Jehoshaphat's rhetorical question (2 Chronicles 20:6)?

**Verse 33:** What point is the writer/editor making here?

**Verses 35–37:** Why is this part of Jehoshaphat's history merely tacked on to the end? How do you reconcile the differences between this account and that of 1 Kings 22:49–50?

# Lesson 28

1 Kings 17–19

## Elijah

We know from passages in the New Testament and, especially, from latter-day revelation that Elijah is one of the most important prophets to have lived. (In the Jewish tradition, he is second only to Moses.) Yet we know almost nothing about him. Why do you think that is?

In addition to the story of his life, in these and the next few chapters of scripture, we have Malachi's prophecy that Elijah would come to bind the hearts of the fathers and the children (Malachi 4:5), as well as the repetition of that prophecy in several places, notably in D&C 2:1–3, where we are told that his coming will bring a restoration of the sealing priesthood. (See also D&C 110:13–16.) The Savior thought the prophecy was so important that he repeated it during his ministry to the Nephites.

Of Elijah, Joseph Smith said:

The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth; and to receive, obtain, and perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God,

even unto the turning of the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children unto the fathers, even those who are in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

He also said:

The Spirit of Elias is first, Elijah second, and Messiah last. Elias is a forerunner to prepare the way, and the spirit and power of Elijah is to come after, holding the keys of power, building the Temple to the capstone, placing the seals of the Melchisedec Priesthood upon the house of Israel, and making all things ready; then Messiah comes to His Temple, which is last of all.<sup>2</sup>

As Arthur Bassett has noted, there is considerable difference between Elijah's mission and what we know of his life: he brings the sealing power, but the only sealing we see him do is the sealing of the heavens; the sealing power unites families, but we see no family for him; the sealing power creates an eternal community, but we see him live a solitary life; the work of sealing is mostly associated with the temple, but we have no record of any connection between him and the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

There are strong parallels between Elijah and John the Baptist: Elijah is a secluded prophet, dressed in leather and crying repentance in the wilderness; part of his mission is accomplished on the banks of a stream; those who most oppose him are a wicked king and queen, and the queen is the one most actively seeking his death; he restores a priesthood (the sealing priesthood) to the earth in the latter days. Elijah is also somewhat like Melchizedek in that we know

virtually nothing about his personal background. John the Baptist was a forerunner. Was Elijah? If so, how?

## Background

The story of Elijah is primarily a story of his conflict with Ahab and Jezebel, the wicked king and queen of Israel (the northern tribes). Ahab has become king after a series of assassinations, insurrections, and civil war, giving Israel six kings in approximately thirty-six years.

### 1 Kings 17

**Verse 1:** This is the first reference we have to Elijah. It is as if he comes from out of nowhere. Why do you think the text introduces him in this sudden, dramatic fashion?

The name Elijah means “Yahweh is God.” What is the significance of that name for his work?

The word *Tishbite* does not tell us where Elijah is from. Most contemporary scholars assume that it means “settler.”

In these circumstances, why is it important for Elijah to announce that God is a living God? What does it mean to *us* to say the he is living rather than dead? What would be an example of a dead god?

The first thing we see of Elijah is his prophecy. Why did he seal the heavens? The drought lasted for three years (1 Kings 18:1), and it was serious and widespread enough that it may be referred to in other historical records (for example, but not only, in Josephus’s *Antiquities* 8:13). Announcing the drought amounted to announcing a challenge to

Baal, Ahab's god, who claimed to be the god of rain and fertility. Why do you think the Lord would command such a challenge? Why do we not see such challenges today, or do we?

**Verses 3–7:** Why do you think the Lord told Elijah to hide?

How does what the Lord does for Elijah relate to the wider drought? In other words, what lesson is being taught here?

Is there anything symbolic about the use of the raven rather than another bird? Is it significant that the raven was an unclean bird (Leviticus 11:15)?

How does Jesus use this story? (See Luke 4:24–25.)

**Verses 8–24:** Presumably Elijah did many things worth reporting. Why do you think the writer chose to tell us this particular story? What does it teach? Does it show us anything important about Elijah?

Is it significant that this story and a story about Elisha are similar? (See 2 Kings 4:18–37.)

Is it significant that Sidon (*Zidon* in the KJV) was a Gentile city and that the widow was thus probably a Gentile?

Under the same circumstances, how would you have taken Elijah's command?

How does this story illustrate that "whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap" (D&C 6:33)?

After the widow has fed Elijah, her faith is tried again by the death of her son (verse 17). What does she think has happened (verse 18)? Does the fact that, on the one hand, she calls Elijah a man of God and that, on the other hand, she

questions his integrity say something about her feelings at the time? How would you feel in the same circumstances?

How does Elijah's miracle answer her question? Does that teach us anything about how we should deal with those who accuse us?

We read this story as one about the trial of this widow's faith, and of course that is reasonable. But can we also read it as a trial of Elijah's faith? For example, what might he have thought when he arrived in Zarephath?

Why is healing of the sick such an important sign of the prophet and, later, of the Christ? Does that suggest anything about how we ought to understand our obligations as followers of Christ?

## 1 Kings 18

How is the story of this chapter related to that of the previous chapter?

**Verses 1–2:** Why does the Lord want Elijah to show himself to Ahab?

**Verses 3–5:** What do we learn about the situation in Ahab's court from these verses?

What kind of person was Obadiah?

**Verses 6–16:** Why is Obadiah afraid? Why does he keep repeating "and thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold Elijah is here"? How does Elijah calm his fear?

Contrast verse 16 with verses 9–15. What does verse 16 show us about Obadiah?



Does what Obadiah says in verse 7 help us think about the questions for 1 Kings 17:1?

**Verses 17–18:** Is Ahab surprised to see Elijah? Of what “trouble” does each accuse the other?

The Hebrew word translated “he that troubleth” in verse 17 connotes witchcraft. On what basis might Ahab make that accusation?

**Verses 19–24:** To say that the priests of Baal ate at Jezebel’s table is to say that they were official members of her court. Why does the writer think it is important to tell us that they are?

What do you think Ahab and the people thought would happen when they all gathered at Carmel?

Why does Elijah have them gather at Carmel rather than another place, such as Jezreel (Ahab’s palace is there) or Beth-el or Dan (where Israel worships)?

What do you make of the people’s inability to answer Elijah?

He asks them, “How long halt [or ‘limp’] ye between two opinions?” What are the two opinions between which they limp?

Is Obadiah an example of a person limping between two opinions? What does your answer suggest about Israel as a whole? (See 1 Kings 19:18.)

The word translated “halt” suggests a ritual dance at an altar (as in verse 27). Why does Elijah use that particular metaphorical language here?

In verse 21, the people do not answer Elijah. In verse 24 Elijah puts the contest as a question of which God will answer prayer. We will see in verses 24 and 26 that Baal does not answer his priests. Then in verse 37 Elijah says, “Answer me, O God, answer me” (translated as “hear me” in the KJV). So what?

**Verses 25–29:** The priests do a sacred dance around the altar and cut themselves, a sign of devotion in many ancient religions. Why does Elijah mock them (verse 27)?

**Verses 30–40:** Is it significant that Elijah offers his sacrifice on an ancient Israelite altar that he repairs?

Why does Elijah use twelve stones rather than ten? Notice that when he does so, the writer refers to the Lord’s change of Jacob’s name to Israel (verse 30). What might Elijah be telling the northern kingdom, now called Israel? After all, the kingdom is now divided, with only ten tribes in Israel.

Why does Elijah wait until evening to perform this miracle? Why does he dig a trench around the altar and drench it in water? What is the significance of Elijah’s prayer (verse 37)?

How do the people respond to his miracle?

Why does he have them capture the priests of Baal and kill them?

**Verses 40–46:** Ahab wasn’t mentioned in the story of the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal. Why not?

What is the purpose of this story?

Does the fact that Elijah tells Ahab to eat and drink suggest that Ahab has been fasting? If so, was he fasting for the

success of Jezebel's priests, for the end of the drought, or something else?

What is Elijah doing in verse 42? Why does he keep sending his servant to the point of Mt. Carmel? How violent was the storm?

The sentence "[Elijah] ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel" means "Elijah ran as a herald in front of Ahab's chariot to the entrance of Jezreel." Why did he do that? (The distance was about fifteen miles.)

## 1 Kings 19

**Verses 1–2:** Ahab seems pleased with the result of Elijah's contest, with the rain that has come. Why is Jezebel unhappy?

Here is another translation of verse 1: "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and all about how he had killed all the prophets with the sword." Does that shed any light on Jezebel's anger? What does it say about Ahab? Why, for example, did he say "all that Elijah had done" rather than "all that the Lord had done"?

If Jezebel intends to kill Elijah, why does she warn him?

**Verses 3–4:** How do you explain Elijah's reaction to Jezebel's threat? Why is the person we have just seen deal with hundreds of priests of Baal now fear in Jezebel's presence?

What does he mean when he says, "I am not better than my fathers"?

**Verses 9–14:** Many commentators assume that Mount Horeb is the same as Mount Sinai. Is there a relation between

Moses's experience on Mount Sinai and Elijah's on Mount Horeb?

Why does the Lord ask Elijah what he is doing in the cave? Is Elijah fleeing, or was he sent here by the Lord?

Most translations have *zealous* instead of *jealous* in the first part of verse 10. *Zealous* is one of the meanings of *jealous* in King James English, and it is an accurate translation of the Hebrew.

Is there perhaps an accusation in Elijah's claim that he has been zealous for the Lord's name, perhaps a suggestion that the Lord has *not* been zealous for his name?

Jezebel killed the Lord's priests (1 Kings 18:4). Why does Elijah say that the people of Israel did it?

Why is the question that the Lord asks after the experience of the wind, earthquake, fire, and still small voice the same as the question he asked before that experience? (Compare verses 9–10 and 13–14.) Elijah's answer is the same as it was before, so what has this experience changed?

How does Elijah's experience in these verses contrast with the experience he has just had at Carmel? What does that contrast teach us? Why do you think this experience was important to Elijah after his experience at Carmel?

Compare this revelation of God with that which we saw in Exodus 19:16–19. What do wind, fire, and earthquake do in each? Why the differences?

**Verses 15–21:** Why would the Lord tell Elijah whom to anoint as king over Syria, a kingdom outside of both Judah and Israel?

What is the point of verse 18? Some have described it as the climax of this story. Can you see how they could understand it that way?

The hair-shirt mantle was part of a prophet's official dress, so putting it on Elisha was a way of saying immediately, "Here is the new prophet."

Since Elisha had twelve oxen, he must have been wealthy. Why does he kill two of them and cook them with the wood from his plow?

To see the rest of Elijah's story, you may also want to read chapters 21–22 and 2 Kings 1–2.

# Lesson 29

2 Kings 2; 5–6

Arthur Bassett has pointed out these parallels between Elisha, on the one hand, and Moses and Christ, on the other. (All scripture references are to 2 Kings).

1. Elisha parts the water (2:14, as Moses parted the sea and Joshua and Elijah parted the Jordan)—Jesus parts the heavens at the time of his baptism in the same Jordan.
2. He supplies water (2:19–22, as had Moses)—Christ presents himself as the living water.
3. Waters appear to be blood (3:21–23, as Moses had changed the river to blood)—Jesus turns water into wine.
4. He provides a never-ending supply of oil (an essential ingredient in bread, the staple food) for a widow (4:1–7, as did Elijah)—Jesus provides a never-ending supply of the bread of life.
5. He restores life to a child (4:18–37, as had Elijah)—Jesus does the same for two.
6. He renders poison harmless (4:38–41, as had Moses with the snakes).
7. He feeds a multitude with twenty loaves (4:42–44)—the Savior feeds the five thousand.

8. He heals a leper (5:1–14)—Christ heals ten lepers.
9. He defies gravity by causing an ax head to float (6:1–7)—Jesus defies gravity by walking on water and ascending bodily into the heavens.
10. He blinds his enemies who come searching for his life (6:18–20)—Jesus walks unseen through the crowds at Capernaum.
11. Though not strictly in the realm of miracles, Elisha forgives his enemies and those who persecute him (6:22–23)—Jesus does the same on the cross.
12. Upon coming into contact with Elisha’s bones, a man returns from the dead after his burial (13:20–21)—the Savior raises Lazarus and himself from death.

Are these genuine parallels or simply coincidences? If they are parallels, why are there so many between Elisha’s life and the life of the Savior? If they are not parallels, do you think that there are genuine parallels between ancient events and later ones? Why or why not? If there are, what might those parallels teach us? In other words, what would the point of such parallels be?

## 2 Kings 2

**Verses 1–10:** Why tell us several times in a few verses that the sons of the prophets (which probably means “the students of the prophets”) in various places knew that the Lord would take Elijah on this day?

Why did Elijah keep suggesting that Elisha stay behind (verses 2, 4, and 6)? Is there any reason that Elijah might not want Elisha to see his translation from the earth?

Elisha asks for the blessing of a double portion, in other words, the blessing of the firstborn (verse 9; see Deuteronomy 21:17). In Israelite culture, why should a firstborn son receive a double portion? What responsibilities does the firstborn have? Does understanding that help us understand what Elijah is asking for? In what sense is Elisha Elijah's son?

Why is what Elisha asks "a hard thing"? So what?

**Verses 11–12:** Why does verse 12 begin, "And Elisha saw it"?

Why do you think the Lord sent the fiery horses and chariot to separate Elijah from Elisha?

Why does Elisha cry out what he does? Why did Elisha tear his clothing in two?

**Verses 13–14:** Why does Elisha repeat Elijah's act of parting the waters of the Jordan? After doing so, why does he ask, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Having just witnessed the Lord's power, it is unlikely that he is asking for information or expressing doubt. So what is the point of his question?

**Verses 15–18:** What are the sons of the prophets asking Elisha to do? Why? Why did their urging make Elisha ashamed?

**Verses 19–22:** Does this miracle repeat anything we saw Moses do in the wilderness with the children of Israel? Can we understand this as a miracle that prefigures Christ, the Living Water? Why or why not? Would ancient Israelites have understood such prefiguring? What do they show *us*?



**Verses 23–25:** This is one of those difficult Bible passages where there is so much distance between ancient times and our own that it is very hard to know what is going on. There are several possible explanations, though perhaps none of them is satisfactory to us: First, most commentators agree that the “little children” were probably young men.

A rabbi has said that the Hebrew word used here means the young men were “bare of Divine commandments”; in other words, they didn’t practice their religion.

Some suggest that “bald head” was an obscene remark, making fun of the fact that prophet was circumcised. Others say that the prophets may have shaved their heads (like some medieval monks did) as a mark of their office. In that case, the young men are making fun of Elisha as a prophet. Still others suggest that the young men are comparing Elisha (who is bald, and baldness was considered a disgrace) with Elijah (who was hairy).

“Go up” probably means “If you’re Elijah’s successor as prophet, prove it by going up as he did.”

However we interpret this passage, it is clear that these young men are questioning Elisha’s status as prophet. Often, when we hear people repeat this story, we hear them say that the bears killed the young men. However, the verse does not say they killed the young men.

However we explain the details of the story, though, I don’t think it has any completely satisfactory explanation. It is one of the stories that many of us will have to “put on the shelf” as something we don’t understand.

## 2 Kings 3–4

These chapters are not part of the reading assignment, but looking at them helps us understand Elisha's story as a whole. In them, Elisha becomes the ally of the king and saves Israel from the Moabites (chapter 3). He also becomes known as a man of miracles as he multiplies a widow's oil, raises a child from death, renders poisonous food harmless, and multiplies food for a multitude (chapter 4).

A high proportion of the stories of Elijah and Elisha are about the miracles they each performed. Why do you think that is so? Why are their miracles important to us? Why are *any* miracle stories important to us? What function do they serve?

## 2 Kings 5

As you read this chapter, ask yourself what lesson Jesus draws from the story (Luke 4:23–27)? Is there a message for our day in it?

Naaman commanded the armies of the king of Aram, Ben-Hadad II (860–841 BC). Evidently people with leprosy were not subject to the same restrictions in Syria that they were in Israel. Otherwise Naaman could not have held such a high post. (It is unclear to what disease the word *leprosy* refers. It was almost certainly not what we call leprosy or Hansen's disease.)

**Verses 1–3:** Why does the Bible say that the Lord had given Aram victory over Israel?

How does a Syrian general, commander of Israel's frequent enemy, find out about Elisha (verses 1–5)?

Given what Jesus says in Luke 4:27, that no leper was healed in Israel during Elisha's time (until Naaman), how could the slave girl have known that Elisha could heal Naaman?

**Verses 4–7:** Why does the king of Aram send so many riches (about 750 pounds of silver and about 150 pounds of gold, as well as ten changes of clothing) to the king of Israel? Why is the king of Israel, Jehoram, upset at receiving the letter and riches from the king of Aram? Why does he distrust the tribute?

**Verses 8–9:** Why is it important that Naaman “know that there is a prophet in Israel”? There were many important functionaries at the time who did not know. Why should Naaman?

**Verses 10–14:** What are Elisha's instructions to Naaman? Why doesn't Elisha bother to come out of his house to deliver those instructions? What is Naaman's reaction to this? How natural is that response? In other words, is this behavior something that we would expect from one in Naaman's position?

How is Naaman's reaction like that of the Israelites in the wilderness when Moses lifted up the serpent during the plague of the poisonous serpents?

What advice do his servants give him?

What do you think God wants us to learn from Naaman's experience?

**Verses 15–16:** How does Naaman wish to reward Elisha? And what is Elisha’s response?

**Verses 17–19:** What does Naaman covenant to do when he returns to Syria?

Why would he ask for Israelite soil? What does this tell us about the non-Israelite concept of gods at this time? Does Naaman think that the soil of the land is connected to the gods of the land?

Do we do anything like what we see Naaman doing here?

How does Naaman justify continuing to worship with the Syrian king? Does Elisha excuse him for intending to do so?

**Verses 20–27:** What mistake does Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, make? Why might he do that? What is his punishment for his greed?

## 2 Kings 6

**Verses 1–6:** What leads to the loss of the axe head, and what miracle is associated with it? The “sons of the prophets” were putting a beam into place when they lost the axe. What kind and quality of dwelling can you make to live in with only one beam? What does that tell us about the people who followed Elisha? How might the quality of dwellings they were making help us understand the workman’s distress at losing his axe head?

Why does it matter that it was borrowed?

How might the sons of the prophets have understood this miracle symbolically? Why do you think that the chronicler

of Israelite history thought it was important to tell this story? Why might God have intervened over what seems to be a very trivial matter?

How do we reconcile a belief that God will intervene in such trivial matters with the fact that he often does not intervene in miraculous ways to help those who are in dire need?

How might this miracle prefigure miracles in the life of Christ?

**Verses 8–17:** What does Elisha mean by the statement “they that be with us are more than they that be with them”? What lesson is here for us?

**Verses 18–21:** What miracle does Elisha perform against the army sent against him? How does he bring the entire Syrian army to the mercy of the king of Israel?

Notice how the attitude of the king has changed toward Elisha, whom he calls “My father.”

**Verses 22–23:** What do you make of Elisha’s treatment of Israel’s enemies? What does this tell us about Elisha? How is Elisha’s statement like the Savior’s statement in the Sermon on the Mount about loving one’s enemies, and also like his statement of forgiveness on the cross? What effect did it have? (Apparently the effect was short-lived. Note verse 24).

**Verses 24–25:** “Dove’s dung” is probably incorrect. Given the nitrate content of fowl manure, it is highly unlikely that people ate it, even during an extreme famine. The Hebrew

word should probably be translated “Star of Bethlehem,” a bulbed plant that the poor often ate for food.

**Verses 26–31:** See Deuteronomy 28:56–57, Lamentations 2:20 and 4:10, and Ezra 5:10 for other cases where people ate human flesh during a siege. (See also Leviticus 226:29 and Deuteronomy 28:53ff. for prophecies that this would happen.)

How is this story like the story of the women who come to Solomon to settle their dispute over their children (1 Kings 3:16–27)? How is this story different?

What does this king’s response to the woman’s story tell us about his character? How does he come off in comparison with Solomon?

Why is he angry with Elisha?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

## Lesson 30

2 Chronicles 29–30; 32; 34

As the Old Testament tells the history, Hezekiah was the thirteenth king after David and the eleventh king of Judah: David → Solomon → Rehoboam (who was king at the time of the split between Judah and Israel and became the first king of Judah) → Abijah → Asa → Jehoshaphat → Joram → Ahaziah → Joash → Amaziah → Uzziah → Jotham → Ahaz → Hezekiah. Hezekiah reigned from 715 BC to 687 BC.

King Uzziah was a successful king, but at the end of his career he came into conflict with the temple priests. Whether the description of the conflict that we see in 2 Chronicles 26:16–23 is accurate is debatable, for it is clear that, as king, David had the right to offer sacrifice and to use the Urim and Thummim. (See 1 Samuel 23:9–12; 24:7–8; and 2 Samuel 24:25. The Urim and Thummim were attached to the ephod mentioned in 1 Samuel 23 and 24.) In addition, David tells us that he was given the Melchizedek Priesthood (Psalm 110:4). There can be little doubt that the king of Israel was originally a priest-king. (See 1 Chronicles 29:23, which says that Solomon sat on “the throne of the Lord.”) So it seems likely that Uzziah was not doing anything improper when he made offering in the temple. If so, then the story in chapter 29, that Uzziah was stricken with leprosy because he dared to act as a priest in the temple, was written or edited later to justify excluding the king from



priesthood functions. (Notice that 2 Kings 15:1–5 gives a different reason for Uzziah’s/Azariah’s leprosy.)

Jotham was also a good king, but Ahaz, Hezekiah’s father, was wicked, “for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree” (2 Chronicles 28:2–4).

In these chapters (including the chapters not assigned), we see Hezekiah order that the temple be cleansed, that proper worship be reinstated (2 Chronicles 29), and that the Passover celebration be reinstated by a national celebration, though at a date later than appointed (2 Chronicles 30). We see the details of the religious reform that Hezekiah began (2 Chronicles 31) and the attack of the Assyrians stopped by the miraculous salvation of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32). We also see the wicked reign of Hezekiah’s son Manasseh, followed by his repentance and good reign and then by the wicked reign of his son Amon, which ended in his assassination by his own servants (2 Chronicles 33). Finally, we read about a new reformation under Josiah (2 Chronicles 34).

## 2 Chronicles 29

This chapter expands considerably on the story that is told in 2 Kings 18:1–3. Why might the author of Kings have left the cleansing of the temple out of his story? Why might the author of Chronicles have included it?

**Verse 3:** What does it mean to say that Hezekiah opened the doors of the temple? (See 2 Chronicles 28:24.)

**Verses 5–8:** Why did Hezekiah say that the temple needed to be sanctified?

A more literal translation of the end of verse 6 is “Our fathers . . . turn round their faces from the tabernacle of Jehovah, and gave neck.” Why does the writer use the tabernacle here as the symbol of the temple? The word for the neck could also be used to mean “the back.” In Hebrew, to give neck could mean to flee in fear (as in Exodus 23:27), to turn one’s back on someone (as in 2 Samuel 22:41), or to apostatize (as in 2 Chronicles 29:6; Jeremiah 2:27; 32:33). What does the metaphor suggest to you in this verse?

A more literal translation of part of verse 8 is “He [the Lord] hath delivered them to be a horror, an astonishment, and an amazement,” or as the Anchor Bible translation has it, “He made them a terror, a horror, and a mockery.” How does that change the meaning of the verse? To whom were they a terror, horror, and mockery? What does it mean to be a terror, horror, or mockery to someone else? How might we become a horror, terror, or mockery? *Why* might we become one? Is that something we do by choice or something that happens beyond our control?

**Verse 11:** Why does Hezekiah call the Levites his sons?

**Verse 34:** One explanation of the difference between priests and Levites is that those called priests were Levites descended from Zadok, high priest at the time of Solomon. Zadok’s descendants were Levites who had been given the responsibility for temple ritual, but not all Levites were

descendants of Zadok. Why might the Levites have been more “upright in heart” than the priests?

**Verse 36:** What does it mean to say that “God had prepared the people”? For what? How?

## 2 Chronicles 30

**Verse 1:** Why does the writer say that Hezekiah wrote to all Judah (two tribes) and to Israel (ten tribes) and to Ephraim and Manasseh? Why mention the latter two specifically? Hadn’t he already mentioned them when he wrote to Judah and Israel?

What is strange about Hezekiah writing to all of Israel?

**Verse 3:** Why had people ceased to keep Passover?

**Verse 9:** Much of the northern kingdom had already been conquered by the Assyrians and the inhabitants taken captive. Hezekiah promises that if the Israelites will restore the temple and resume temple worship, the Lord will bring the captives back. Why was temple worship so important to Hezekiah?

What happened in ancient temple worship?

Did Hezekiah think that restoring the temple would reunite Israel and Judah?

**Verses 10–12:** From what tribes are those who come to this Passover feast? What does that tell us?

**Verses 18–20:** What is going on here? (Compare Numbers 9:1–14.)

**Verse 22:** This verse may also explain the difference between the priests and the Levites, for it speaks of the Levites as teaching the law. (Compare 2 Chronicles 17:8–9.) It appears that there were two ecclesiastical authorities, those who taught and those who officiated in the temple. Is that comparable to our teachers and priests? Might this be the origin of the later difficulties between the temple priests and the Pharisees?

**Verse 25:** Traditionally it has been assumed that the *strangers* were converts to Judaism.

## 2 Chronicles 32

**Verses 1–8:** Anticipating Sennacherib’s attack, what does Hezekiah do? (See also verse 30.) What lesson is in this for us?

**Verses 9–20:** What are Sennacherib’s tactics? How effective do you think they would be against the people of Jerusalem?

**Verse 21:** Compare 2 Kings 19:35. What happened to Sennacherib’s army?

Who are “they that came forth out of his own bowels”? What image is the writer using?

Why is it significant to the writer that Sennacherib was assassinated in “the house of his god”?

## 2 Chronicles 34

In this chapter we see another restoration of the temple by a new king. How would you describe the cycle of restoration and apostasy that we have seen in the last several readings?

Has prosperity been an important part of this cycle, as it was for the people of the Book of Mormon?

What seems to cause pride in Israel and Judah?

Why is the leadership of these two groups so crucial to whether the groups remain in apostasy or repent?

**Verse 3:** Refer to verse 1 and calculate how old Josiah was when he began these reforms. What does that suggest?

**Verses 4–5:** What does it mean that the altars were broken down in Josiah's presence?

Why does he strew the ashes of the idolatrous vessels on the graves of those who had worshipped idols, and why does he burn the bones of the dead idolatrous priests on their own altars?

**Verse 8:** How long did it take Josiah to purge idolatry from Judah?

**Verses 14–15, 18–21:** How do you think the book of the law (perhaps the first five books of the Old Testament, the sacred scripture of this period; perhaps only Deuteronomy or parts of it) had been lost? *Was* it lost, or is this evidence of its construction and presentation to Israel as something recently discovered? (Some contemporary scholars argue for the latter.)

We saw that the Levites were teaching from the scriptures in 2 Chronicles 17:8–9. How long has it been since then?

Why did Josiah tear his clothes in mourning when he found out about the book and its contents?

**Verse 22:** Jeremiah was also a prophet at this time. Why do you think they went to Huldah instead of Jeremiah?

**Verse 23:** In all of the other verses, Josiah is referred to as “the king.” Why is he referred to here as “the man”?

**Verses 24–25:** What does the Lord say will happen to Israel because it has not kept the law? Can’t they plead ignorance: “We didn’t even know what the law was. That is why we didn’t keep it!” Is the Lord punishing them for sinning in ignorance?

**Verses 26–28:** What does the Lord promise Josiah? How is Josiah different from Israel? Does that answer the questions for verses 24–25?

**Verse 28:** Given the violent death that Josiah suffers (2 Chronicles 35:23–24), how can we make sense of the promise that he will be gathered to the grave in peace?

**Verses 29–33:** Does Josiah get the people of Jerusalem to repent? If so, why does the Lord’s curse come on them anyway?

**Verse 33:** Does Josiah cleanse only Judah? How many of Israel seem to have made the covenant?

How do you think Josiah made all of the Israelites serve the Lord?

Is it significant that the chapter ends by saying “*all his days* they departed not from following the Lord” (italics added)? What is the writer suggesting, and what does that suggest about Israel under Josiah?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 31

## Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

The reading for this lesson covers slightly less than sixteen thousand words in Proverbs and slightly more than twenty-three thousand words in Ecclesiastes. Were someone to spend fifteen minutes to an hour a day studying the assigned material, he or she could probably read both books in a week. But it would be difficult to spend time actually studying them.

Because Ecclesiastes is so seldom read and talked about, and because it is such a beautiful book, these notes will focus on Ecclesiastes. However, because Latter-day Saints are generally unfamiliar with Ecclesiastes, these notes will begin with overviews of the two books assigned and then consist primarily of a synopsis of one way to understand the book of Ecclesiastes rather than questions about it.

To use these notes for scripture study, first read a chapter of Ecclesiastes and give your own explanation of what it means. It will probably help if you write down your explanation, at least in rough form. Only then compare your explanation to the one in these notes. Where does your explanation differ from this one? Does that difference help you see an ambiguity in the text that you had not noticed? How does your understanding of the chapter improve on this one? Does this one improve on yours in any places?



After you have thought about the meaning of what you've read, ask yourself about the truth of what the author, Koheleth, says. Is he right about the uselessness of human existence? Is it possible to reconcile his understanding of the meaning of our lives with the restored gospel? If so, how? If not, why not? What is missing?

How can the book of Ecclesiastes be comforting? How can it strengthen us? Or is it simply good literature, but “a downer”? If it is the latter, why has it been included in scripture for thousands of years?

## Overview

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are in a genre called “wisdom literature.” In the Hebrew Bible, they are part of the Writings. The Hebrew Bible has three parts:

- The Law, or Torah    Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- The Prophets        Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings—the prophetic history that puts the teachings of the prophets in context—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi
- The Writings        Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles

The section called the Writings contains a variety of things, but it includes a good deal of wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes), which appears to be the oldest genre of writing that we have in the Bible.

To some degree, the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible represent the three most important sources of Hebrew teaching: the priests, whose primary function was temple worship and who taught the people their religious duties; the prophets, who brought divine revelation and who, as we have seen, were often critical of the priests; and the wise people. The Old Testament doesn't say much about these wise people (though see Jeremiah 18:18 and Ezekiel 7:26, where they are mentioned), but it contains a great deal of their teachings. Unlike the teachings of the priests and the prophets, wisdom literature has less to do with such things as Israel's status before God, Israel's covenant, and temple worship than it does with the practical requirements for a good life. It may be that much of the wisdom literature does not have a specific author, but begins, grows, and is refined as it is passed from generation to generation until someone commits it to writing.

There is also wisdom literature in the Apocrypha: the Wisdom of Sirach (also called simply Sirach) and the Wisdom of Solomon (also called simply Wisdom), as well as in parts of the other books of the Apocrypha. During New Testament times, Jews and Christians alike often referred to the Wisdom of Solomon. They seem to have considered it the equivalent of canonical scripture. For example, Paul quotes from or paraphrases it in a number of places such as Romans 1:19–23 (compare Wisdom 13:1–9 and 14:22–31),

Romans 1:26 (compare Wisdom 11:15–16 and 12:27), Romans 1:29–32 (compare Wisdom 14:23–26), Romans 5:12 (compare Wisdom 2:24), and Romans 5:14 (compare Wisdom 1:14).

In wisdom literature, Wisdom (the Hebrew word is *ḥokmah*) is often personified as a woman, in fact, as a female deity. It was assumed that kings should be wise people (as well as priests). David was (2 Samuel 14:20), and, of course, Solomon has been taken to be a paragon of wisdom (1 Kings 3:6–14). The book of Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and a large portion of Proverbs are traditionally attributed to Solomon, though he probably did not write all that is attributed to him.

According to the Talmud (an ancient Jewish commentary on the meaning of the Law), the book of Proverbs was compiled during Hezekiah's reign.

The word *wisdom* doesn't have just one meaning in these books. At its simplest, it means "knowing how to get by" or "shrewdness." (Some of the stories we read earlier, such as that of how Jacob got his father's blessing in the place of Esau, were probably intended to show, among other things, that Jacob and Rachel were shrewd. Shrewdness was a valued trait.) The word *wisdom* also means "having sound judgment" and "having moral understanding." We see both of these kinds of wisdom in the book of Proverbs. Finally, *wisdom* can denote the ability to think about profound human problems, the kind of wisdom that we see in Ecclesiastes and Job. As you read from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or

other books of wisdom literature, ask yourself what kind of wisdom is under discussion at any given place.

## Proverbs

Here is one way to divide up the instructions of the book of Proverbs:

The introduction	1:1–9:18
The proverbs of Solomon	10:1–22:16
The sayings of the wise	22:17–24:34
The proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah copied out	25:1–29:27
The words of Agur the son of Jakeh	30:1–33 31:1–9
The words of King Lemuel	31:10–31
Praise for the ideal wife	

Of course, though some of the sayings and discourses of Proverbs were ancient proverbs in our sense of the word (“common folk-sayings”), not all are. More of them are wise counsel put into poetic form.

## Ecclesiastes

The book of Ecclesiastes is one of the most beautifully written books in the Bible, but it is an unusual book of scripture, for it focuses on what seems to be the meaninglessness of our lives and the impossibility of understanding them. Koheleth, the pen name of the author of Ecclesiastes, is no Pol-

lyanna. He sees the injustice and pain in the world and does not gloss over them, but he also refuses to let that injustice and pain turn him to despair. (Kohleth means “one who assembles a group,” for example, a teacher or a preacher. Sometimes translators call this book “The Preacher.”)

As you read Ecclesiastes, use the following outline to help you make sense of it as a whole. What is the author’s main point? Do his arguments about the vanities of life make any sense to you? Are they helpful to you as you think about your life? Can you think of someone to whom the teachings of this book might be helpful? How?

If you were asked to do so in fewer words, how would you explain the point of Ecclesiastes?

Here is how A. Schoors divides the book of Ecclesiastes:<sup>1</sup>

1:1	Title
1:2	General theme of the book
1:3–2:26	Solomon’s confession
3:1–22	Human beings under the law of time
4:1–16	Life in society
4:17–5:8	The advantage of silence over unreflected speech
5:9–6:9	On wealth
6:10–12	Transitional unit
7:1–9:10	The experience of life and death
9:11–10:20	Wisdom and folly
11:1–6	The necessity of taking risks

11:7–12:7	The necessity of enjoying life
12:8	The general theme of the book
12:9–14	Epilogue

Knowing the division of the book into these parts isn't crucial to understanding it, but sometimes it helps to understand a particular verse if we know the larger section of which it is part. I'm sure that others have divided the book differently than Schoors did, or have described the divisions differently, but Schoors's way of dividing it is convenient for reading and seeing how particular parts relate to others.

## Ecclesiastes 1

This chapter is Koheleth's introduction to the theme of the book. He is going to take us through his experience of life so that we can understand the conclusion to which he came. He begins by telling us that everything in life is vanity (literally *breath*, verses 1–2) and that the same things happen over and over again, in an endless, meaningless repetition (verses 3–11), with the result that there is no point in trying to change things or trying to understand why things are as they are (verses 12–18). The more wisdom you have, the more you'll suffer grief (verse 18). In a sense, Ecclesiastes is an anti-wisdom book. It is the work of a wise man telling us the uselessness of his worldly wisdom.

## Ecclesiastes 2

The author began by telling us that learning is vanity. In this chapter he tells us that worldly pleasures are. In verse 1

he says that after discovering the uselessness of knowledge, he decided to turn himself to pleasure. In verse 2, he says that laughter turned out to be mad or senseless. In verse 3 he says he experimented with the effects of wine and discovered that it only turned his wisdom into folly. Then he describes the great things he constructed and the wealth he accumulated (verses 4–10). But they, too, were no more than an ephemeral breath (verse 11).

Having tried wisdom, madness, and folly, Koheleth tells us that even if wisdom is useless, it is better than the other two. At least the wise man knows the uselessness of his wisdom (verses 12–14). But no one remembers the wise man any more than he remembers the fool—both die and are gone. Seeing that, he hates life (verses 15–17).

Koheleth hates the work he has done (verses 18–23) and decides that the wisest thing to do is to indulge in pleasure (verses 24–25). He ends with a verse comparable to Mormon’s “and thus we see,” reflecting on the decision to indulge in pleasure: God gives to each according to His wisdom, so it is vain to seek pleasure (verse 26).

### Ecclesiastes 3

Expanding on what he said in Ecclesiastes 2:26, Koheleth says that the times when things happen are given by God, not decided by us, which means that what we will and decide has little if any effect on the grand scheme of things (verses 1–15).

Where there ought to be righteousness, there is injustice (verses 16–17), so we see that men are, in reality, little different from beasts (verse 18). The same thing happens to

human beings that happens to beasts: they die and turn to dust, and we don't know what becomes of them after that (verses 18–21). So there is nothing better than to rejoice in what we have done—though, as he has already shown us, that too is nothing (verse 22).

## Ecclesiastes 4

In Ecclesiastes 3:16, Koheleth talked about justice and injustice. In Ecclesiastes 4 he turns back to that subject and tells us that seeing the tears of the oppressed and the power of the oppressors, he thought that the dead and the unborn were better off than the living (verses 1–3).

Turning back to individual endeavor, he notices that our work creates rivalry with our neighbors and decides that it is better to get half as much quietly (in other words, with peace of mind) than to have a great deal through hard work and striving (verses 4–6). The miserly person who depends on his riches will be lonely and useless (verses 7–8). Companionship is better (verses 9–12). But the companionship of kings is vain. In other words, we ought not to choose our companions with an eye to their power or social standing or the degree to which they respect and flatter us, since all are equally useless (verses 13–16).

## Ecclesiastes 5

Seeming to continue to talk about the person who depends on his own work and riches, Koheleth tells us to remember that living as we ought is more commendable to God than the sacrifice (temple worship) of a fool (verse 1), and he



warns against repeating the same requests over and over again in our prayers, for the Lord knows what we need (verses 2–3).

He reminds us to keep the vows we make (verses 4–5), and he summarizes verses 2–5 by reminding us of the uselessness of repetition and warning us against making excuses for our failures (verses 6–7).

In verse 8 he warns us not to be surprised at corruption in government, but to remember that there is someone higher than political leaders who will judge; and in verses 9–17 he tells us again of the vanity of riches.

He ends the chapter by coming to the same conclusion he came to at the end of chapter 3: we ought to enjoy our lives and the fruits of our labor, and we ought not to worry about the shortness of life since God has given us whatever joys we receive in life. They are nothing, but that doesn't prevent us from enjoying them.

## Ecclesiastes 6

Koheleth describes what life is like if you have riches but cannot enjoy them (verses 1–9) and reminds us that it is useless to struggle against the misfortunes that befall us (verses 10–12).

## Ecclesiastes 7

In verses 1–12 Koheleth give us a series of proverbs that tell what the good things in life are, and in verses 13–14 he tells us that we should submit to the will of God. Then in verses

15–22 he gives us some rules for living, but he reminds us that the search for wisdom is vain (verses 23–25). He ends with a condemnation of bad women (the opposite side of the praise of the good woman in Proverbs 31:10–31).

## Ecclesiastes 8

After a tribute to the wise person (verse 1), Koheleth gives advice about how to relate to a king (verses 2–9). Though the advice was important to people living in a time when the king could make or break anyone, sometimes even on a whim, it may seem no longer useful to us. But it is not difficult to see how to generalize it as advice about how to deal with those who have power over us, whether in the government, in our jobs, or in church.

In verses 10–15 the author returns to one of the themes he takes up repeatedly in various ways: though he knows that “it shall be well with them that fear God” (verse 12), there are wicked people to whom things happen as if they had lived righteously, and righteous people to whom things happen that would seem to be the fruits of unrighteousness. (Compare Ecclesiastes 7:15.) The only answer he can see is to enjoy the life that God has given one, whatever it is (verse 15). Though Koheleth uses the phrase “to eat, and to drink, and to be merry,” he doesn’t seem to be recommending sensualism as much as he is recommending that we accept what God has given us and enjoy it. Koheleth’s conclusion is that we cannot understand the ways of God (verses 16–17).

## Ecclesiastes 9

Koheleth continues the point with which he concluded the previous chapter: there is no explanation for the vicissitudes of our lives (verses 1–6). (Since the chapter and verse divisions were not created until hundreds of years after the book was written, in truth, the writer just continues on the same theme. There was no chapter break in the original text.) This means, as he has said before, that we should enjoy whatever it is that God has given us (verses 7–10).

Of course, even as we enjoy the gifts we have received, we know that our skills do not decide what rewards we will receive (verses 11–12). The pleasures, wealth, and other worldly things we receive are not our reward for righteous life.

Then Koheleth points out that wisdom is both useful and unappreciated by giving an example (verses 13–16), and he concludes by contrasting the quiet wise person on the one hand and the noisy fool, as well as the sinner, on the other (verses 17–18).

## Ecclesiastes 10

Koheleth continues to contrast the wise man and the fool (verses 1–3).

Then he again raises the problem of dealing with rulers, many of whom may be fools but are fools who have power (verses 4–7).

Some have suggested that “the rich” in verse 6 refers to the spiritually rich. An alternative spelling of the Hebrew word would yield that reading. Others have suggested that

it means the financially rich and that Koheleth is merely showing that he is from the upper class and thinks that they have a natural ability and right to rule. But the latter interpretation isn't consistent with Koheleth's views about the distribution of wealth and wisdom (that they are not distributed according to merit).

Though verses 8–11 appear to be only practical advice, we might wonder why that advice is inserted here. One answer is that it may be practical advice aimed at those who must deal with a foolish king.

In verses 12–15 the writer returns to comparing the fool and the wise, and in verses 16–20 he returns to his discussion of government, pointing out the effects that it has on the governed.

## Ecclesiastes 11

Koheleth advises us to do as much good as possible, for given the uncertainty of life, we do not know who it is we need to help nor when we will need to be helped in return—however many good days there are, there will also be many dark ones (verses 1–8). Then, giving advice to youth, he says that they should enjoy the pleasures of youthful life, but at the same time they should remember that God will judge them for what they do (verses 9–10).

## Ecclesiastes 12

There are many interpretations of verses 1–8, but there is general agreement that they describe the inevitability of aging and its decay.

The word *while* at the beginning of verse 2 should be translated “before,” the word *not* should be removed from the verse, and the word *nor* should be changed to *and*: “Before the sun, or the light, or the moon or the stars be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain.”

Some interpret the keepers of the house as the legs, the grinders as the teeth, and those who look out as the eyes (verse 3). Others take the keepers of the house to be the hands and arms, and still others understand them to be the household servants. The same variety of interpretations is true of each other element in these verses: some take them to be metaphors for the body, and others take them to be more literal descriptions of those in the house of the old and dying person.

Verses 9–10 give a conclusion to the book as a whole: The wise will teach many things. In fact, there is no end to the advice books that wise men could write. But true wisdom can be summed up briefly: fear God and keep his commandments.

This is what Koheleth has been trying to show by recounting the inexplicable vagaries and difficulties of life: ultimately we cannot understand why we prosper or why we fail to prosper, so we cannot be the masters of our fate. All we can do is trust God.

Though he does not repeat it here, Koheleth has also come to one other conclusion, namely, that we should enjoy the lives God has given us.

## Lesson 32

### Job

In his commentary on Job,<sup>1</sup> David Clines quotes this very nice poem from W. H. Auden, “Thomas Epilogises”:

Where Job squats awkwardly upon his ashpit,  
Alone on his denuded battlefield,  
Scraping himself with blunted Occam Razors  
He sharpened once to shave the Absolute . . .  
Eliphaz, Zophar, Bildad rise together,  
Begin to creak a wooden sarabande;  
“Glory to God,” they cry, and praise his Name  
In epigrams that trail off in a stammer.  
Suave Death comes, final as a Händel cadence,  
And snaps their limbs like twigs across his knees,  
Silenus nods, his finger to his nose.

As with the lesson on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, there is an enormous amount of material to cover in this lesson. The scholarly material on Job is enormous. The Anchor Bible volume on Job is over four hundred pages long. In the two-volume *Word Biblical Commentary* on Job, the bibliography of recommended reading runs to fifty-three pages, and there are additional bibliographies for each of the commentary’s

subsections. But even if we ignore the scholarly material in the interest of focusing on the book as material for Sunday School and for self-reflection and meditation, the book of Job needs a week to read slowly and several months of thinking and rethinking. These study notes will only lightly touch on the material that is here, looking at a few key points in several chapters rather than the book as a whole, but perhaps they will suggest the kind of further study that one might do.

Part of the Hebrew Bible called the Writings (see the notes on lesson 31 for more about the Writings), the book of Job is an unusual book of scripture. We do not know who wrote it; the narrator never identifies himself, and it doesn't appear to have been written by someone named Job. The only other place in the Old Testament where Job is mentioned is in Ezekiel 14:14, where he is mentioned as an example of an exemplary righteous person. And, of course, he is mentioned in a similar way in Doctrine and Covenants 121:10.

The book of Job may well have more than one author. For example, some scholars think that chapter 28 was inserted by someone after the main part of the book was written. Many believe that the ending (Job 42:11–17) was added by another writer. And some think that Elihu's speeches (chapters 32–37) were inserted later. We also do not know when the book was written, nor where it was written (though it has a non-Israelite setting), and we do not know its intended audience.

There are sometimes debates among LDS members about the question of whether this is a true story. Was there a per-

son named Job who had this experience? These notes will avoid that debate because the answer is irrelevant to our study of the book as something that teaches us. If it is fiction, it is inspired fiction. If it is not fiction, it is inspired history. Either way, the important question for us is not “Did Job live?” but “What does this story, historical or fictional, teach us about our lives and our relation to God?”

Job has been praised as one of the most important literary contributions to our culture by writers as gifted as Tennyson, Carlisle, Blake, and Frost. Perhaps because of its literary importance, people tend to find in Job what they are looking for. It tends to act as a mirror of our questions and beliefs: Calvin wrote 159 sermons on Job, using the book to demonstrate his understanding of divine grace and predestination. In contrast, the Enlightenment thinker Voltaire saw Job as a rebel and the book as describing the universal human condition, a view still shared by many contemporary readers. And psychiatrists have seen in it a description of the grief process.

Job is not an easy book to interpret. In fact, many have found its message disturbing, and some have even thought that it teaches things that are contrary to faith. Because Job is not easy to understand at first glance, we often deal with it by proof-texting, choosing passages that support something we believe, without regard for whether that is what the book of Job is actually teaching. For example, it isn't uncommon for someone to quote one of Job's friends approvingly, though it is clear that the book rejects their ready-made, moralizing answers to his suffering. Or we often assume that we know what Job is about—most often we assume that it is about the problem of suffering. But is it? If so, why is it about the suf-



fering of only one particular person? It doesn't really give us an explicit answer to the problem of suffering for Job, much less something we can universalize. So, though we assume that this is a book about that problem, we should ask ourselves whether that is right. Isn't it perhaps more about *how* to suffer than *why* we suffer?

In spite of the variety of interpretations, there is almost universal agreement that the book of Job teaches that the natural order of the world is not a moral order. Like Koheleth in Ecclesiastes, Job teaches us that the good do not always prosper, nor do the wicked always come off worse in this life. If the natural order *were* a moral order, then it would be obvious to everyone that goodness is better than wickedness, and people would be good so as not to suffer rather than because it was good. In other words, righteousness would not be possible if the good were always rewarded and the wicked always punished in proportion to their goodness or wickedness.

Job also teaches that we cannot judge God using our understanding of morality. Thus, though James emphasizes Job's patience in suffering (James 5:11), that is probably not the main theme of the book. Instead, patience in suffering is an attribute one acquires if he or she understands the lessons of the book of Job.

## Outline

### 1. Chapters 1–2: The prose prologue

The prologue takes us back and forth from Uz to heaven. We first see Job living happily and prosperously

in Uz. Then we see the confrontation between Satan and God in heaven in which Satan doubts Job's virtue. Shifting back to Uz, we see the calamity that befalls Job when he loses everything, including his children. Finally, we see the Lord tell Satan that Job has passed the test and remained faithful, and Satan replies that he has passed it only because it didn't touch his body. If Job suffers bodily, says Satan, he will blaspheme. The Lord allows Job to suffer bodily, and his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come to comfort him.

## 2. Chapters 3–31: A poetic dialogue between Job and his three friends

This is a cycle of complaints by Job followed by responses by his three friends, who insist that his suffering results from something evil he has done but refuses to acknowledge. The first cycle is chapters 4–14, the second is chapters 15–21, and the third is chapters 22–26. In these cycles, Job is sometimes confused and angry (e.g., 19:21–24), but he is also faithful (13:15–16; 16:20; 19:25; and 26:14). The cycle ends in chapters 27–31 with Job continuing to insist that he has not done evil (e.g., chapter 31). He praises God's wisdom, which he cannot understand (chapter 28).

## 3. Chapters 32–37: Elihu's interruption—poetry

A young man, Elihu, cannot stand it any longer. Brashly and angrily, he interrupts to condemn Job for justifying himself rather than God and to condemn Job's friends for condemning Job without being able

to refute Job's claims of innocence. After his outburst, Elihu disappears from the poem.

#### 4. Chapters 38–42:6: The Lord's answer to Job from the whirlwind—also poetry

Several times in the second part of this book, Job asks that the Lord appear so that Job can demand the reasons for his suffering. In these chapters, the Lord appears from out of a whirlwind and answers Job, asking him who he is to speak out of such ignorance. The Lord reminds Job of the many things he has created and that Job cannot even understand such things, much less create them. Job responds in 40:3–5: "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." Then the Lord repeats the substance of his demand: Do you have divine power? You can't create thunder, much less save yourself. Job repeats and expands his response in 42:1–6.

#### 5. Chapters 42:7–17: The prose epilogue

Job's friends are condemned by the Lord but saved by Job's intercession. Then Job is given twice as much as he had before his trial.

### Job 1

**Verse 1:** What does it mean to say that Job was perfect (or "whole-hearted") and upright? The Hebrew word translated "perfect" (*tm*) can also be translated "blameless."

What does it mean to be blameless? The Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon gives these definitions of *tm*: “1. complete, perfect; 2. sound, wholesome; 3. complete, morally innocent; having integrity.” The Hebrew word translated “upright” (*ysr*) means “1. straight, level; 2. that which is right, pleasing in the eyes of, agreeable; 3. straightforward, just, upright.” Do those definitions help us understand better what this verse says about Job?

“Perfect and upright” is probably what literary critics call a pleonastic pair, two words used to mean one thing rather than two different things. If you think of that phrase as a pleonastic pair, how do you understand Job’s character? How does this book demonstrate Job’s perfection? What does Job’s story tell us about what it means to be perfect? Does Job say things in his discussion with his friends that surprise you? How does that fit with his perfection?

The Septuagint, a second- or third-century-BC translation of the Hebrew Bible says, “A certain man was in the land of Uz by the name of Job and that man was a truthful, blameless, righteous, God-fearing person, far removed from all evil deeds.” What does it mean to say that Job feared God? *Feared* is an excellent translation of the Hebrew, and the word is often used in the Old Testament to describe how the righteous feel about God. Why would it properly be said that we fear God? Even if the word is a metaphor, why would the metaphor of fear describe our relation to our Father in Heaven?

If Job did not fear God before these events, might he have had reason to fear him afterward?

What does it mean to eschew evil?

**Verses 9–12:** When Satan questions Job’s motivation for righteousness, suggesting that Job is good only because he has been rewarded, what question ought that to raise for us as readers? How do you think the first readers of Job probably thought about the connection between righteousness and material prosperity? Do we often think in the same terms? What does the book do with that way of thinking? Is Satan right when he says that people follow God because they expect a reward? If he is right, then why do we have the book of Job and its story? If he is wrong, then what is the point of rewards and the promise of prosperity and blessings?

## Job 2

**Verses 9–10:** How do you explain Job’s wife’s response to his suffering? How do you explain his response to her? If she believes that there is a causal connection between righteousness and prosperity (“if a person is righteous, then he will be prosperous”—which is *not* the same as “if a person is prosperous, then he is righteous”), what does she think the calamity that has just befallen her family means? Would she explain her response to Job, her demand that she commit what some have called “theological suicide”?

**Verses 11–13:** How do Job’s friends respond to his suffering at first? Does his friends’ response here fit with Alma’s injunction that those who are baptized are to “bear one another’s burdens” and “mourn with those that mourn” (Mosiah 18:8–9)?

## Job 3

**Verses 1–19:** What is happening in these verses?

What does the fact that Job says these things after his friends have come and sat with him in silence suggest?

Are there questions here that you have asked at some point or feelings that you have felt? If a friend has these feelings, how do you respond, as Job's friends respond in chapter 2 or as they respond in chapter 4 and afterward? Is there another alternative? What would it be?

## Job 4

**Verses 7–9:** What is Eliphaz saying to Job? Does Eliphaz think that Job and he disagree? Explain your answer to that question.

Sometimes we say that Job is about the problem of suffering. What do you make of the fact that only Job's friends give an answer to that problem (though perhaps his wife has implied one)?

## Job 6

**Verses 1–13:** How does Job first respond to what Eliphaz has said?

In verse 2 Job wants to put his grief (vexation) and his calamity (disaster or "fall") on one side of a balance scale. In verse 3 he says that if he did, they would be heavier than the sands of the sea, which are immeasurably heavy. Then he says that his "words are swallowed up," in other words, that

he is unable to speak. Yet he does speak. When he speaks, what does he ask for (verse 9)? Why?

What does he mean in verse 13 when he says that wisdom is driven from him?

**Verses 14–15, 24, 28–29:** What is Job’s response to his friend now?

With regard to verse 15: a brook in a desert region cannot be counted on, for though it may be full in the spring, by late summer it is likely to be dry.

Regarding verses 28–29: the word *turn* could also be translated “turn away.” Job is asking Eliphaz to change his judgment.

## Job 8

**Verses 1–6:** Is Bildad’s accusation any different than Eliphaz’s? What does Bildad tell Job that he should expect if he were righteous?

## Job 9

**Verses 2–3:** When Job says, “I know it is so,” what is he saying is so? Is Job contending with God or agreeing with what Bildad has just taught in chapter 8, that God does not pervert justice? Is that the issue for Job? If not, what is the issue?

**Verses 14–22:** What is Job saying here about his situation before God?

## Job 10

**Verses 1–2:** What is Job asking for that we, too, ask for?

## Job 11

**Verses 1–6:** How does Zophar expand Eliphaz’s and Bildad’s accusations?

## Job 13

**Verses 4–8:** How is Job criticizing Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar?

**Verses 15–16:** How does this show us Job’s faith? What does Job mean when he says, “I will maintain mine own ways before him”? (Another translation has “I will argue my ways before him.”) Most biblical scholars believe that the first part of verse 15 is mistranslated. It ought to be “He may slay me; I am without hope.” Does reading the verse in that way change Job’s teaching about how to undergo suffering?

## Job 14

**Verses 7–14:** What is Job’s question? Does he know the answer? What difference does the answer make to his situation?

If Job lives righteously because he knows that God will give him a reward in the life hereafter, then isn’t Satan’s claim in chapters 1 and 2 (Job 1:9–11 and 2:4–5) right, namely, that even perfect Job is only righteous because God blesses him for it?

What is the alternative to doing what is right because one will be blessed? If doing right doesn’t ultimately bring blessings, why should we do it?



## Job 19

**Verses 23–27:** What is Job’s testimony? How is it related to his question in chapter 14? How does his answer overcome Satan’s claim?

There were no printed books when the book of Job was written, so the King James translation of verse 23 is anachronistic. “Oh that they were inscribed” is a more literal translation of the last half of the verse.

## Job 23

**Verses 3–7:** Why does Job want to confront God? What does he think the outcome would be?

When is a person justified in arguing with God?

Is Job implicitly accusing the Lord of acting unrighteously?

## Job 26

**Verses 1–4:** Of what is Job accusing Bildad in these verses? Are we ever like Bildad? If so, how and when? What does Job’s response say of us?

## Job 27

**Verses 2–5:** This is one of a number of places where Job speaks of his integrity, saying that he will not give it up. The Hebrew word translated “integrity” could also be translated “wholeness” or “perfection.” It is a variation of the word translated “perfect” or “blameless” in Job 1:1. Why is integrity so important to Job? What would giving up his

integrity require him to do that he is unwilling to do? How can Job be so sure of his integrity?

## Job 38

**Verse 1:** This is the first time since chapters 1 and 2 that the writer of this book has used the name *Lord* (*Yahweh*). Why do you think he has not used that name again until now?

How does the experience of this verse differ from Elijah's experience (1 Kings 19:11–13), and how do you explain the difference? Is it relevant that Job's friend Elihu has just spoken of a great storm at the end of the previous chapter? Is it significant that Job's family was killed by a great wind (1:19)? What might that parallel suggest?

Job prayed for this encounter several times (e.g., see 23:3–7). How does what happens differ from what he demanded?

## Job 38

**Verse 2:** What does it mean to say that Job has darkened counsel? (This is a literal translation of the Hebrew.) Whose counsel has he darkened? How has he done so? How have Job's words been "words without knowledge"?

**Verse 3:** Why does the Lord tell Job to gird up his loins? What does that phrase suggest about Job's answer?

**Verses 4–11:** What is the point of the Lord's questions?

**Verses 12–15:** Why is the Lord asking Job about Job's power?

The Lord has said that Job has darkened counsel. Now he asks whether Job is the one who created the day and its light. What is his point?

**Verses 16–24:** Why does the Lord ask Job about these many kinds of places on the earth and whether Job has been to them?

**Verse 16:** Anciently the sea was assumed to spring forth from the earth someplace, just as the streams and rivers we know of do. The writer is using that idea here in the Lord's question of Job.

**Verse 17:** The gates of death—in other words, the gates to the place where the dead go—were assumed to be a place on the physical earth.

**Verses 25–38:** What point is the Lord driving home with these questions about how the world is governed and who does that governing?

## Job 40

In this chapter and the next, beginning in Job 40:6 and ending in Job 41:26, the Lord repeats his rebuke of Job. Why does he do so even after Job has given his first rebuke a humble response? Is it because Job has not yet disavowed being innocent?

**Verses 4–5:** What is Job's response to the long series of questions that God asks him? Another translation of the Hebrew word translated *vile* would be *small* or *a trifle*.

Job can say no more, but has he changed his claim of innocence?

**Verse 8:** Does the question “Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?” represent the problem? If so, how has Job been doing that? Can you point to places where this has occurred? If Job has accused God of unrighteousness, how might we sometimes do that?

**Verse 10:** God essentially asks, “If you’re not brave enough to take on Leviathan [a mythical beast that inhabited the sea, the embodiment of evil; see Psalm 74:14], what makes you brave enough to stand before me?” Does Job have an answer to this question? If he does, what is it?

## Job 42

**Verses 1–6:** What has Job learned? We speak of this book as a book about suffering, but it never answers the question of why we suffer. Indeed, it solidly rebukes some answers to that question and condemns some who offer answers. But if it is not about *why* we suffer, what does it teach us about suffering?

We find this in the lesson manual, a quotation from Elder Richard G. Scott:

When you face adversity, you can be led to ask many questions. Some serve a useful purpose; others do not. To ask, Why does this have to happen to me? Why do I have to suffer this, now? What have I done to cause this? will lead you into blind alleys. It really does no good to ask questions that reflect opposition to the will of God. Rather ask, What am I to do? What am I to learn from this experience? What am I to change?

Whom am I to help? How can I remember my many blessings in times of trial?<sup>2</sup>

How does this relate to our understanding of the book of Job?

What did Job utter without understanding? What does he mean when he says in verse 5, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee”? When do we hear by the hearing of the ear but not see? How do we see?

## Lesson 33

Jonah 1–4; Micah 2; 4–7<sup>1</sup>

This set of notes covers both Jonah and Micah, but it concentrates on the book of Jonah.

With this lesson we begin to study a group of writings called the minor prophets. Jews divide the Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament, but what is probably more accurately called “the First Testament”) into the *Law* (the first five books of the First Testament, also called the Pentateuch), the *Writings* (parts of which are also called “Wisdom literature”; the Writings consist of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles), and the *Prophets* (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—the major prophets—and Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—the minor prophets). The terms *major prophets* and *minor prophets* have nothing to do with the relative importance of the prophets in question. The terms refer only to the size of the scrolls on which the books are written: the major prophets’ scrolls are large; the minor prophets’ scrolls are small.

To this point, when the texts were about the prophets, they focused on the miracles done by them. Now the focus changes. Both the minor prophets and the major prophets

we will study will focus on their message of repentance to Israel. How would you account for that change?

Before dealing directly with this week's reading materials, look briefly at five of the minor prophets: Jonah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Joel. There is little doubt about the historical existence of these prophets, except for Jonah. Many believing scholars do not believe that Jonah was an actual person; many other believe otherwise. However, whether or not he did live is irrelevant to our purposes in Sunday School, so (as we did with Job) these notes will ignore the question and treat Jonah as if he were an actual person. That is in line with the position taken by the Church, that "what is important . . . [is] not whether the books [are] historically accurate, but whether the doctrines [are] correct."<sup>2</sup>

## Jonah

The book of Jonah (Jonah is placed at about 750 BC) differs from the other minor prophets in that he doesn't call Israel to repentance. In addition, whereas we know little about the lives of the other minor prophets, the book of Jonah contains a great deal of biographical information about him. His book is about *his* problems rather than Israel's.

Because the Assyrians have invaded Israel (the northern kingdom) on numerous occasions, killing many and taking many into captivity, Jonah hates them. He hates them so much that he refuses to go on a mission to Ninevah, the capital city of Assyria, for fear that the people there will repent. But Jonah's story shows God's love for all his children,

even non-Israelites—and Jonah. God will forgive whom he will, Israel's enemies as well as Israel.

Why, though we pay lip service to the idea of loving everyone, is it sometimes difficult to accept God's love for all people, especially for our enemies or for people who have been guilty of heinous crimes? How does Jonah's problem manifest itself in *our* lives? How might that affect us personally? How might it interfere with missionary work? How might it interfere with the mission of the Church as a worldwide church?

How might this aspect of the story of Jonah relate to current events?

More detailed study questions follow the overviews of each of the minor prophets.

## Hosea

The study questions for the book of Hosea are in the materials for the next lesson.

Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom (Israel) at the time of the Assyrian captivity (746–721 BC). He was roughly a contemporary of Jonah, Joel, Amos, and Isaiah.

Those prophets often used literary devices to reach their readers (metaphor, simile, chiasmus, and especially typology). Hosea uses a powerful type to make his point. But his is more than a metaphor. It is a real event that serves as a type or shadow of the Lord's relation to Israel: Hosea is called to marry an adulterous wife, and then, though she has been



unfaithful and even had children by other men, he is commanded to buy her back and to love her.

The point of this shocking type is that Israel (like an unfaithful wife) has gone whoring after other lovers (pagan gods), and the Lord, the husband who has entered into a covenant with her, will buy her back and love her and bring her to repentance. Some argue that Hosea did not actually marry the woman he talks about, that she is *only* a literary device. As with Jonah, it doesn't matter for our purposes. Since the book of Hosea treats her as real, these notes do too.

What do we learn about God and his nature from Hosea? Why is the story of Hosea a message of hope? Where else in scripture do we see the same type? Why is marriage so powerful a metaphor for God's relation to his people? Does that tell us anything about marriage?

## Amos

The study questions for Amos are in the notes for lesson 35.

Amos was a herdsman or wool grower and sycamore fruit gatherer from Judea (Amos 7:14). Unlike the other prophets, he was not called to prophesy to his own people, Judah. Instead the Lord called him as a prophet to Israel. He prophesied in about 765–750 BC. The metaphors that Amos uses reflect his pastoral background.

Amos prophesies against those who have oppressed Israel. Then he prophesies against Israel: he tells us that just as those outside Israel cannot escape judgment for the ways in which they treat others, Israel also cannot escape judgment.

Amos's message condemns a society in which the righteous and the poor were oppressed and treated without mercy. As much as anything else, he is a prophet of social justice. He condemns both Israel and Judah for not keeping their covenant obligations. Amos condemns Judah for such things as idolatry (Amos 2:4) and other wickedness. He condemns Israel for things such as social injustice (Amos 2:6–8; 4:1; 5:11–12; 8:4–6), practicing idolatry (involving fornication and adultery, Amos 2:7), and suppressing the prophets and Nazarites (Amos 2:12; 5:10–12; 6:1–6).

What do the things for which Amos condemns Israel and Judah tell us about them? What do they say about the relationship of religious worship to humanitarian concerns? Why is caring for those less fortunate than us such an important matter in the writings and revelations of the prophets ancient and modern and in Christ's teaching?

## Micah

Micah was a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah, probably under King Zedekiah, the last Davidic king (597–587 BC). He was roughly a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. Micah's prophecies condemn both Samaria and Jerusalem.

Micah's message is that we ought to emulate God. In a day when both kingdoms were corrupt and wicked, Micah's prophecies centered on three topics: (1) the destruction of Samaria (the northern kingdom, Israel) and Jerusalem (the southern kingdom, Judah) because of transgression; (2) the

coming Messiah and his birthplace in Bethlehem; (3) and words of counsel, chastisement, and comfort from the Lord.

How does Micah's description of what the Lord requires of us ("to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly") encapsulate the essence of the gospel? Do we sometimes let other aspects of our religious life keep us from grasping this vital principle? What about aspects of our non-religious life?

More detailed questions for studying Micah appear after the overviews of the minor prophets and after the more detailed questions for studying Jonah.

## Joel

The materials for the book of Joel are in the notes for lesson 35.

It is difficult to know when Joel prophesied. Tradition makes him a contemporary of Hosea during the reign of Joash, king of Judah (837 BC). But many believe that his book is one of the latest of the prophetic books (500 BC or somewhat later).

Joel uses the image of a natural disaster of a plague of insects (locusts, palmworms, cankerworms) to convey the terror, power and destruction of a coming destruction. In turn, that destruction serves as a type of the Lord's apocalyptic coming, when the earth will be cleansed and burned by fire. Like most of these prophetic writers, Joel ends his prophecy with words of hope and a promise of restoration to the Israelites. Though we seldom refer to Joel, remember that Moroni quoted from his book when he first visited

Joseph Smith, telling Joseph that Joel's prophecy was about to be fulfilled.

Do we understand prophetic images of apocalypse as images of blessing or cursing? Why?

Are prophecies such as Joel's best understood by trying to figure out what they tell us about the future or what they tell us about the present? Why?

At a number of times in the First Testament, there were multiple prophets. We also have more than one prophet today. However, the ancient prophets seem not to have been organized in any fashion, much less as ours are, nor to have been thought of as ecclesiastical leaders as they are today. How do you explain that difference?

## Jonah 1

What do you make of the fact that neither the title *prophet* nor the verb *prophesy* appears anywhere in the book of Jonah?

The book is divided into two parts, Jonah 1:1–2:11 and Jonah 3:1–4:11. Each of those parts corresponds to a different mission given to Jonah. In the first, Jonah receives God's mercy; in the second, he begrudges God's mercy to others. What do we learn from the contrast of those two missions?

**Verses 1–2:** Read 2 Kings 14:25. Does that help us understand who Jonah is?

It would be unusual for an Israelite to be called on a mission to the city of Nineveh. How would an ancient Hebrew

reader of this verse have responded to the idea that Jonah went on such a mission?

The Hebrew word translated “wickedness” may also mean “calamity” or “difficulty.” How do you think Jonah understood it? Why? (Regarding the wickedness of Ninevah, see Nahum 3:19.)

**Verses 3–4:** Tarshish was a common name denoting a mining center and port. There was a city by that name in Spain, a Greek and Phoenician colony there that in ancient times was called Tartessos. Carthage, the name of an important city in North Africa, is a variation of the same name. The name was a descriptive term as common as the name Portland is today.<sup>3</sup> Here it seems to mean merely a faraway location.

Why would Jonah want to go to Tarshish, when Nineveh is in the opposite direction (wherever it was)? Why does Jonah think he could run from God by leaving the borders of the promised land? What does the emphasis on the distance to Ninevah tell us, and what should it have told Jonah?

**Verses 4–6:** How could Jonah sleep through the storm? Why do the sailors wake him up? Brigham Young suggested that we put ourselves in Jonah’s place to understand the book.<sup>4</sup> Is that recommendation particularly apt in this instance?

Is it significant that the captain addresses Jonah with the same two verbs that the Lord used when he called Jonah, *arise* and *call/cry*?

**Verses 7–9:** Why do the sailors cast lots?

What does the word *occupation* mean here?

**Verses 12–13:** What does the fact that Jonah asks to be tossed overboard tell us about him and his feelings at the time? How does this contrast with his later behavior in regard to Ninevah? How do you explain the difference? Why go overboard, rather than just pray for forgiveness from the Lord? Why not just jump overboard?

What does the fact that the sailors are hesitant to follow his wishes, even though it possibly means their own death if they do not do so, tell us about them?

**Verse 14:** What is the innocent blood they refer to?

**Verses 15–16:** What is their reaction to the calming of the sea?

**Verse 17:** What does scripture tell us about the origins of the great fish? What does this information do to the arguments about what type of fish it was?

We understand the symbolism of Jonah's three days in the fish in Christian terms: Jonah is a type of Christ, who spent three days in the tomb before he was resurrected. However, we are not the only ones who have read this story symbolically. If we were ancient Israelites or modern Jews, how might we understand the symbolism of Jonah's three days in the belly of a great fish?

For whom might Jonah stand?

Who might the great fish that consumes Jonah stand for? (Compare Jeremiah 51:34 and perhaps Isaiah 27:1.)

For what might the stay in the darkness of the fish's belly stand?

How do we choose between these two symbolic readings? Must we choose? If the book can have more than one meaning, what prevents it from having any meaning we decide to give it?

The *Jerome Biblical Commentary* says, “The cuneiform characters denoting Ninevah are a combination of the symbols for house and fish.”<sup>5</sup> So what?

## Jonah 2

**Verses 2–9:** If this is a foreshadowing of Christ’s experience in the tomb, what does the reference to hell (literally, the place of departed spirits, out of the presence of God) foreshadow (1 Peter 3:18–20)?

What do you make of the references to the temple?

What do you make of Jonah being brought *up from corruption* (verse 6)? Is there a baptism motif here?

In Hebrew, verses 2–9 are in poetic form, though what comes before and after is prose? Why is the prayer in poetic form rather than prose?

## Jonah 3

**Verses 1–2:** How is this new beginning significant to our understanding of Jonah’s story typologically?

**Verse 4:** Note the size of Nineveh; it was one of the grandest cities of its day. The word *Ninevah* may refer not only to the city but also to the region surrounding it, an area of about twenty-six square miles.<sup>6</sup> Is its size relevant to the meaning of this story?

What are Jonah's feelings regarding Ninevah?

Has his attitude toward the Assyrians changed as a consequence of being in the sea? Why?

How do you explain a missionary going to preach repentance to a people he strongly dislikes?

**Verses 5–9:** How is the drowning metaphor of verses 5–6 appropriate as a description of sin?

Why might the writer of Jonah not have bothered to mention the name of the king of Ninevah?

How do the Assyrians express their repentance? What might cause the entire city to repent? How does this compare to Israel (compare Ezekiel 3:4–7)? Is that comparison part of the point of the story?

**Verse 10:** What is God's reaction to Ninevah's repentance? What does God's so-called repentance tell us about the nature of divine prophecies?

How might this story, like the story of Namaan, make us question our presuppositions about what the First Testament teaches?

## Jonah 4

**Verses 1–2:** How do you explain Jonah's reaction to the repentance of the people of Nineveh? What do you make of the fact that Jonah says, essentially, "Didn't I tell you this would happen?" (verse 2). If he really already knew that Ninevah would probably repent, why did Jonah flee his mission?



Wouldn't we expect his response to be like that of Amos, "The Lord hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8).

How might Jonah have justified his flight to himself? Why would anyone get angry when others repent? What lesson can we learn from Jonah's anger and its outcome? Can you think of an instance where you've had something like Jonah's experience?

**Verse 3:** Why would Jonah want to die, when earlier he had fought so strenuously for his life while in the belly of the great fish?

**Verse 4:** Isn't this the heart of the story: how can someone who has received God's grace refuse it to others? *In what ways do we refuse divine grace to other people?*

**Verses 5–7, 10:** Why would God raise up a gourd in one night and then destroy it? What has the miraculous gourd to do with the story of Jonah's rescue from the fish? With the story of the city of Ninevah?

Compare and contrast verse 6 with 1 Kings 19:4. Is this similarity intentional? What does it teach us?

What is Jonah waiting to see? Verse 5 tells us that he is waiting to see "what would become of the city," but he isn't just curious. What is he hoping will happen?

**Verse 8:** Why would the Lord send an *east* wind? What is the significance of an east wind to an Israelite? Where is it coming from? Note also that the writer makes a special point earlier (verse 5) that Jonah had positioned himself on the east of the city—which means that he is on the opposite

side of the city from where he would have entered; he has crossed the entire city.

What is Jonah's response to his situation after the gourd dies? How is the use of the gourd in this situation like the parable of the man and his sheep that Nathan tells David after David's rape of Bathsheba? In other words, how do these stories open the way for the recipient to be his own judge? Does that say anything about divine judgment in general?

**Verse 10:** How is Jonah's pity ("concern" might be a better translation) for the gourd ironic?

**Verse 11:** What lesson in love and regard for human kind does God teach Jonah through the death of the gourd and Jonah's reaction to it?

Who is the Lord talking about when he speaks of those who cannot tell their right from their left hand? Why does he mention the cattle?

## Micah 2

**Verse 1:** What does Micah mean when he speaks of people "devising iniquity and working evil upon their beds"? (He is *not* talking about sexual sin.)

**Verse 2:** What kind of evil have the wealthy been planning? (In verse 2, *heritage* means "inheritance.")

**Verse 11:** Who is Micah referring to when he speaks of those who shall be the prophets accepted by his people?

**Verses 12–13:** What is the point of these verses? What do they mean to us personally?

How do you explain what verse 13 means? Who has been broken up? What does it mean that they have “passed through the gate”? If they are broken up, how can the Lord be at their head?

### Micah 3

**Verses 1–3:** How does one *eat the flesh* of the Lord’s people? Is this description supposed to coincide with a description of sacrifices? If so, are those Israelite sacrifices on the temple altar or idolatrous sacrifices? Or is the comparison to butchers preparing slaughtered animals?

**Verse 5:** How do the prophets make the people err? What does God propose to do about these prophets (Micah 3:6–7)? What does Micah mean when he says they will cover their lips?

Where do we find such prophets today? Can we find them within the Church, or are they only outside it? Are we ever in danger of being such a prophet?

**Verses 8–11:** Micah has come, he says, to make a particular declaration of iniquity on Israel. What is the substance of that declaration?

What does his chastisement of the judges, the priest, and the prophets tell us about the religious practices of the times? the judicial practices?

**Verse 12:** Does the punishment fit the crime? If so, how?

## Micah 4

**Verses 1–3:** Notice that these verses are the same as Isaiah 2:2–4. Sargon and Sennacherib, kings of Assyria, attacked Jerusalem during Micah’s time, making his prophecy of a time when the nations would flow to the temple especially poignant.

Why are mountains so important in Old Testament writings? What can they symbolize—and why?

We know how *we* understand the prophecy of these verses. How might someone in Micah’s audience have understood it?

What description does Micah give of the millennial reign? How might we prepare for that reign?

**Verses 4–8:** What does Micah mean by the image of the vine and the fig tree? Are those particularly significant?

Whom has the Lord afflicted, in other words, injured (verse 6)?

Why is the Lord’s promise to be the king of Israel important at this point in their history? What does it have to do with what we have seen Israel (then Judah and Israel) go through? How is this prophecy of Israel’s restoration relevant to us?

**Verses 9–10:** How is the image of childbirth apt?

What do you make of the reversed exodus imagery in verse 10: instead of leaving Egypt and dwelling in the wilderness on the way to the promised land, Israel will leave Zion and dwell in a field on its way to Babylon.

**Verses 11–13:** What is it that Sennacherib and the others who attack Zion do not know or understand? Is that relevant to the situation of the Church today?

## Micah 5

**Verse 1:** A significant number of scholars believe that this verse belongs in chapter 4. Can you explain why they might think that?

**Verses 2–3:** How does Matthew's quotation of Micah (Matthew 2:4–6) about the birthplace of the Savior differ from the original prophecy?

Does where he comes from help explain why Micah might be the only one to name the birthplace of the Savior?

Why was the Savior to be born in Bethlehem rather than in the capital city, Jerusalem?

## Micah 6

**Verses 1–5:** Why does the Lord recount the history of Israel from the time of Moses forward?

Why do the prophets' teachings often begin by reminding us of our past history, the history of Israel? Why, out of all the things he could have referred to, would God remind the Israelites of Balaam?

**Verse 7:** To what is the Lord referring?

**Verse 8:** What do you think of Micah's synopsis of the requirements of the Lord? How can this include everything that is required of us? How are these three all brought to-

gether in the holy of holies when the high priest comes before the ark of the covenant?

Why would all of these be associated with our state of being, rather than what we have done? What is gained by this type of approach to the gospel?

**Verses 11–12, 14 (also Micah 7:5–6):** What is wrong in the business world of that time? What does that mean in today's terms?

How can one eat and not be satisfied?

What does it mean to do evil “with both hands”?

What is vengeance when it is the Lord's vengeance? Is it vindictiveness or retaliation? If not, what is it?

## Micah 7

This chapter is often described as a lament. Why? What is Micah lamenting? How is that relevant to us?

**Verses 5–6:** What is happening to the family at Micah's time?

**Verses 7–10:** What is the significance of the *therefore* that begins verse 7?

What does verse 9 tell us about the process of repentance?

**Verses 18–20:** What is Micah's final evaluation of the Lord? Why is it a good one?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 34

Hosea 1–3; 11; 13–14

## Background

The book of Hosea is an excellent example of a book that we often find difficult because we don't understand "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:1). One of the most important of those ways of prophesying was the use of types and shadows. (See Romans 5:14; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 9:9, 24; 10:1; and Mosiah 3:15; 13:10; 16:14.) The key to understanding Hosea is to recognize that the relation of Israel to the Lord is typified by the marriage relation and that Israel in apostasy is typified by an unfaithful wife. That relation is used in this book to call Israel to repentance.

Initially Hosea uses a negative version of the bride-and-groom metaphor to teach Israel that, though they are unfaithful to the Lord, he will remain faithful to them. (No other prophet in the Old Testament uses as much metaphor as does Hosea.) For us, the surprising thing about the book of Hosea is that Hosea does not only use the metaphor of the faithful husband and the unfaithful wife linguistically, he *acts it out* by marrying an unfaithful woman.

Some have insisted that we cannot understand Hosea's story literally. Most readers have argued that we should. Some have argued that the Lord commanded Hosea to



marry a woman who was not a harlot at the time, but who he knew would become one. Regardless of which side of that multisided argument you wish to defend, it is important to remember that such arguments are beside the point. They take us away from the lesson of Hosea to other issues. These notes will take up the story as we have it in scripture, looking to learn the lessons that story teaches us. They won't be concerned with whether the Lord really commanded Hosea to marry an unfaithful woman.

Hosea was a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (approximately 750–790 BC), king of Israel, and during the reigns of those who followed. He probably prophesied mostly in Samaria, the northern kingdom. The traditional dates given for the years of his prophetic work are 760–720 BC. Jewish tradition says that Hosea's father, Beerī, was also a prophet and that one of Beerī's prophecies was included in Isaiah's prophecies (Isaiah 8:19–20).

Micah, Isaiah, and Amos were contemporary with Hosea, and all four of these prophets agreed on what they said about Israel and Judah: they were morally and spiritually ill. Hosea 4 gives a bleak description of Israel, summarized in verse 1: "There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." Israel's spiritual illness was reflected in her politics: she was constantly quarreling with her neighbors and winning and losing unending battles, while at the same time she and those neighbors were threatened by the huge power of Assyria.

The political strife was not only between Judah and Israel, on the one hand, and other nations, on the other. It was

also internal. In the south, Judah was at war with Ephraim (see chapter 5). And after Jeroboam II died, there were three kings on Israel's throne within one year, followed by continual fighting by those who claimed to be king and, shortly, the end of the kingdom. (See Hosea 13:11.)

## Hosea 1

**Verses 4–5:** The first son is born and named Jezreel, or “I will sow.” What connotations does this name have? What will the Lord sow? Are any connotations of the name positive?

Why isn't his name changed after Gomer repents?

What does it mean that the Lord will “break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel”?

**Verses 6–7:** The name Lo-ruhamah is the name Ruhamah, “mercy,” with a negative prefix. So it means “no mercy” or “no compassion.” What does it mean that the Lord will have mercy on Israel but not on Judah? Why would he do that? What is the division between Israel and Judah?

What does it mean to say that the Lord will not save Judah “by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle”? How *will* he save them? Does this suggest anything about how we should understand salvation?

**Verses 8–9:** Like Lo-ruhamah, Lo-ammi is the name Ammi with a negative prefix. *Ammi* means “my people.”

Notice that verse 3 says Gomer “conceived, and bare him a son,” but verses 6 and 8 just say that she “conceived, and bare a [child].” Many have understood this to be a way of saying that Hosea was not the father of the second two children.

**Verses 10–11:** What do these two verses have to do with the rest of the chapter? What promise is made? To whom?

Does remembering the meaning of the name Jezreel add a dimension to the meaning of the phrase “great shall be the day of Jezreel”?

## Hosea 2

**Verse 1:** Why has Hosea dropped the negative prefix from his daughter’s and his son’s names? Why change their names? What does this say about him? What might it show Israel?

**Verses 2–5:** What does Hosea ask in verse 2?

Verse 3 describes the punishment of adultery (compare Ezekiel 16:39), and verse 4 continues that description. The description of these children at the end of verse 4 is paralleled by Gomer’s description of them in verse 12, where she describes them as the rewards of her lovers rather than as the children of Hosea, adding weight to the usual interpretation of verses 3, 6, and 8, that Hosea was not their father.

In verse 5, what does she say she wanted from her lovers? What do these verses say to Israel? What do they say to us?

**Verses 6–13:** This section begins with Hosea speaking of what he will do to convince Gomer to return, and it ends with the Lord speaking of Israel forgetting him. This change in voice may seem odd to us, but it is perfectly appropriate in typological writing: Hosea the prophet is a shadow of the Lord.

What is Hosea going to do to convince Gomer to return?

Who has been providing her with her needs?

Compare what Hosea has been giving her with what she wants from her lovers.

She thinks of her children as gifts of her lovers, just as she thought the necessities of life came from them. What does this show us about her? What do these things tell us about Israel? About ourselves?

In verse 11, Gomer's mirth (her joy or rejoicing) is defined by her feast days and so on, indications of her idolatry. Notice, too, that the trees of a forest (to which she compares her children) are non-bearing trees. They have no fruit. So what?

**Verses 14–15:** The word translated “allure” could also be translated “persuade her with endearing words.” What does this say about how the Lord deals with Israel?

In verse 15, why does the Lord offer marriage presents to someone to whom he is already married?

Compare the reference to the wilderness here with the reference in verse 3. How do they differ? The reference here is an allusion to the Exodus from Egypt. How is that relevant?

As the footnotes of the LDS edition of the Old Testament point out, in verse 15 the word *Achor* can also be translated “trouble.” How does that translation help us understand the point of these two verses?

In addition, the valley of Achor was a valley the children of Israel had to pass through on their way from Egypt to the promised land. How is that significant to this verse?

Why is the exodus such an important type for scripture? (Why is it such an important type for the Book of Mormon prophets?) Is it an important type for us? If so, how so?

**Verses 16–17:** What is the significance of this change in the form of address? What is the difference between a husband and a master?

The word *Baali* is connected with idolatry, with Baal worship. So what?

**Verse 18:** What is the Lord promising?

**Verses 19–20:** What does the word *betroth* mean? What does it mean to be betrothed to the Lord? How does the image of betrothal compare to that of being the Lord’s children (compare 1:10)? What does each image teach us?

**Verses 21–22:** Perhaps a better translation of the word translated “hear” in these verses would be “pay attention to” or “respond to.” What is the Lord promising here?

Does the fact that the verse ends with the name Jezreel (“I will sow”) help us understand the promise made? Is there more than one level of this promise? In other words, can it be read as meaning more than one thing?

Corn, wine, and oil may be an oblique reference to the temple ritual and sacrifices. If so, how might that be relevant to the promise made here?

**Verse 23:** In the last verses of this chapter, the names of Hosea and Gomer’s children are important. For example, verse 19 ends with a reference to mercy or compassion, the name of their daughter (Ruhamah, 1:6). As we saw, verse 22 ends with the mention of their first son, Jezreel, and if we

remember the meaning of the first son's name, verse 23 begins with a mention of him. Then this verse mentions their daughter, Ruhamah, and finally it mentions their second son, Ammi. So if we recognize the connection of the names to the meanings of the names, verse 23 mentions each child in order of birth and could be translated like this:

Then I will sow her (Jezreel) unto me in the earth  
and I will have mercy on She-Who-Did-Not-Receive-  
Mercy (Lo-Ruhamah); and I will say to He-Who-Is-  
Not-My-People (Lo-Ammi), Thou art my people; and  
they shall say, Thou art my God.

How does this bring together the shadow (Hosea's experience with his wife, Gomer) and the original (the Lord's experience with Israel)? So what?

### Hosea 3

**Verse 1:** What is the Lord commanding Hosea to do when he says, "Love the woman who is beloved of another and an adulteress"? (I've used another translation to make the King James translation more clear.)

Deuteronomy 4:4 forbids a man whose wife has become the wife of another person from remarrying her, so what Hosea does here seems, strictly speaking, to be illegal. What do you make of that? How does that add depth to the story?

**Verse 2:** In ancient Israel, as in many other ancient cultures, women were considered the property of their husbands. Since Gomer now "belongs" to someone else, if Hosea wants her back, he must compensate her lover and

buy her back. In spite of being part of a social structure and practice that we no longer condone, how is that an image of our own situation?

**Verses 3–5:** What is Hosea’s message to Gomer? What is the Lord’s message to Israel?

Hans Walter Wolff describes Hosea’s message this way: “The lawful opportunity for Israel’s return was created only by the emphatic love of Yahweh.”<sup>1</sup> Do you understand the book as Wolff does or differently? Explain.

## Hosea 11

This chapter gives us the Lord’s version of Israel’s history, including its near future history, and turns toward its future in the last four verses. How is that history relevant to Hosea’s message?

**Verse 1:** *Love* is a good translation of the Hebrew word used here. It includes all of the kinds of love we might think of, from marital love to parental love to carnal love—love of all kinds. When the Lord speaks of the covenant between himself and Israel, he often uses the word *love* (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:8 and 10:15). Should we see a parallel between Israel and the Son in this verse?

**Verse 2:** The King James translation of the first part of this verse is misleading. The New International Version (NIV) translates it this way, and most scholars would agree: “The more I called Israel, the further they went from me.” That fits the context better than does the KJV translation. If we accept this revision of the translation, in what two ways

does the Lord describe Israel's sin? Do either or both of those describe our own sins?

What do you make of the contrast between verse 1 and verse 2?

**Verse 3:** "To go" here means "to walk": "I taught Ephraim also to walk." What is the image that the Lord uses here? How does that image help us understand the Lord's point in these verses?

Previous chapters have spoken of the Lord healing Israel (Hosea 5:13; 6:1; 7:1). When has he done so? How has Israel responded?

**Verse 4:** The Lord has been using the metaphor of a parent's love for a child. What metaphor is he using in this verse? "Laid meat unto them" means "fed them."

**Verses 5–6:** Of whom is the Lord speaking here? In verse 5, "refused to turn" means "refused to repent."

When the Lord says that Israel will not return to Egypt but will be governed by Assyria (verse 5), what is he saying? Why mention Egypt at all?

What does it mean to Israel that it will no longer have its own king?

How does verse 5 compare to the curse on Israel uttered by the Lord in Deuteronomy 28:68?

A better translation of "shall consume his branches and devour them" is "will destroy the bars of their gates" (NIV). What does the threat of swords in the cities and the destruction of the city gates tell Israel? Why would that be such a



disastrous event? To what does the King James translation attribute this destruction?

**Verse 7:** Will the destruction and enslavement of Israel bring them to repentance?

The second two parts of this verse are understood in quite different ways by different scholars. Some understand “Most High” to refer to the Lord, as we might assume. Others, however, think that it refers to Baal. Which interpretation do you think fits the context best?

**Verses 8–9:** To see who Admah and Zeboim were, go to Genesis 10:19 and 14:2–8. How are they relevant to what the Lord says here?

What point is the Lord making when he says, “I am God, not a man”?

“I will not enter into the city” is not a good translation of the last clause of verse 9. “I will not come in wrath” is more accurate.

**Verses 10–11:** Why will the Lord “roar like a lion” when his people begin to follow him again? Why use that metaphor? What does it mean here? (Compare Amos 1:2; 3:8; Joel 4:16; and Jeremiah 25:30.)

Some translators believe that the Hebrew word translated “tremble” in verse 10 and verse 11 should be translated “hurry.” Given only the context—in other words, not knowing Hebrew—do you think that makes sense? If *tremble* is correct, what does the last clause of verse 10 mean?

**Verse 12:** This verse should probably be the first verse of chapter 12 rather than the last verse of chapter 11, so I will treat it that way.

## Hosea 12

The chapter lays out the Lord's lawsuit against Israel (Hosea 12:2): his accusations against them (Hosea 11:12–12:1, 7–8, 11), his defense of himself (12:3–6, 9–10, 12–13), and the judgment that he will make (12:14–13:1).

**Verses 11:12–12:1** The dominant theme of the chapter is mentioned here: treachery. How has Israel been treacherous with the Lord? What does *treachery* mean in a context like this? Does the second half of verse 1 suggest an answer to that question?

Wolff thinks these verses are spoken by the prophet Hosea rather than by the Lord. Do you agree or disagree? What does it mean to say that Ephraim feeds on the wind and follows the east wind (Hosea 12:1)?

**Verse 2:** Verse 1 accuses Ephraim. The first part of verse 2 accuses Judah. The second part accuses Jacob. What is going on in that series?

**Verses 3–5:** Is the Jacob of verse 2 the same Jacob that we see here? Are both the prophet Jacob? Are both the nation of Israel, called by the prophet's name? Is one the prophet and the other the nation?

What does it mean to say that the Lord is Jacob's memorial?

**Verse 6:** How does the content of this verse follow from what has just been said?

**Verses 7–8:** What is the point of this metaphor? Of what does it accuse Israel?

Ancient Israel thought of the Canaanites as merchants but not themselves.<sup>2</sup> Does that help us understand these verses? Unjust scales are often used in the Old Testament as a metaphor for those who oppress the poor.

What does Ephraim say of himself in verse 8? What does that mean? How is it part of the Lord's accusation?

**Verses 9–10:** How is verse 9 a response to what Ephraim has said in verse 8? What is the Lord threatening? How will that help Israel?

How is verse 10 relevant to the Lord's accusation? To his defense against accusations?

**Verse 11:** What kind of sacrifice is the Lord speaking of here, sacrifice to him or idolatrous sacrifice?

The last clause of the verse, "Yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields," appears to be a prophecy about what will become of Israel's sacrifices at Gilead and Gilgal: their altars will be like heaps of stones in a plowed field.

**Verses 12–13:** The Lord uses Jacob's service to his father-in-law to earn a wife as a metaphor in verse 12. Can you explain the meaning of that metaphor?

Structurally, verse 13 seems parallel to verse 12 (e.g., both end by speaking of tending: Jacob tended sheep, the Lord

tended—*preserved* in the KJV—Israel). Can you explain that parallel?

**Verses 12:14–13:1:** When the Lord says that Ephraim has offended so severely that he, the Lord, “shall leave his [Israel’s] blood on him [Israel],” what is he saying?

Here is the NIV translation of Hosea 13:1: “When Ephraim spoke, men trembled; he was exalted in Israel. But he became guilty of Baal worship and died.” Does that help make sense of the King James translation? Can this serve as a synopsis of the charge against Israel and the result? Why use Ephraim as the stand-in for Israel as a whole?

## Hosea 13

We see here a series of threatened punishments, amounting to “I will destroy you, O Israel.” Read the chapter and ask yourself how you would respond to something like that from a contemporary prophet.

What contemporary events could be comparable to the events prophesied for Israel? Are they necessarily attacks by an invader? In other words, what does this chapter have to do with us?

## Hosea 14

**Verses 1–3:** Why does the prophet tell Israel what they should pray when they repent? Is he giving them a formula for their prayers, or is he telling them what the content of those prayers of repentance should be?

Why are they to take *words* to the Lord rather than sacrifices?

There is scholarly debate about the proper translation of what the KJV renders “receive us graciously.” Some think it should be “Accept the word [we offer].” Others think it should be “We will take what is good [to the Lord].”

“Calves of our lips” is a poor translation of the Hebrew. “Fruit of our lips” is better.

What is it that Asshur (Assyria) cannot save Israel from?

Why do they say, “We will not ride on horses”?

Do we ever say to the work of our hands, “Ye are our gods”? Do the works of our hands—computers, smartphones, television, and other gizmos—ever control our lives, deciding for us what has to be done and when?

What do you make of the description, in this context, of the Lord as the one in whom the fatherless find mercy?

**Verses 5–7:** How does the Lord heal backsliding, in other words, apostasy?

When he spoke of Israel’s sins, the Lord compared himself to a lion, a leopard, or an angry bear (Hosea 5:14; 13:7). Now he speaks of himself as the dew. The fierceness of a wild animal is easy to understand as a metaphor for an angry God, but what does the metaphor of dew suggest? Is Isaiah 26:19 relevant to understanding this metaphor as it is used here?

What do the other metaphors in these verses suggest about the Lord’s relation to Israel?

**Verse 8:** Who is speaking in the last two sentences of verse 8, Israel or the Lord?

**Verse 9:** The prophet has finished describing Israel's possible repentance and returns to its present problem: who will understand the prophecy and voice of warning that he has pronounced? How might this prophetic reflection on the prophetic office apply to us?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 35

Amos 3; 7–9; Joel 2–3

## Amos

Though Amos is a short book, it can be difficult to make sense of it. Amos seems to have done his prophetic work at about 765–750 BC, though it may have been earlier. (We can give fairly accurate dates for him because he refers to an earthquake (Amos 1:1) that occurred during the reign of Uzziah (Zechariah 14:5) and to an eclipse of the sun that took place in 763 BC (Amos 8:9). So Amos prophesies just after Hosea, or perhaps he was his contemporary.

Look at the Old Testament chronology in the LDS Bible Dictionary to see what kinds of things were happening in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah at that time. How is this related to the events narrated at the beginning of the Book of Mormon?

Amos is a herdsman (Amos 1:1) and someone who collected sycamore figs (Amos 7:14), a food eaten by the poor. Our view of shepherds owes a great deal to our Christmas views of Christ's nativity: a shepherd lives with his flock in the hills and is often an itinerant worker. Similarly, our view of someone who collects figs is that the person is probably a hired hand. As a result, we assume that Amos was not a wealthy person and probably had little formal education. We see many books on Amos informed by that assumption.



It is possible that the assumption is correct, but it is also possible that view is quite wrong.

The word translated “shepherd” described Mesha, the king of Tekoa (2 Kings 3:4), and the same word is used in other ancient Near Eastern cultures to refer to officials among the priests and other nobility. So perhaps rather than being an itinerant, uneducated farmhand, Amos was a wealthy businessman, a dealer in wool and sycamore figs. Such a person was probably well educated.

According to *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, “He may have occupied a professional status under the king or the temple which obligated him to supply them with flocks, to pay taxes, or even to fulfill a military role; he would have also enjoyed certain privileges that came with employment by the royal house.”<sup>1</sup> That Amos was called from the village of Tekoa, geographically isolated from Jerusalem and Israel, but on a major trade route, is evidence for *The Anchor Bible Dictionary’s* suggestion. In the end, however, we do not know much about Amos’s background.

What do you make of the fact that, though Amos lives in Judah, his message is primarily for Israel?

Amos’s message is that Israel will be punished for her sins even more than those outside Israel: being the covenant people means having greater obligations. Amos is also adamant that meticulous observance of religious rituals will not be enough to save them. Justice toward others is more important: God demands not only religious ritual, but righteousness and mercy.

The first two chapters of Amos are a kind of preamble. They tell us that just as those outside Israel cannot escape judgment for the ways in which they treat others, Israel also cannot escape that judgment. The next four chapters are criticism directed at those who believe that their prosperity is proof of their righteousness. (Evidently they hadn't read or hadn't believed Ecclesiastes or Job.) The last three chapters tell us of Amos's visions of calamities, calamities that remind us to repent before we suffer the greatest calamity of all, captivity. (We can read this warning on several levels: beware lest you fall into captivity at the hands of the Assyrians; beware lest you fall into captivity at the hands of Satan.) The last several verses of the book (9:11–15) are a conclusion that describes the time when Israel as a whole will be reconciled to their God.

As you read Amos, notice that his message differs from many other prophecies in that it is addressed not only to Israel but also to others, specifically to “the nations,” a phrase that probably refers to those who, in Amos's time, occupied the territory once occupied by the kingdom of David and Solomon. However, the phrase can also refer to all of those outside Judah and Israel, to the Gentiles. Why did he address his message to those other than Judah and Israel?

Also notice that the Lord does not condemn the nations for idolatry, but for what we would call crimes against humanity: waging annihilating war (Amos 1:3), breaking one's obligation to kinsmen and warring against them (Amos 1:9, 11), torturing pregnant women (Amos 1:13), and either human sacrifice or desecrating a royal tomb (Amos

2:1—the meaning is unclear). It is as if to say that the nations might not be expected to worship the Lord, but surely they can be expected to be humane.

Of course, in addition to his message of woe to the nations, Amos also speaks to Israel. He pleads both with Israel (to repent) and with the Lord (to give them more time to repent). He is unsuccessful with the former and only temporarily successful with the latter. (See Amos 7:1–3.) What does it mean for a person to plead with the Lord? How can Amos, or anyone, do such a thing? What might we make of Amos’s failures?

In Amos 7:1–3, we see him supplicate the Lord successfully, and we see the Lord promise that the devastation he has threatened “shall not be.” Then, in Amos 8:7 and the verses that follow we see the Lord say he will *never* forget the wickedness of Israel and threaten destruction again. What do you make of this seeming contradiction?

When Amos condemns Israel as a whole (the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah), it is only partly for not living up to their religious obligations in a narrow sense: Judah rejected the instruction of the Lord, failed to keep the commandments, and practiced idolatry (Amos 2:4). Amos also condemns them for being generally wicked: the kingdom of Israel oppressed the righteous and the poor (Amos 2:6–8) and practiced idolatry that included fornication and adultery (Amos 2:7).

Is there any sense in which we might think of fornication and adultery as *always* being a kind of idolatry?

When Amos names specific sins, he most often mentions such things as the oppression of the poor (Amos 4:1; 5:11–12; 8:4–6), the suppression of the prophets and the Nazarites (Amos 2:12; 5:10–12; 6:1–6), the children of Israel are not concerned for Joseph’s affliction (Amos 6:1–6), and they trust in military might (Amos 6:13). (What does Joseph’s affliction or fall refer to?) Indeed, Kelly Ogden has pointed out that Amos uses the Israelite disruption of society as the type of his own disruption of nature with natural disasters:

“You cause the poor of the land to fail” (Amos 8:4);

“I’ll cause the crops of the land to fail” (Amos 4:9).

High society had withheld necessary sustenance from the poor, and God withheld necessary sustenance from the Israelites (Amos 4:6–8). Leaders had swallowed up the needy (Amos 8:4), so God would swallow them up with various catastrophes. Merchants had sold the refuse of the wheat (Amos 9:6), so God would sell them as refuse into the hands of the enemy (Amos 6:8).<sup>2</sup>

What should we make of Amos’s emphasis on these kinds of sin?

What comparison does Amos imply between Israel and the nations?

What might the mention of these specific sins say about what the Lord values? What might it say about the relation of religious worship to humanitarian concerns? Why does concern for the poor seem to be such an important matter here? Virtually every one of the prophets who

come to Israel just before her entry into captivity makes justice for the poor a major theme. Why? Is this concern perhaps one of the origins of the same concern in the Book of Mormon? Of what might such justice be a type or shadow? What is the relationship between our devotion to God and our duty to the poor?

Consider what Amos has to say about the religious centers of his day, the temples (Amos 3:14; 5:4–5, 21–23). (Oddly, Amos doesn't mention the Jerusalem temple, but Isaiah does, and in much the same kinds of terms that Amos uses to speak of the temple at Beth-el.) What does Amos teach us about ancient Israel? About latter-day Israel?

Amos 8:11–12 tells us that one result of Israel's sin will be the absence of prophecy. How is that an appropriate punishment for the sins Amos denounces? Why is the absence of prophecy such a calamity? How does this relate specifically to Amos's work? (Compare 7:10–17.) Do we ever experience an absence of prophecy?

What is prophecy? Though today, outside the Church, the word *prophet* is often used to mean something like “one who tells the future,” it does not have that meaning in the Old Testament, even though prophets sometimes tell of future events. The Hebrew word translated “prophet” (*nabi*) has the literal meaning “one who is inspired” and, when used positively, always refers to an authorized spokesman. (See Exodus 7:1–2; Numbers 12:1–2; compare Jeremiah 23 and Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, 19.) That meaning explains why the Old Testament uses the word differently than we usually do. As we have seen, there were schools for the

prophets (Amos 7:14; 1 Samuel 10:5, 10; 19:20), and often there was more than one prophet at a time, each operating more or less independently of the other.

In the Old Testament a prophet must meet five requirements: (1) he must be an Israelite (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18), (2) he must speak in the name of the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:19, 20), (3) what he foretells comes to pass in the eyes of those who hear the prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:21–22), (4) he has the power to perform miracles (Deuteronomy 13:1ff.), and (5) a prophet must never ask us to serve another god or gods (Deuteronomy 13). Are these signs of a prophet relevant to us today?

Amaziah was Jeroboam II's high priest. (Recall what happened to the priesthood in Israel under Jeroboam I, when Israel was divided into two kingdoms. You may wish to review lesson 27.) What does that say about his authority? About the worship in the temple at Beth-el?

Why do you think Amaziah commands Amos no longer to prophesy at the temple at Beth-el (7:12–13)? Do we ever imitate Amaziah? If so, how?

If we don't read carefully, we may find ourselves reading the book of Amos as a catalogue of sins and destructions, but it is important to remember that it is not only that. Don't forget the message of repentance that Amos preaches (Amos 4:4–5; 5:4–6, 14–15). And notice that even after the Lord says he will never forget, he makes a promise of restoration through his prophet, Amos (Amos 9:7–15). What might we make of this message and this promise?

## Amos 3

**Verses 1–2:** What does the Lord mean when he says, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth?”

**Verses 3–7:** How does the list of rhetorical questions in verses 3–6 culminate in the statement of verse 7?

**Verse 9:** Why does the Lord call on Ashdod and Egypt to witness the destruction of Israel?

**Verses 10–15:** The Israelites “store up violence and robbery” in their palaces. How do they do so? What will be the result?

The horns of the altar served two purposes: (1) the blood of the sin offering was placed on them, since this was the part of the altar closest to heaven; and (2) a fugitive might flee to the temple and take hold of them for safety (1 Kings 1:50; 2:28). Given that, what does taking the horns from the altars at Beth-el indicate (verse 14)?

What does the reference to the winter houses and the summer houses and houses of ivory and the great houses tell us about life in Israel at Amos’s time (verse 15)? Why would God be concerned with the size and number of our houses? Does this mean that if we are wealthy we ought not to have multiple homes?

## Amos 7

**Verses 1–6:** What is the relationship between grasshoppers eating all of the crop and the fire consuming the great deep and Amos’s question about the rising again of Jacob (i.e., the covenant people)?

**Verses 7–8:** With what do you associate a plumb line in carpentry? Why would the Lord place one in the heart of Israel? What does this metaphor tell us about justice and uprightness in Israel?

**Verses 10–13:** Who is Amaziah, and why doesn't he want Amos to prophesy in Beth-el, the king's sanctuary? What does he mean when he says regarding Amos, "The land is not able to bear all his words?"

**Verses 14–17:** What is Amos's response to Amaziah's threat? In relating his biography, why would Amos want to distance himself from the professional prophets who were abroad in the land? What does he mean by the warning "thou shalt die in a polluted land"?

## Amos 8

**Verses 1–2:** Why is a basket of summer fruit a good symbol for the decline and fall of Israel?

**Verses 3–8:** What conditions of social injustice does the Lord give as a cause for the demise of Israel? Are any of these things happening around us? Should that concern us? Can we really do anything?

**Verses 9–14:** What will the conditions be when Israel is taken captive?

## Amos 9

**Verses 1–8:** What indications of God's wrath do we see here? Who is going to escape his punishment? Within one generation, what is he going to do to the northern tribes?



## Joel

It is difficult to know when Joel prophesied. Tradition puts him just before or contemporary with Hosea, perhaps prophesying during the reign of Joash, who came to the throne in 837 BC. However, many scholars believe that he did his work much later, as late perhaps as 444 BC.

When we read Hosea, we saw the Lord use historical events to characterize his relation to Israel. In Joel we see the same comparison at work: a plague of locusts that is real, but that is also symbolic of those who will conquer Israel. In scripture, events usually have more than one meaning.

This multiplication of meanings is more than just the fact that a plague of locusts can also portend an invasion. The invasion can also have more than one meaning. To what did Joel intend Judah and Israel to understand his prophecy to refer? How might the Jews have understood Joel at the time of Christ's first coming? How should we understand it? How might we understand it as a personal revelation rather than a general revelation about the last days?

In chapter 1, Joel describes a horrible invasion of locusts (Joel 1:1–7). In verse 9 he points out that the temple ritual is no longer being carried out. This may be because the food shortage is so great that the offerings can no longer be made, or it may suggest that the calamity is not only a natural one but also a matter of apostasy. In response to the calamity, Joel calls on Judah to repent: mourn (Joel 1:13), call a solemn assembly (Joel 1:14), recognize that the day of the Lord—a day of the destruction of the wicked—is at hand (Joel 1:15), and understand the locust invasion as

part of that day (Joel 1:16–18). Then Joel reminds them that only the Lord can undo the damage of the locusts and, by implication, only the Lord can save them from the destruction to come.

Chapter 2 repeats chapter 1: Joel repeats his description of the locust plague (verses 1–10), and he again draws a parallel between that plague and the day of the Lord's wrath (verse 11). In verses 12–17, he calls the people to repentance, and in verses 15–17, he tells them to call a solemn assembly. The chapter ends by telling us that the Lord heard Joel's and the people's plea, and promises to save them from the invasion.

Joel 2:28 marks a change in the subject matter. (In the Hebrew Bible, verses 28–32 constitute a separate chapter.) The Lord promises not only that he will save Judah physically but also that he will bless them spiritually: he promises to pour his Spirit out on all (Joel 2:28–32). In these verses, Joel moves from talking about a particular plague and rescue from that plague to a more general prophecy about the last days.

Chapter 3 describes the restoration of Judah and Israel and the judgment that the Lord will mete out on those who have conquered them (verses 1–17), as well as the blessing that he will give Judah and Israel (verses 18–21).

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 36

Isaiah 1–6

## Scriptural background

The Savior says “great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1), and he commands us to search them diligently. (Towards the end of Book of Mormon history, Mormon repeats that command; see Mormon 8:23.) Nephi tells us that his soul delights in Isaiah (2 Nephi 11:2), but he also tells us that many of his people did not share his delight: “Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand” (2 Nephi 25:1). A good number of us have had the experience of Nephi’s people rather than of Nephi.

Nephi explains why his people don’t understand Isaiah: First, he says, “They know not concerning the manner of prophesying of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:1). Then he adds, “The words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4). We need two things to understand Isaiah: we must understand the manner of prophesying of the Jews, and we must have the spirit of prophecy.

If we wish to understand Isaiah (and the scriptures tell us that we must),<sup>1</sup> Nephi suggests, we have to learn how the Jews prophesied (2 Nephi 25:5). That means paying attention to the language of scripture in a way that we might not when reading contemporary English texts.

To some degree, that is what we are doing in these study materials. For example, consider Hosea's and Joel's prophecies. To understand them, we must think in terms of types and shadows, seeing a particular event as revealing something about another event or even about more than one other event. Though that is not the only thing that characterized the prophecies of Nephi's age, it is perhaps the most important. Also important are poetic and rhetorical devices of various sorts, including but not limited to chiasmus.

This use of poetic and rhetorical devices is the consequence of the ways that the Israelites thought about language. For them, language revealed the world, not just by referring to things in it but by revealing its structure. For example, they appear to have believed that the similarity of words or the fact that words share a common root allows us to see something about the structure of the world. We can see an example of this in Numbers 15:38–40, which instructs the Israelites to wear fringes or tassels on their shawls in remembrance of the commandments. To us the designation of fringes as such a reminder is arbitrary. Anything else could have done the same thing. For the Jews, however, the fact that both the word for fringes (*sisit*) and the word for obedience (*sits*) have the same consonants in the same order creates a connection between the two.<sup>2</sup> For them it is neither accidental nor arbitrary that they have been told to wear fringes in remembrance of the commandments. I think we can assume that ancient Israelites thought in similar terms. Rhetorical and other linguistic effects do the same thing: they reveal things about the world that we might otherwise overlook.

Of course, many of these linguistic effects are lost or modified in translation. And we may overlook them because we do not believe that language reveals the world that way, though we can presume that since they did believe that language is connected to the world in that way, their belief will show itself in their writing. Whatever difficulty the ancient Israelites might have had in understanding Isaiah, for us that difficulty is multiplied severalfold by the fact that we do not understand that way of seeing the world, at least not immediately, and we almost all are reading a translation. In addition, reading from the King James translation, most of us are reading a language that itself requires translation into a contemporary idiom. If we have grown up reading the language of the King James Version, we can do that translation as we read, but it requires translation nevertheless. And sometimes things get lost as we translate.

Kabbalah (a mystic tradition in Judaism) relies heavily on this ancient Israelite way of thinking about the world, but not all those who have the view are kabbalists. Of course, we no longer think about the world in these terms, but if we are to understand the First (Old) Testament particularly, and to a lesser degree the Second (New) one as well as the Book of Mormon, we need to understand that this way of thinking about language and the world is at the heart of ancient Israelite thinking. The use of types and shadows, poetical and rhetorical figures, and wordplay is not an accidental feature of biblical writing. It is the way that biblical writers showed their understanding of the world and the revelation of God in the world.

The second thing Nephi tells us we need in order to understand Isaiah, the spirit of prophecy, shows how we are to look for such things as types and shadows. As every missionary has learned, Revelation 19:10 defines the spirit of prophecy as “the testimony of Jesus.” We can understand that phrase in two related ways, as “the testimony that Jesus is the Christ” and as “the testimony that Jesus bore,” in other words, the gospel he taught. Though we often focus on the first meaning, and it is not irrelevant, perhaps the second meaning is more important as we read Isaiah: as we read, we ought to look for events that we can understand as types of the things that Jesus taught, as well as events in his life and most associated with his reign. Nephi’s testimony is that the words of Isaiah, better than the words of Moses (and, presumably, other Old Testament prophets), will work to convince us that Jesus is our Redeemer (1 Nephi 19:23).

Recall that the plague of locusts in Joel refers to an actual plague of locusts as well as to the invasion of the Assyrians *and* to other destructions. Thus speaking of that plague can lead Joel to speak not only of it but also of the last days, as he does in Joel 2:28–32. By reading Joel’s prophecy with the spirit of prophecy—with an eye on the good news of Jesus Christ and the events associated with that gospel—we understand what Joel’s prophecy means, both for those living at the time of Joel and for ourselves. We must read Isaiah in the same way.

This requires that we learn something about the particular events about which Isaiah speaks. For just as knowing that Joel was speaking of a plague of locusts helps us

understand better what he had to say about our own day, knowing something about the historical events contemporary with Isaiah's prophecy will help us understand Isaiah's message better with the spirit of prophecy in terms of types and shadows.

## Historical background

Isaiah's name means "help or deliverance of God." We know very little about him. John Watts summarizes what we do know:

Isaiah was a prophet who lived and worked in Jerusalem from about 750 to 700 BC. All that is known of him is contained in a few passages of the book that bears his name.

Isaiah is said to have worked under four Judaeen Kings (1:1): Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. A marvelous picture of the future of Jerusalem (2:1–4) and a chilling description of Babylon's fall (13:1–22) are directly attributed to him.

He and his son Shear-Yashub carried God's message to Ahaz about 734 BC (7:1–17). Another son bore a shatteringly symbolic name, *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*: "Swift-plunder hastening-booty" (8:1–4). Isaiah was divinely commissioned to walk about Jerusalem unclothed as a walking sign of God's displeasure with Jerusalem's pro-Egyptian policies (ca. 714 BC; chap. 20). And he prophesied Jerusalem's deliverance from Sennacherib's siege in 701 BC (chaps. 36–37; 2 Kgs



18:13–19:37), was a witness of Hezekiah’s recovery from a mortal illness (chap. 38; 2 Kgs 20:1–11), and delivered the Lord’s condemnation of Hezekiah’s hospitality for Merodach-Baladan’s delegation from Babylon (chap. 39 = 2 Kgs 20:12–19).<sup>3</sup>

We also have various traditions about Isaiah, though all seem to begin long after he lived. According to tradition, his father, Amoz, was also a prophet and the brother of King Amaziah. Tradition also says that Isaiah was executed by King Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, by being sawed in half.

Like most Old Testament prophecies, Isaiah’s were probably delivered orally and written down afterward. That explains another reason that ancient prophets used rhetorical, poetic, and other linguistic devices: they were a way of helping people listening to the prophet understand and remember without a written record. According to the Talmud (a collection of Jewish oral teachings compiled in written form after the time of Christ), Isaiah’s many prophecies were compiled into one book by King Hezekiah or his scribes.

When Syria and Israel (Ephraim) were at war with Judah, Isaiah assured King Ahaz that both would be destroyed by Assyria, but he warned him against seeking help from Assyria. (See Isaiah 7.) The war with Syria and Ephraim was only a harbinger of what was to come, for at the time (the eighth century BC), the two great powers of the region, Egypt and Assyria, were vying with each other for control. Their wars would be fateful for Judah, which was situated immediately between the two. (The Assyrian-Egyptian war

did not end until 670 BC, when the Assyrian king, Esarhadon, conquered Egypt.)

In 732 BC, Assyria took Damascus, the capital of Syria, and ten years later (722 BC) Assyria conquered Samaria (Israel). Assyria was at Judah's door and threatening. For all intents and purposes, Judah was under Assyria's control, though it had not yet been fully conquered. In about 708 BC, in response to a new military strength in Egypt resulting from the rule of Ethiopian kings, Judah was tempted to ally itself with Egypt and assert its independence from Assyria—in spite of the fact that previous alliances with Egypt had always ended in disappointment and even ruin for Israel.

Isaiah warned King Hezekiah against making the alliance with Egypt. His advice was to submit to the Assyrians and trust in God, but Hezekiah did not take Isaiah's advice. (For the story of Hezekiah, see 2 Kings 18–20 and 2 Chronicles 29–32, as well as Isaiah 36–39 and Jeremiah 15:4.)

Before the Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah, Hezekiah fell ill. Isaiah told him to prepare to die, but in answer to the king's prayer, Isaiah told him that the Lord had added fifteen years to his life. In 701 BC, Sennacherib overran all of what remained of Israel, the northern kingdom. This may have been at least partly in response to the new alliance between Egypt and Judah, the southern kingdom. The Assyrian army was threatening Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, but Isaiah promised Hezekiah that the Assyrian army would be destroyed, as they were when 185,000 of their men were miraculously killed in one night.

That victory, however, was only temporary. Slightly more than one hundred years later, in 587 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the empire that had replaced Assyria as the dominant power in the region, captured and destroyed Jerusalem, taking its inhabitants captive into Babylon.

## Isaiah 1

*The Jerome Biblical Commentary* says that Isaiah 1 is a brilliant synopsis of the whole message of Isaiah. How accurate do you think this claim is?

**Verses 1:** This introductory verse tells us that the vision Isaiah received is “concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” What does that mean? Why isn’t it also about the northern kingdom, Israel?

This verse is one of the indications that Isaiah is a collection of prophecies rather than only one continuous prophecy. (See, for example, the similar heading for chapter 2.)

**Verses 2–15:** A lawsuit is announced: witnesses are summoned (the beginning of verse 2); the person bringing the suit is named (last half of verse 2); he gives a brief of his charges (verses 2–3) and announces the accused (end of verse 3); testimony is given by witnesses (verses 4–9); and testimony is given by the plaintiff (verses 10–15). Why is a lawsuit an appropriate response to a broken covenant?

**Verses 2–4:** Why does the Lord compare Judah to children and to farm animals?

**Verses 5–6:** Here is a better translation of the beginning of verse 5: “Where would you like to be struck?” How does

that change our understanding of verse 6? What is the image here?

**Verse 7:** This verse and the three that follow probably describe Sennacherib's invasion well; he claimed to have destroyed forty-six walled cities, and villages without number, in his attack. Does it have application to our personal lives as well as to events in history?

**Verse 8:** The "daughter of Zion" is probably Jerusalem. As in many poor countries today, vineyards and gardens had small huts or platforms in which someone could sit during the day and sleep during the night to ensure that the crop wouldn't be stolen, a humble version of the tower in the vineyard of which the Savior speaks in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matthew 21:31–39; Mark 12:1–8). What is the Lord saying about Jerusalem?

**Verses 9–10:** What is the point of the comparison of Judah to Sodom and Gomorrah? What does it mean to say that a remnant is left? Why is the command to hear addressed to the *rulers* of Sodom and the *people* of Gomorrah? What does the command to hear mean? How do we hear the Lord?

**Verses 11–17:** Here we see what the Lord wants his people to hear.

In verse 11, is the Lord saying that he does not want them to perform temple sacrifice? (Compare 1 Samuel 15:22; Amos 5:21–24; Hosea 6:6; and Jeremiah 7:21–23.)

How does the beginning of verse 13 explain the Lord's objection to their sacrifices? (The word translated "vain" could also be translated "empty" or "deceitful.")

What is the relation between religious ritual and practice on the one hand and righteous living on the other? (Recall the charge of Micah 2.)

Since it was common for people to pray by lifting their hands above their heads toward heaven, the reference to spreading one's hands in the first part of verse 15 is probably a reference to prayer. How are Judah's hands full of blood (verse 15)?

The condemnation of verses 11–15 is followed by the Lord's demand in verses 16–17. What does it mean to put away one's evils from before the Lord's eyes?

**Verse 18:** This is one of the most famous verses in the Bible, though the clause “Come now, and let us reason together” is almost always used contrary to its meaning in this verse. The verb translated “reason” means “to decide” or “to judge.” (See Genesis 31:37 for another use of the same verb.) So this famous clause means something like “Let us take up your case in court.” With that in mind, how do you explain the verse as a whole? What outcome is the Lord predicting for the lawsuit that he has instigated?

**Verses 19–20:** This is the essence of the Lord's promise in Isaiah as well as in the Book of Mormon. How does this promise fit with what we saw taught in Ecclesiastes and in Job? Is there a contradiction? Does this promise have anything to do with why Isaiah was Nephi's favorite prophet?

It isn't difficult to imagine Laman and Lemuel using this verse against Lehi and Nephi: “Look,” they might say, “The Lord has promised that if we are good, we will prosper. We

are living in Jerusalem and prospering. Why should we believe that he wants us to leave this situation and move into the desert toward a land we know absolutely nothing about?” Given this verse, how might Lehi or Nephi have answered this imaginary argument? What in our own lives might be comparable to leaving a comfortable situation and moving into the desert?

**Verses 22–23:** The Lord repeats his condemnation. Can you explain the metaphors of verse 22?

Why is adultery so often used as a metaphor for apostasy?

To what kinds of problems does verse 23 point?

**Verses 24–27:** The Lord tells Judah what his response will be. Who are the enemies of whom he will be avenged (verse 24)?

What does the metaphor of purging away dross suggest will happen to Judah (verse 25)?

Why is the promise that the judges and counselors will be restored an important promise (verse 26)?

What does the Lord say it will take for Judah to become righteous?

**Verses 28–31:** The Lord’s condemnation in verses 22–23 was followed by his promise. Now he pronounces woe against the unrighteous. What does it mean to forsake or abandon the Lord (verse 28)? How has Judah done that? How do we do it?

In verse 31, *tow* means “tinder.” In that verse, to what is Isaiah referring? What is like tinder and so is easily burned?

## Isaiah 2

Isaiah 2–4 forms one discrete unit. What is the overall point of this unit?

**Verses 1–5:** Compare these verses to Micah 4:1–5. How do you explain what you see in that comparison?

What promise is made in these verses? When and how do we see it fulfilled? Must we wait for it to be fulfilled in the future? In other words, is there any sense in which we live in this condition now?

How would Isaiah’s audience have understood this prophecy?

It isn’t unusual to speak of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but here we have only “the God of Jacob.” Why?

“The law” and “the word of the Lord” are parallel at the end of verse 3. Do they mean the same thing? If so, what might that say about what the word *law* means here?

What does one do with plowshares and pruning hooks? Is it significant that the weapons of destruction are turned into plowshares and pruning hooks rather than some other utensil that is not a weapon?

How is verse 5 a conclusion to verses 1–4?

**Verses 6–9:** The prophet has been speaking to Judah in the previous verses. To whom is he speaking here?

“They please themselves in the children of strangers” means “They make covenants (or treaties) with foreigners.” What is wrong with that? Do we do anything that is parallel? How so?

**Verses 10–21:** Verse 11 is a synopsis of these verses. What sin does it describe?

**Verse 22:** What is the prophet saying to the Lord?

### Isaiah 3

This chapter shows us the decline of civilization, law, and order in Judah, and it interprets that decline as the *result* of God’s judgment rather than its cause: Judah is living in chaos because of its sin. But chaos isn’t a judgment of God; it’s the natural result of sin. If chaos is the natural result of sin, can we avoid chaos simply by ceasing to sin? If so, why can’t we save ourselves?

**Verses 1–4:** Who does Jerusalem stand for? Judah?

What is the Lord taking? From whom is he taking it?

What does verse 1 have to do with verses 2 and 3?

Is verse 4 predicting something good or something bad?  
How can you tell?

**Verses 5–7:** What will be one result of the absence of leadership in Judah?

**Verses 8–12:** In verses 10 and 11, the righteous and the wicked get the same reward, namely, what they have produced. How do we judge what we have produced? What measure do we use?

Verse 12 repeats the material of verses 1–4.

**Verses 13–23:** In verses 14–15, we see the Lord make the same charge against Judah that he made through the prophet Joel: they oppress the poor. How is oppression of



the poor a type or shadow of apostasy as well as a sin in itself? Why is care for the needy such a central part of the gospel? Is that care a type of something higher?

What judgment is the Lord pronouncing on Judah's leaders (verses 13–14)?

What are “stretched forth necks and wanton eyes”?

What does it mean to say that the women are mincing as they walk (verse 16)? How is the accusation against the women the same as that against the men? What do their sins have in common?

What does the Lord threaten in verse 17?

How is the threat of verses 18–23 related to their sin?

**Verses 24–26:** Verse 24 is a summary of what will happen to women, and verse 25 is a summary of what will happen to men. Verse 26 sums up what will happen as a whole.

## Isaiah 4

**Verse 1:** Compare this verse to Isaiah 3:6. Is there any reason to think that perhaps this verse should have been placed in chapter 3 rather than chapter 4?

**Verses 2–6:** As verses 3–4 make clear, this is another description of the Messianic age.

What is the point of the cloud by day and the fire by night? (Compare Exodus 13:21.) What does this image tell us about what is to come?

In the Book of Mormon, verse 5 is slightly different than it is here. (See 2 Nephi 14:5.) What does the Book of Mormon

version include that we do not see here? What difference does that make?

## Isaiah 5

**Verses 1–2:** Compare this parable of the vineyard to Jacob’s account of Zenos’s parable in Jacob 5. What does Isaiah focus on and why?

**Verses 3–6:** How does this differ from Zenos’s parable? Why?

**Verse 7:** We see a play on words here that cannot be captured in translation: the Lord looked for judgment (*mishpat*), but he found only oppression (bloodshed—*mishpach*); he looked for righteousness (*tzaqa*) and found instead a cry of distress (*saqa*). What is the point of that wordplay? In other words, what does it teach?

**Verse 12:** Like the other prophets, Isaiah teaches that God is involved in history and that part of Israel’s sin is that they do not see that. How do *we* see his hand in history? If we don’t, do we also sin?

**Verses 7–25:** What are the two complaints that the Lord makes of Judah in verse 7? The Lord expands on these two points, indicting Judah on six counts in verses 8–25.

*First count:* they “join house to house” (verses 8–10).  
What does that mean?

*Second count:* they are drunken and self-indulgent (verses 11–17), ignoring the work of the Lord.

Verse 13 says they are captive “because they have no knowledge.” In how many ways can we be in captivity? What does it mean to be captive for want of knowledge? The word *knowledge* translates a Hebrew word that could also be translated “cunning,” “know-how,” or “shrewdness.” What is the implication of that translation?

The word translated “knowledge” could also be translated “without knowing why.” What is the implication of that translation?

*Third count:* they “draw iniquity with cords of vanity,” in other words, slender or useless cords (verses 18–19). Little sins gradually lead to great ones.

*Fourth count:* they willfully pervert goodness and truth (verse 20).

*Fifth count:* they are arrogant, thinking themselves wise. What is the difference between wisdom and prudence (verse 21)?

*Sixth count:* they are self-indulgent, and they twist justice for their own purposes (verses 22–23).

When and how might the same counts come against us?

**Verses 24–30:** Isaiah describes the Lord’s response to the iniquity of Judah, who will be ripe for destruction (verse 24): in his anger, the Lord has stretched his hand out against them and will continue to do so (in other words, he will punish them with his might, verse 25); he will call a powerful nation to attack Judah (verses 26–30).

We understand verses 26–29 to be a prophecy of those called to Zion in the last days rather than a prophecy of Assyria’s attack on Judah. How is our understanding justifiable?

## Isaiah 6

**Verses 1–4:** Isaiah’s vision of the glory of the Lord. Uzziah died in about 740 BC, having reigned for forty years.

**Verse 5:** What is Isaiah’s response to the vision? How do you explain that response?

**Verses 6–8:** What does the glowing coal symbolize? Why is it significant that the seraph touches Isaiah’s mouth with the coal from the altar? How is his mouth significant? How is the altar significant? Why fire?

As we have seen in previous chapters, Judah has been defiled. Now Isaiah has been cleansed in order to be the one clean thing through which the whole can be cleansed. Compare verse 8 with Moses 4:1–2. (See also Abraham 3:27; Genesis 22:1, 11; 31:11; 46:2; Exodus 3:4.) Is Isaiah a type of Christ? If so, how so?

**Verses 9–10:** What is Isaiah’s message to Judah? In these verses, it seems not to be “repent.” How should we understand what Isaiah is to say to Israel in verse 10?

**Verses 11–13:** The only way to end the sinful state of Judah is to destroy it and exile its inhabitants. How is this situation similar to that of the world at the time of Noah? How is the Lord’s response the same in both? How is it different?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 37

## Isaiah 22–30

Chapters 23 and 27 are not assigned for the lesson. Nevertheless, I have added them to the reading because I will refer to them.

In these notes, rather than giving a list of questions to answer, I will suggest some exercises in reading that seem to me to be particularly appropriate to reading Isaiah, exercises in understanding in terms of types and shadows.

Before studying how these chapters can apply to us, consider a literal, historical interpretation of these chapters. You may need to consult the maps in your scriptures to understand the references to countries and kingdoms. Looking at a literal interpretation may help us understand it better when we try to think of it as a type of something else.

This is how I think the people of Isaiah's time would have understood what he was saying:

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Isaiah 22:1–14  | What will happen to Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar invades.  |
| Isaiah 22:15–25 | The condemnation and exile of Shebna, a high official in Hezekiah's government, and his replacement by someone more worthy, Eliakim. One tradition says that he was the |

- steward of the king's household, another that he was in charge of the Temple treasury. Tradition also says that he plotted to turn Hezekiah over to the Assyrians, but verse 16 seems to suggest that he has tried to give himself a high status, perhaps by embezzlement.
- Isaiah 23      The prophet foretells that Tyre and Sidon, the most important cities in Phoenicia, will be destroyed.
- Isaiah 24–27      A set of prophecies of God's judgment of the world, his overcoming of Satan, his blessing of Israel, and the overcoming of death and suffering
- Isaiah 24      A preview of the judgment day.
- Isaiah 25      A hymn of thanksgiving for God's deliverance of Israel and for the defeat of Israel's enemies, which deliverance and which enemies are left unstated.
- Isaiah 26:1–6      A song of rejoicing and thanksgiving for the protection of Jerusalem as a city for the righteous and for the humiliation of Jerusalem's enemies. Again, the time to which this hymn refers is not given, though it

- seems to be the prophecy of something to come rather than praise for what has already happened.
- Isaiah 26:7–19 Three prayers: one expressing trust in God (verses 1–6), one asking him to destroy his adversaries (verses 7–12), and one for Israel’s ultimate deliverance and for the resurrection (verses 13–19).
- Isaiah 26:20–21 Isaiah’s call to Israel to go into seclusion until God’s indignation, or anger, at the inhabitants of the earth is passed.
- Isaiah 27 A prophecy that the Lord will overcome three monsters, two serpents and a dragon. These seem to represent the three great powers of Isaiah’s day: Assyria, Edom, and Egypt. This chapter expands on Isaiah 26:21, describing God’s anger against the inhabitants of the earth.
- Isaiah 28–32 Isaiah’s warning about what will happen if Judah makes an alliance with Egypt.
- Isaiah 28:1–4 What happened or will happen to Israel, the northern kingdom.
- Isaiah 28:5–6 The coming of the Messiah.



- Isaiah 28:7–8 A description of Judah, showing that its people are no better than Israel's.
- Isaiah 28:9–13 A question: How can one teach such a people? An answer: Not easily. It will sound to them as if the teacher were stammering or speaking in a foreign language.
- Isaiah 28:14–22 Isaiah answers those who scoff at his advice not to make an alliance with Egypt: in response to their scoffing, in the end the Lord will establish his justice and righteousness, and they will overcome the scoffers' injustice and unrighteousness.
- Isaiah 28:23–29 Isaiah invites the scoffers to listen to a parable about farming: the farmer plows, breaking up the soil, but he doesn't do so just to plow. He has a purpose, namely the eventual harvest. He threshes each seed of his harvest with the appropriate equipment.
- Isaiah 29:1–4 Though Jerusalem is, at the moment of the prophecy, celebrating its feast (in other words, in charge of itself rather than subservient to another power), it will be attacked and brought down.

Isaiah 29:5–8	Nevertheless, the Lord will destroy Jerusalem’s enemies.
Isaiah 29:9–12	Isaiah inveighs against Judah for not listening to his warning.
Isaiah 29:13–14	He condemns them for a worship that merely goes through the motions.
Isaiah 29:15–21	He prophesies of the restoration of Israel and the destruction of the wicked, particularly those who use words to cause sin, try to trick those who preach repentance, and ignore those who are just.
Isaiah 29:22–24	The restoration will remove Israel’s shame, and they will subject themselves to the true God.
Isaiah 30:1–2	A denunciation of those who recommend the alliance with Egypt.
Isaiah 30:3–5	The consequences of that disobedience: Pharaoh will welcome Judah’s representatives, but that welcome will redound to Judah’s shame.
Isaiah 30:6–7	A description of the trip to Egypt and its outcome. Notice that verses 3 and 4 are parallel to verse 6 and that verse 5 is parallel to verse 7.
Isaiah 30:8	A command to Isaiah to write down his prophecy.

- Isaiah 30:9–11      Why the written book is needed: because Judah will lie and pretend they have not been told these things; they will deny prophecy and demand that the prophets not prophesy.
- Isaiah 30:12–14    How the Lord will respond to those lies and demands: Jerusalem will be destroyed.
- Isaiah 30:15–16    The Lord promised them that they could be tranquil and safe, but they refused his offer.
- Isaiah 30:17        The result of their refusal: Judah will be isolated and alone.
- Isaiah 30:18–26    But the Lord will wait for Judah's repentance, and he will save them from the destruction in which they will find themselves, showering them with blessings.
- Isaiah 30:27–33    A prophecy of the destruction of the Assyrians when they attack Jerusalem.

After you've begun to understand this as Isaiah's listeners might have, look back to see what kinds of things in these prophecies could be understood as shadows of the coming of Christ as a mortal (*the* type of all scripture: 2 Nephi 11:4). Then reread these chapters looking for things that

describe the latter-day restoration (a shadow of the type). Also look for things that apply to the Second Coming. Finally, look for things that you can apply to your own, individual and family experience (another shadow of the type).

Of course, the same event or warning or promise can mean something for each of these ways of reading the chapters. Each can be a legitimate reading of Isaiah, and he is such an important prophet because his writings can profitably be read in so many ways.

### Isaiah 22:15–22

Here's an example of how you might find two levels for reading a passage. (These are not the only levels of reading, but they are good ones to start with.)

First consider the literal reading:

Shebna is proud and haughty and perhaps commits fraud or treason (verses 15–16).

Therefore, the Lord will send Shebna into exile and remove him from his post (verses 17–19, 25).

Eliakim, the son of the high priest, Hilkiah, will be appointed in his stead (verses 19–24).

He will be clothed with the official clothing that Shebna wore (verse 21).

He will be in charge of the government, and his relation to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (and Israel!) will be like that of a father (verse 21).

He will have the key of the house of David on his shoulder—in other words, as a sign of his rank—and his authority will be final (verse 22).

He will be “a nail in a sure place,” and he will bring honor to his father’s house (verse 23).

His whole family will depend on him (verse 24), which presumably means he will be able to provide for them all.

Now try to understand the same material as a shadow of something eternal:

Footnote 20a in the LDS edition tells us that we can understand Eliakim as a type of the Savior. His name means “God shall cause to arise.”

Though the footnotes don’t say so, *Shebna* means “vigor.” Does that add anything to your understanding?

If Eliakim is a type of the Savior, of whom might Shebna be a type? What makes you answer this question as you do?

What might Shebna’s exile represent (verses 17–18)?

What might we understand by the Lord’s declaration that Shebna will be driven from his high position and pulled down from his station (verse 19)?

How might we understand the clothing that is put on Eliakim? What might we understand by the government being put in his hands, by him being a father to all of Israel (verse 21)?

What might we understand by “the key of the house of David” (verse 22)?

What does “he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” mean?

How might we understand this person being fastened as “a nail in a sure place” (verse 23)?

What does it mean to say that the person brings honor to his father’s house?

What could it mean to say that his whole family will depend on him (verse 24)?

Can you see more than one way of applying this prophecy to events in the Church or in your own life?

Here are other passages that you might want to look at. How can you understand them as revealing things of the Restoration, of the Second Coming, and of our individual lives?

Isaiah 22:22

Isaiah 24:21–22

Isaiah 25:1–4 (compare Isaiah 32:1–2)

Isaiah 25:6–9

Isaiah 26:19

Isaiah 28:16

Isaiah 29:4, 9–14, 18, 24

Isaiah 30:19–21

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 38

## Isaiah 40–49

These chapters begin a new section of Isaiah. The first thirty-nine chapters focused on Judah and Israel before the exile in Babylon: the sin and iniquity of Judah and Israel. This new section, chapters 40–56, focuses on Judah and Israel during the exile: the promise of return. The last chapters, 57–66, will focus on Judah and Israel after the exile: life after the return.

If we think of these times in Israel’s history as shadows of eternal things, what might we see them typifying? Are there other ways of reading the same material, ways of seeing other shadows of the eternal? For example, what might they mean to Nephi? To Matthew or Paul? To Joseph Smith? To you as an individual?

### Overview

If you are having trouble reading Isaiah, this overview may help you see how things are connected to each other. I’ve tried to avoid interpretation in this overview, sticking merely to restatement and description as much as possible.

### Isaiah 40

Verses 1–2:           The Lord tells the prophet to comfort his people and to tell them that the exile is about to end.



- Verses 3–5: A highway will be prepared on which the exiles can travel when they return to see the glory of the Lord.
- Verses 6–8: Though the things of the world are transient, God’s promises are eternal.
- Verses 9–11: The prophet is told to announce from the mountaintops the return of the exiles, led by the Lord.
- Verses 12–17: The incomparable power of the Lord.
- Verses 18–20: The Lord cannot be compared to an idol of any kind.
- Verses 21–26: The incomparable power of the Lord.
- Verses 27–31: The prophet addresses Israel as a whole, reminding them that the Lord has the power to save them and will do so.

## Isaiah 41

- Verses 1–4: The Lord invites the nations of the world to come before him to see his omnipotence and their powerlessness.

- Verses 5–7: In response, the nations band together to protect themselves from the Lord’s wrath. (Perhaps they are portrayed as building idols.)
- Verses 8–16: The Lord turns from the nations to Israel, telling them not to fear and promising them that he will not only protect them but also make them powerful.
- Verses 17–20: The difficult conditions of the exile and the promise that they will be overcome.
- Verses 21–24: As verse 24 shows, in these verses the Lord speaks to those who worship idols and to the idols themselves, challenging them to declare what is going to happen.
- Verses 25–26: A prophecy that Cyrus will conquer and a repetition of the challenge to the idols.
- Verses 27–28: These verses are parallel to verses 25 and 26. They say that Cyrus will be a messenger of hope, and they remind us that the idols and their worshippers could not predict Cyrus’s reign.
- Verse 29: The conclusion: the works of the idol worshippers are nothing.

## Isaiah 42

- Verses 1–4: The elect servant.
- Verses 5–9: The Lord’s promise to his elect servant.
- Verses 10–13: A hymn praising God.
- Verses 14–17: The Lord will use his power to give light to the blind, and those who have worshipped idols will be ashamed.
- Verses 18–25: The Lord calls to blind and deaf Israel, reminding them that the fallen state they find themselves in is the result of their blindness and disobedience.

## Isaiah 43

- Verses 1–8: In spite of Israel’s disobedience and sin, the Lord will redeem them.
- Verses 9–13: All the nations, including Israel, are called before the judgment bar to defend themselves against the charge of idolatry.
- Verses 14–21: Babylon will fall, Israel will be restored to its land, and the Lord will provide the land with water.

- Verses 22–24: Though the Lord will restore Israel, Israel has not been worthy of his blessings.
- Verses 25–26: Remember the Lord.
- Verses 27–28: Israel has not been worthy of the Lord's blessings.

## Isaiah 44

- Verses 1–5: In spite of Israel's unworthiness, the Lord will help them and will pour both temporal and spiritual blessings on them.
- Verses 6–8: The Lord bears witness of himself and the surety of his promises.
- Verses 9–20: The usefulness of work like smithing, carpentry, and farming compared to the uselessness of the work that goes into making an idol.
- Verses 21–22: Israel must remember the Lord who has redeemed them. This is a hymn calling on all of nature to praise the Lord for the salvation he will bring through Cyrus.

## Isaiah 45

- Verses 1–8: The Lord promises Cyrus that he will bring him to power for the sake

of Israel and reminds him that the Lord is the only God and is in control of both nature and history.

Verses 9–13: Woe to those who question what the Lord does or doubt his prophecies.

Verses 14–17: The idolatrous nations who have conquered Israel will honor Israel; they will be ashamed because of their idolatry, but Israel will not be ashamed, because God has saved his people.

Verses 18–25: The Lord declares himself the Creator of the world, one who speaks openly and truthfully, declaring to those who have been idolaters that only in him can they be saved.

## Isaiah 46

Verses 1–4: A comparison of idols to the Lord, showing their powerlessness.

Verses 5–7: The Lord cannot be compared to an idol.

Verses 8–13: Remember what God has done in the past, and trust that what he promises will happen: he will save Israel.

## Isaiah 47

- Verses 1–3: The humiliation of Babylon.
- Verse 4: Perhaps an exclamation of awe by Isaiah.
- Verses 5–11: Babylon will be violently destroyed.
- Verses 12–15: The Babylonians will look to their wisdom for an answer to their woes, but they will be destroyed.

## Isaiah 48

- Verses 1–8: The Lord has warned Israel and prophesied before, but Israel has not listened.
- Verses 9–11: The Lord will save Israel to preserve the sanctity of that name because of the covenant Israel has made, not because of Israel's virtue.
- Verses 12–15: The Lord, and no other God, has created the earth and given Cyrus the power to conquer.
- Verse 16: The Lord has spoken openly from the beginning.
- Verses 16–17: The Lord, who teaches and guides Israel, has sent the prophet and the Spirit to declare his word to Israel.

Verses 18–19: The blessings that would have come had Israel been obedient.

Verses 20–22: The exiles are told to praise God and what he has done as they return to Israel from Babylon.

## Isaiah 49

Verses 1–4: Isaiah describes his mission: called from birth and given the power to speak powerfully, he has prophesied to no avail, but he continues to trust in the Lord.

Verses 5–6: The Lord's response to Isaiah's dejection: your prophesying will be a light not only to Israel but also to all the earth so that salvation can come to all.

Verse 7: Israel will be raised up from its position as a conquered nation to become a nation before whom kings and princes will bow.

Verses 8–13: The Lord has accepted the exiles' prayers, and he will redeem them from captivity.

Verses 14–16: Zion (Jerusalem) complains that the Lord has forgotten her, but he will not forget: he has engraved

her on his hands, and he always remembers her destroyed walls.

Verses 17–19: The oppressors of Zion’s children will let them be, so Zion will be clothed as a bride to welcome her children’s return.

Verses 20–21: There will be so many returning children of Zion that they will complain that there is no room for them, and Zion will be amazed that all these children are really hers.

Verses 22–23: The leaders of the nations will serve the returning Israelites and bow down before them.

Verses 24–26: The Lord will defend Israel against its enemies.

## Study Questions

### Isaiah 40

**Verses 12–26:** Why does the Lord think it is so important to emphasize his power and the powerlessness of idols? In how many ways does this apply to us?

### Isaiah 41

**Verses 5–7:** Are there events in these last days that this describes?



## Isaiah 42

**Verses 1–4:** To how many of the Lord’s servants can you apply these verses? Obviously, Christ is the epitome of this servant. What does that suggest about others to whom these verses could apply?

**Verses 5–9:** Can you point to specific things that this teaches about the mission of the Savior? How might it apply to others, or does it not apply?

**Verses 10–13:** How do we praise God? Why is it important to do so?

**Verses 18–25 and 43–48:** These two sets of verses repeat a theme that we have seen in every prophet we have studied: you are in sin, but the Lord can save you. Why does the Lord repeat this message so often? How does it apply to the individual? To the Church? To nations? To the history of the world?

Does your answer to those questions help explain why the Lord says so much about his power in these chapters? Why does the frequent repetition of this message require a variety of metaphors and symbols?

## Isaiah 43

**Verses 9–13:** How does the charge of idolatry apply to us? We often answer this question quickly: “We worship money and status.” Without denying that, are there any other ways in which the charge of idolatry can sometimes apply to us?

**Verses 22–28:** The ideas of these verses are chiasitic: 22–24 (Israel is unworthy), 25–26 (remember the Lord), 27–28 (Israel is unworthy). Why is remembrance so important, and what does it mean to remember the Lord?

If we remember him, we will not remember our sins. (See Alma 36:19.) What can that mean?

## Isaiah 44

**Verses 6–8:** How has the Lord born witness of himself and the surety of his promises in the latter days?

**Verses 22:** Why does the Lord speak of the redemption of Israel in the present tense when they have not been brought back from Babylon at the time of this prophecy and the Savior has not yet atoned for human sin?

## Isaiah 45

**Verses 1–5:** What do these verses tell us about some world leaders?

## Isaiah 46

**Verses 8–11:** How do we remember what the Lord has done for us individually? For the Church? For our country? For ancient Israel? *Why* should we remember these things?

## Isaiah 47

**Verses 12–15:** Can we understand this to describe our own times? How?

## Isaiah 48

**Verses 9–11:** How do these verses apply to us today?

**Verse 16:** We have seen the Lord say several times that he has spoken openly. Why do you think he emphasizes this to Israel? Does he speak openly to us? How?

## Isaiah 49

**Verses 5–6:** Why would the Lord's response have buoyed up Isaiah?

**Verses 8–12:** Why does the Lord use the past tense to describe something that will happen in the future?

**Verses 8–13:** How might the particulars of these verses be a type corresponding to your own life?

## Overall questions for this lesson

In how many places did you see verses describe not only people and events of Isaiah's time but the Savior and his work?

What characteristics do these chapters ascribe to the Savior? Which ones does it focus on and why?

If we remember that Jesus is Yahweh, the Lord of the Old Testament, how might that change our understanding of these chapters?

## Lesson 39

### Isaiah 50–53

These chapters are among the most beautiful in the Bible; they are an important part of Western literary culture, even for nonbelievers. Many scholars see the chapters as part of larger dramatic structure, a larger dramatic script as it were. In contemporary scripts the various parts would be marked clearly: “Chorus,” “Yahweh,” “Earth,” “Heavens,” “Armies,” and so forth. The fact that we must infer these from what is said makes reading Isaiah more difficult.

As I have done with the previous chapters of Isaiah, I’ll give an explanation of how the people of Jerusalem might have understood these prophecies. Doing that will help us understand better the ways in which those prophecies are also about later events. As you read the outline, ask yourself how to understand the verses in question as applying to us—first individually and then as a church. It seems reasonable to assume that the chapter had meaning for the Israelites at the time it was given, as well as having meaning for later people—for example, Abinadi (Mosiah 14:2–12), who quotes from Isaiah 53, and Jesus speaking to the Nephites, who quotes from Isaiah 52 (3 Nephi 16:18–20). What meaning might these prophecies also have for us today that they didn’t have for others? I will also provide a few questions to help generate others.

For those interested in chiasms, biblical scholars identify one in Isaiah 50:4–51:8:

Isaiah 50:4–9	A	
Isaiah 50:10–11	B	
Isaiah 51:1–2a		C
Isaiah 51:2b–3a		D
Isaiah 51:3b		C'
Isaiah 51:4–6	B'	
Isaiah 51:7–8	A'	

## Isaiah 50

This chapter continues the theme of chapter 49; indeed, the last verses of chapter 49 (verses 24–26) are certainly part of the thought of the first verses of chapter 50. They are part of the Lord’s rhetorical question directed at Jerusalem in Isaiah 49:24: “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty or the lawful captive delivered”? In our terms, “Can anyone take away the booty of the victor, or can the slave who has been taken lawfully be saved”? The division into chapters and verses, a modern innovation, has created an artificial division in the text.

In these verses we see the answer to the Lord’s rhetorical question: the coming captivity of Babylon, that Jerusalem (Zion) will complain that it has been forgotten (49:14–16), and that, nevertheless, the Lord will not have forgotten it.

**Verse 1:** The children of Israel appear to have complained that the Lord has abandoned his people for no reason and that they didn't know what was happening. (See Isaiah 40:27 and 49:14.) He responds to that complaint. Though Zion has been exiled, no divorce decree was given and no bill of sale was made to the Lord's creditors (after all, he owes nothing to anyone): the exile will be only temporary.

At the time that Isaiah was writing, divorce appears to have required that the husband write a writ of divorcement. One solution to poverty was to sell one's children into temporary slavery to pay off creditors. Isaiah uses those images to explain the Lord's relation to Zion.

The metaphor of slavery and being redeemed from slavery is important in the Old Testament and even more important in the New, especially in the writings of Paul. Since slavery was part of ancient Near Eastern culture, the metaphor of redemption—being bought out of slavery—was obvious to those hearing these prophecies. But it may not be as obvious to us today (for which we should be deeply grateful). How might we translate that metaphor into a metaphor that makes sense in our culture today?

When do we accuse God of abandoning us? Why might we do so? Do these verses address us in such times, or are they directed at people in a different circumstance? *Why* do biblical scriptures use slavery so often as the metaphor for sin?

**Verses 2–3:** Those who have not listened to the Lord's message are rebuked and reminded of the Lord's power. Another translation of verse 2a might be "Why, when I came

in, was no one there? Why, when I called, did no one answer?” The second part of the verse identifies, with rhetorical questions, what might explain why no one received the Lord or answered his call. The third part, with verse 3, gives example of his power.

In what kinds of situations might we be able to understand these verses as applying to us? What, for example, might it mean not to receive the Lord? What might it mean for us not to answer this call? Does the word *call* refer here to his call to service or to the call to repentance (or both)? What does it mean to say that the Lord’s hand is not shortened?

**Verses 4–6:** The Lord’s Servant speaks for himself: though the Lord taught him to speak eloquently and he sustained those who were weary, he was smitten and spit on. The word *weary* translates the same word that was used in Isaiah 28–29 to describe the condition of Israel.

Why does this verse emphasize the Servant’s eloquence and the fact that he has helped the weary?

Why is it important that the Servant’s teacher—the one who has given him “the tongue of the learned”—is the Lord?

In scripture, “to hear” often means “to obey.” Does it have that sense in verses 4–5? If so, what do those verses say?

If the Servant of God receives the kind of treatment described in verse 6, how ought we to respond to rejection and even persecution? Do we actually experience persecution in today’s world? If not, why not?

**Verses 7–9:** Though the Servant was abused, he was not ashamed to teach what he had been sent to teach. He trusted

in God's protection. (Compare Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; and 52:13–53:12 to verses 4–9.)

Verse 7 begins with the word *for*: what follows in verse 7 is a consequence of what has just been said in verse 6; in other words, verse 7 explains verse 6. How would you describe the relationship between the two verses? For example, why would the Servant say, “I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting *because* God will help me” (paraphrased)? Does that word *because* teach us anything?

**Verses 10–11:** The voice switches back to that of the Lord: those who fear the Lord should listen to his Servant, though they walk in darkness, but those who make their own light will be burned up by that light. In verse 11 “compass yourselves about with sparks” is literally translated “gird on sparks (or flames).” John Oswalt suggests that this may refer to someone tying a torch to himself to have his hands free in night battle, which would put him in danger of burning himself.<sup>1</sup>

When do we walk in darkness? If we have the Holy Ghost and the words of the prophets, is that ever the case? Notice that this verse is not addressed to the unrighteous, but to those in Israel who do fear the Lord and who obey what comes to them through the Lord's Servant.

## Isaiah 51

There are three poems in this chapter: verses 1–8, verses 9–16, and verses 17–23. In theme, the speaker uses the stories of the creation and the first patriarchs to make his point: the creation, the patriarchs, Israel's history and destiny—all



come together in the promise of salvation. Nevertheless, Israel remains sleepy and must be roused to attention.

**Verses 1–2:** Consolation is once again the theme: those who follow the Lord should remember their ancestors, Abraham and Sarah, as the Lord remembers his covenant with those ancestors.

Klaus Baltzer suggests that Deuteronomy 32:18 is an interpretive key here:<sup>2</sup> “Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.” Baltzer sees that verse as bringing the themes of verses 1 and 2 into a unity: the Lord is still the rock, but now in these verses Abraham and Sarah have given birth to Israel rather than the Lord.

Is the reference to the rock and the well (“hole of the pit” in the King James translation), both of which gave Israel water, a reference to Moses? (Also see Deuteronomy 31:10.) If so, what point is the speaker making? How might a reference to Moses fit with the obvious reference to the covenant with Abraham?

**Verse 3:** Speaking as if the fulfillment of prophecy has already occurred, the prophet says that the Lord will comfort Zion just as he comforted Abraham and Sarah: they were barren, as Zion will be barren, but they were made fruitful, and Zion too will be fruitful, like the Garden of Eden.

In what ways will Zion be fruitful? On the one hand, Zion is compared to Abraham and Sarah, who were promised many descendants. On the other hand, Zion is compared to the Garden of Eden. Is this a promise of many descendants, many heirs, or is it a promise of material comfort?

**Verses 4–5:** Israel is called to listen to the Lord, who will himself provide instruction (law) and judgment for all people. In its original context, this probably refers to the law of Moses. On that interpretation, what do these verses teach? What might a Christian understand the word *law* to refer to?

In verse 4, the Hebrew word translated “judgment” is *mishpat*, and it suggests more than just the decision of a judge in a court case. It suggests an act that restores a community to wholeness after it has been disrupted by something. To what act or judgment do you think the Lord is referring?

**Verse 6:** Though the world and human life are transitory, the salvation the Lord offers is permanent, as is his righteousness.

**Verses 7–8:** These verses begin with another call to Israel to listen to the Lord, this time, however, specifically to those who “know righteousness.” (The word translated “righteousness” is *tsaddiq*, one of the roots of the name Melchizedek.) Since the Lord’s salvation and righteousness are forever, those who have his law in their hearts need not fear the taunts and reproach of human beings.

What does the phrase “know righteousness” mean? How do we come to know righteousness? Malachi 3:18 describes the righteous person as the one who serves God. Does that definition differ from our usual understanding of the term as one who obeys the commandments? How are those definitions different? How are they the same? Ultimately, does anyone but Christ serve God?

**Verses 9–10:** This is a prayer asking God to awaken and defend Zion, as he did in the past when he defeated Egypt (Rahab = “stormy” or “arrogant”) and killed the pharaoh

(the dragon) by parting the Red Sea and allowing the recently freed children of Israel to pass through it unharmed.

**Verse 11:** Comparing the return of Judah from Babylon to the return of Israel from Egypt, the prophet says that those whom the Lord has ransomed will return with singing and joy. In verse 10 the inhabitants of the new Israel are described as “the ransomed.” Here they are described as “the redeemed.”

We know how the words *ransomed* and *redeemed* are used when we think of Christ’s atonement, but how will those who know righteousness be ransomed and redeemed in the last days?

**Verses 12–16:** The Lord reminds Jerusalem of who he is, namely the Creator. He will not allow captive Israel to die in captivity, and he will make Israel his messenger to all other nations, the foundation for his redeeming work.

In verse 12 the Lord asks Israel, “Who are you that you are afraid?” rather than “Why are you afraid?” What do you make of that difference? What is the Lord asking Israel when he asks, “Who are you?” What is he saying when, in verse 16, he says, “Thou art my people”? What does that imply about them? About their future?

**Verses 17–20:** The Lord calls on Jerusalem (Judah) to awaken from the drunken stupor and the consequent destruction and degradation into which sin has brought her, and portrays her as a widow whose sons are too weak to help her. Baltzer points out that the word *Jerusalem* is a feminine word in Hebrew, so verse 17 portrays Jerusalem as a drunken old woman—rather than as the virtuous young

goddesses that personify other cities, as Athena personifies the city of Athens.<sup>3</sup> Why does the Lord make this implicit comparison of Jerusalem to other cities in the way that he does?

**Verses 21–23:** Jerusalem’s troubles will be transferred to those who oppress it. If Jerusalem is not drunk with wine, with what *is* she drunk?

## Isaiah 52

Verses 1–12 continue the drama in a poem, in this case an enthronement hymn: Jerusalem is portrayed as taking the throne. Isaiah 42:13–15 and 53:1–12 are another poem about the Suffering Servant. As before, the modern divisions in the text have artificially broken that poem.

**Verses 1–3:** The prophet calls on Jerusalem to awaken (compare Isaiah 51:9) and to prepare for her redemption by putting on new clothing, getting up from her seat on the ground, and taking her proper place on a throne. The Lord will redeem her but will not pay to do so (compare Isaiah 50:1) because those who took Jerusalem captive paid nothing for it. Recall that the metaphor of redemption is a metaphor of being purchased from slavery: a person redeemed a slave by paying the slave’s owner for the slave and then setting him or her free.

**Verses 4–6:** Just as when Israel was captive in Egypt, the Assyrians have oppressed the Lord’s people and have blasphemed the Lord’s name, presumably by boasting that they have overpowered his people and, therefore, must be

stronger than he. But the Lord's people will know that they can trust in his name. (Compare Mosiah 5:7–8.)

**Verses 7–12:** The return of Israel from exile: a messenger with beautiful or appropriate feet will go before them, announcing their return and their salvation; the watchmen of Jerusalem will see them coming and announce their arrival with joyful singing of praise. Thus those in exile are to leave Babylon and to do so without defiling themselves because they will carry the Lord's vessels. Unlike the departure from Egypt, this departure will not be in haste, though as in that departure, the Lord will guard them back and front.

If we think of the Exodus from Egypt and the return from Babylon as the two end points of a chiasmus, what might be its middle point? Obviously, Isaiah and other scriptures take the two as parallel to one another. To what else might they be parallel?

**Verses 13–15:** The Hebrew word translated “deal prudently” (“prosper” and “succeed” in other translations) suggests an act done wisely, with understanding, intelligently. The Lord's Servant will not only succeed but will be lifted up; in fact, he will be lifted up very high. He will triumph. In spite of that, people will be astonished because the intensity of his suffering will deform him. He will shed his blood on the nations, and their rulers will be amazed, seeing and learning what they had never imagined.

## Isaiah 53

Though this is part of the same poem we have been reading in chapter 52, the speaker changes. Now the Gentiles speak.

**Verses 1–9:** Recounted here is what the kings would never have imagined: the Servant hadn't seemed like anyone to be admired, but he came forth like a tree growing miraculously in the desert (verse 2). Though he was despised, it was not because of his sins but because of our sins: he suffered on our behalf, we who had all gone astray (verses 3–6). Though he suffered, he did not complain (verse 7). In the end he was executed and buried with the wicked and the rich (verses 8–9), all this in spite of the fact that he had done nothing violent or deceitful (verse 9).

Suppose you were an Israelite living several hundred years before the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. How might you have understood these verses?

**Verses 10–12:** This suffering was the will of the Lord: having offered his soul as a sacrifice for sin, the Servant will see those who are his seed, and his life will be lengthened so that he can fulfill the purposes of the Lord. This will satisfy him, and the knowledge he gains by this sacrifice will allow him to justify many before God. Because he will have suffered death for sinners, God will give him his reward and he will conquer his enemies.

How do these verses fit the life of the Savior? In particular, was his life lengthened for the Lord's purposes?

### Overall questions for this lesson

It is not difficult to see these chapters as prophecies of the Savior. They give us a beautiful description of the need for the Atonement and of its accomplishment. As you read them, however, see if you can also understand them in other

ways: of what other persons and events is the Atonement a type? Look at particular groups of verses and ask yourself what ways you can understand them.

For example, think about various ways to understand 50:4–11; 51:1–3, 9–11, 17–20; 52:1–7; and all of chapter 53.

How many ways can you reasonably understand 52:7–12?

Do verses 10–12 of chapter 53 say anything to us about *our* suffering?

## Lesson 40

Isaiah 54–56; 63–65

As was true of the preceding several chapters, such as chapters 52–53, it is easier in these chapters for us to see their symbolic meaning than it is to see it in many of the early chapters in Isaiah. Nevertheless, I think it helps, even in a case like this, to begin by understanding the literal meaning of the chapters—what the people of Jerusalem might have heard and understood. Doing so will often add depth to our understanding of the symbolism.

Speaking of scripture study, Brigham Young asked, “Do you read the Scriptures, my brethren and sisters, as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago? Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them?”<sup>1</sup> His questions suggest that this should be our starting place. Then, when we are reading writings such as those of Isaiah, we should ask ourselves, What else could this represent or refer to?

So here are descriptions of what is happening in the chapters for this week’s lesson, followed by questions about the reading.

### Isaiah 54

According to Klaus Baltzer, chapter 54 takes the form of a description of part of a wedding: the bride arrives (verse 1);



there is rejoicing over her arrival (verse 1); those who celebrate build a tent for the marriage (verses 2–3); the husband’s messengers arrive with their announcements (verses 4–10); and the husband arrives and is crowned (verses 11–14).<sup>2</sup> According to John Watts, this is a drama: first a dialogue between the heavens (verses 1–3, 5) and the earth (verses 2, 4, 6), then speeches directed at Zion by the Lord (7–10, 16) and by Darius (11–15, 17).<sup>3</sup>

The moral of that comparison: if you have difficulty figuring out what is going on when you read Isaiah, don’t feel alone.

I’m more persuaded by Baltzer than by Watts—though I don’t have anything more to rely on than my intuitions. Scholars who know what they are doing might find Watts much more persuasive. But given my intuitions, I will assume that Baltzer’s overview is better: this is a dramatic description of a wedding ceremony. Using that as background, I’ve given the following description of how one might understand the chapter as a whole symbolically.

**Verses 1–3:** The prophet has a vision of the rejoicing of those who return from exile like brides coming to a wedding: they will fill up the place of their habitation, and they will be more numerous than they were before they were cast off.

How does the command “Enlarge the place of thy tent” (verse 2) apply to us today? Why is the image of the tent, with its ropes and stakes, so important to us?

**Verses 4–6:** Though Jerusalem has been like a forsaken wife, she will forget the shame and humiliation she suffered, because she will be redeemed by the Creator.

**Verses 7–8:** Her status as a forsaken betrothed (exile) will have been only a small moment; the marriage (redemption) will be forever.

**Verses 9–10:** The Lord compares Jerusalem’s captivity and return to the flood and the Noahic covenant: his promise never to flood the earth again is comparable to his promise to no longer be angry with Jerusalem and to shower kindness on her.

**Verses 4–10:** How do the promises of these verses have meaning today? To whom do they have meaning? To ancient Israel? To the Jews today? To the LDS Church? To individuals?

**Verses 11–12:** The beauty of the wedded bride (redeemed Zion).

**Verses 13–14:** The blessings of redemption: the Lord will teach the children and protect Jerusalem and her children.

How do these promises have meaning today? To whom do they have meaning? To ancient Israel? To the Jews today? To the LDS Church? To individuals and families?

**Verses 15–17:** Expanding on the last of these blessings, the Lord promises that Zion’s enemies will not succeed.

## Isaiah 55

Baltzer and Watts see this chapter in ways that follow on their understandings of chapter 54. For Baltzer it begins with a crier inviting people to the wedding feast.<sup>4</sup> For Watts it is a point in the drama when the crowd is addressed.<sup>5</sup>

These notes will continue to assume that Baltzer's understanding is better.

The description of the wedding feast occupies Isaiah 55–56. What interpretations does that metaphor make possible?

**Verse 1:** Those who hunger and thirst will be satisfied at no expense to them.

**Verse 2:** Why do they spend money and energy on things that do not fulfill them? Instead, they should listen to the Lord and delight in the things that fatten the soul.

**Verses 3–5:** The Lord will make an everlasting covenant with those who listen to him, the covenant with David. And David will be a witness to and leader of the people—not only the people of Israel—but also the people of nations that Israel doesn't know. Those nations will see what the Lord has done for Israel and come to it.

In verses 3–4, of whom was David a symbol to those in Jerusalem listening to Isaiah? To those at the time of Christ? To us? How can David serve as a symbol of these things?

How do you square David's sins with the fact that he is so frequently used as a positive symbol in the Hebrew Bible? What might that teach us?

**Verses 6–7:** Given such a great blessing, those addressed should repent and return to the Lord, who will pardon.

**Verses 8–11:** Though pardon may seem impossible to human beings, the Lord's ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. The difference is that his word always comes to fruition. As a result, we know that

his promise to redeem and prosper Jerusalem will be accomplished.

**Verses 12–13:** When Jerusalem leaves Babylon, the earth itself will rejoice; it will be transfigured.

## Isaiah 56

Many biblical scholars see a break between the content and tone of the previous chapters and this chapter (and those that follow). In Isaiah 56–66, the prophet seems concerned primarily with the question of whether redeemed and expanded Zion will be able to continue to stand after the return from Babylon. Though the answer will be yes (Isaiah 66:12–14), the need for repentance and the danger of God’s judgment ought not to be taken lightly.

**Verses 1–8:** The reward of those who live justly, keeping the Sabbath: whether Israelite or convert, they will come to the mountain of the Lord and worship joyfully in the temple.

Why does the Lord use Sabbath-keeping as the symbol for all obedience and just living?

Why is Sabbath-keeping so important?

**Verses 56:3–8 (compare Isaiah 55:1–7):** Who can partake of the Lord’s promises to Israel? What did this mean to those in Jerusalem as they listened to Isaiah and contemplated the coming captivity in Babylon? What do you think it might have meant to those who heard Christ’s message during his earthly mission? What did it mean when the gospel was restored in the nineteenth century? Does it

mean the same today that it meant at the beginning of the Restoration?

**Verses 9–12:** Isaiah stops to reflect on the condition of the people as he prophesies: they are led by blind and greedy leaders who think that nothing is going to change, but Jerusalem will be devoured because of them.

## Isaiah 63–64

**Verses 1–6:** The Lord’s vengeance on Edom, one of Israel’s traditional enemies. (As you read these verses, remember that the word *edom* means “red.”)

Isaiah 63:7 through Isaiah 64:11 is a prayer of confession of Israel’s sin and of thanksgiving for the Lord’s deliverance.

## Isaiah 65

This chapter is the Lord’s answer to the prayer of chapters 63 and 64.

**Verses 1–7:** Israel’s rebellion and disobedience brought it suffering: the Lord “measured their works to their bosom” (verse 7); in other words, he paid them according to the desires of their hearts.

**Verses 8–12:** Though the Lord would be justified in destroying Israel as a whole, for the sake of his servants he will not. But he will destroy those individuals who forsake him.

**Verses 13–16:** Those who have been faithful will be fed, their thirst will be quenched, and they will rejoice, but the unfaithful will remain hungry, thirsty, and sorrowful.

In fact, the name of those who have been unfaithful will become a curse, and those who have been faithful will receive a new name.

**Verses 17–25:** The marvelous transformation that will occur to the earth and the inhabitants of the earth when Israel is redeemed: the heavens and the earth will be renewed, there will be a new Jerusalem, God and humanity will rejoice together, there will be neither infancy nor old age, people will live peacefully and fruitfully in their homes, their prayers will be answered before they ask, and the animals will live peacefully together.

**Verses 17–25:** Why would millennial promises have been of interest to the people at Isaiah's time? Can we understand them as anything but millennial promises?

Why were these particular verses of interest to those at the time of Christ? Why are they of interest to us today?

Are there differences in meaning depending on which audience is reading these verses? If so, what does that tell us about scripture and prophecy?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 41

Jeremiah 1–2; 15; 20; 26; 36–38

## Historical Background

Like Isaiah, the book of Jeremiah is a collection of prophecies edited into a book after the fact rather than one extended prophecy. It describes itself as a history rather than as a prophecy, though obviously it contains a number of prophecies. But the word *history* doesn't mean the same for ancient Israel as it means today. It is closer to our word *story* or *account*.

Much of the background for Jeremiah is covered in the last chapters of 2 Kings and the last chapters of 2 Chronicles. Understanding a rough outline of the history behind the readings in Jeremiah should help make it more understandable. Remember we have been studying a number of lessons that are not chronologically ordered. Below is a chronology cobbled together from various sources. It covers the period from the time of Solomon to the time of Jeremiah. Perhaps it will help you understand better how the things we have been reading are related to one another. In this chronology, kings' names are in bold and prophets' names are in italics (all dates are BC).



- c. 980–950      Abiathar, one of Jeremiah’s great-grandfathers, sides with Absalom in his revolt and is banished to Anathoth, three to four miles northeast of Jerusalem. **Solomon** replaces Abiathar with Zadok, from whom all later high priests trace their lineage until a few years before Jesus’s ministry begins.
- 975      Solomon dies and the kingdom is divided into two: Judah and Israel. The kings of both new kingdoms are wicked.
- 929      A righteous king in Judah: **Asa**
- 873      **Jehoshaphat**, Asa’s successor, reigns righteously in Judah.  
*Elijah’s* ministry begins.
- c. 850      *Elisha’s* ministry begins.
- 837      **Joash** rules righteously in Judah. He repairs the temple. Later he ransoms Judah from Syria by giving the Syrian king the temple gold and precious things; his servants assassinate him.  
  
Syria wars against Israel, taking cities on the border.  
  
*Joel* prophesies.

- 826 *Hosea* prophesies  
*Jonah* prophesies.
- 811 *Amos* prophesies.
- 797 **Amaziah**, Joash's son, rules righteously in Judah.
- c. 795 Israel defeats Judah in battle and plunders the temple and the temple treasury.
- 792 **Uzziah**, son of Amaziah, reigns righteously in Judah  
*Isaiah* begins to prophesy the year that Uzziah dies.
- 740 **Jotham**, son of Uzziah, is a righteous king of Judah.
- 734 **Ahaz**, son of Jotham, rules Judah. He is unrighteous, defiling the temple with human sacrifice and changing the temple ritual.
- 732 Assyria defeats Syria.
- 730 The Assyrian campaign against Israel begins, taking many captive, particularly from among community leaders.
- 726 **Hezekiah** ascends to the throne of Judah and reigns righteously.

Isaiah urges Hezekiah not to make an alliance with Egypt against Assyria and, instead, to acquiesce to Assyria's power. However, most of Hezekiah's advisors recommend the alliance with Egypt.

- 722 Assyria completes its domination of Israel.  
*Micah* prophesies.
- 708 Israel rebels against Assyria's domination, making an alliance with Egypt—against Isaiah's advice.
- 697 **Manasseh**, Hezekiah's son, reigns wickedly: he executes Isaiah, allows idolatry, and offers the human sacrifice of his son to Moloch.
- 670 The Assyrian-Egyptian war comes to an end with the defeat of Egypt by Esarrhadon of Assyria.
- 640 **Josiah's** righteous reign begins. (He succeeds his brother, **Amon**, who was unrighteous.)
- 627 *Jeremiah* is called to be a prophet while he is still a child.
- 625 Babylon begins to increase in power.

- 622 The book of the law is discovered during temple repairs, and Josiah reforms Israelite worship.
- 609 As a vassal of Assyria, Josiah goes to battle against the Egyptians at Meggido and is killed.
- His son **Jehoahaz** reigns in his stead, but he is wicked.
- Pharaoh takes Jehoahaz captive into Egypt, where he dies. He makes Josiah's other son, Eliakim, king of Judah and changes his name to **Jehoiakim** to indicate that he is the pharaoh's vassal. **Jeohiakim** also rules wickedly.
- 606 The fall of Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria is defeated by Babylon. Egypt decides to aid Assyria and to strike against Babylon before it can grow further in power.
- 605 Nebuchadnezzar's armies defeat Egypt at Carchemish, and Babylon becomes the dominant power of the region.
- Babylon's armies attack Jerusalem and take thousands captive, including Daniel and Ezekiel.
- 596 The first downfall of Jerusalem.

*Habukkuk* prophecies.

*Ezekiel* prophecies.

Concerned about rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar sends his armies and confederate armies from Edom, Ammon, and Moab against Jerusalem.

Jeremiah delivers a sermon at the temple (Jeremiah 7), accusing the Jews of hypocrisy. He is banished from the temple and persecuted.

The prophet *Uriah* is executed for preaching the same thing that Jeremiah has been preaching.

Nebuchadnezzar executes Jehoiachin and places his eight-year-old son, **Jehoiachin**, on the throne in his stead.

Jehoiachin reigns for three months, giving Nebuchadnezzar all of the temple treasures as tribute. Nebuchadnezzar takes thousands more into captivity, including Ezekiel. In particular, he takes captive those from leading families, the artisans, and the government officials. His aim is not to depopulate the region but to remove its leaders.

Nebuchadnezzar appoints another son of Josiah, Mattaniah, as king, changing his name to **Zedekiah** to prove that Zedekiah is a vassal. Zedekiah does not rule righteously.

*Lehi* is called as a prophet and leaves Jerusalem with his family.

c. 590

In spite of his promise of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah forms an alliance with Edom, Ammon, Moab, Phoenicia, and Egypt, and they rebel against Babylon.

Jeremiah appears in the streets of Jerusalem wearing a wooden yoke around his neck as a symbol that the rebellion will be unsuccessful and Babylon will continue to dominate Judah.

587

Angry at failure to keep his covenant as a vassal, Nebuchadnezzar takes personal leadership of the Babylonian army and lays siege to Jerusalem. During the siege, mothers kill their children to save them from Nebuchadnezzar's army. Some eat the remains from hunger.

During a break in the siege, Jeremiah escapes to his hometown, Anathoth. He is arrested, beaten,

and thrown into a dungeon. Then Zedekiah summons him to give some word of hope. When Jeremiah cannot do so, Zedekiah keeps him in captivity.

Jeremiah continues to prophesy of Babylonian victory, so Zedekiah has him tied up and thrown into a well, left to die in the mud. An African slave rescues him.

Nebuchadnezzar resumes the siege and conquers Jerusalem.

Zedekiah flees and is captured at Jericho. His sons are executed before his eyes, and then his eyes are put out. He is taken to Babylon, where he dies in captivity.

One month after the fall of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar's army burns the city, destroying the temple and the palaces and tearing down the city walls. The ark of the covenant disappears.

Most of the remaining population is taken into captivity. Gedaliah is appointed governor, but he is murdered by an agent of the king of Ammon.

The remainder of those in Judah flee to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them as a hostage.

One of Zedekiah's sons, Mulek, a baby at the time, somehow escapes execution. With people still loyal to Zedekiah, he makes it to the Western Hemisphere. These are the people of Zarahemla later discovered by the Nephites.

## Jeremiah 1

**Verses 1–3:** These verses are roughly equivalent to what we find in the title and title page of the kind of book that we are accustomed to.

Note that in Hebrew *words* can be understood to mean “message.”

Why is Jeremiah's ancestry significant to his prophecy? Why does it matter where he came from? Do his place of origin and his ancestry perhaps tell us something about his relations with the priests in Jerusalem?

The fifth month would have been August of 597 BC.

**Verses 4–5:** As in some other prophetic books, such as in much of Isaiah, the words of the Lord in the book of Jeremiah appear in poetry and those of the prophet are in prose. Why do you think that was a standard way of



writing prophecy? What is the significance of putting the Lord's words into poetic form?

Compare Jeremiah's calling to Isaiah's. How are they similar? How are they different?

The word translated "formed" in verse 5 is the word usually used to speak of molding pottery. What does that language suggest?

What does it mean for the Lord to sanctify a person? The word translated "sanctified" could also be translated "dedicated." What contemporary LDS language might be equivalent in meaning? What does it mean to be dedicated by the Lord?

**Verses 5–10:** What indication does the Lord give Jeremiah about the nature of his calling?

If the prophet is the prophet to Judah, why does the Lord say that he has been set over all nations?

What does it mean to say that the prophet has been called "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (verse 5)?

**Verses 11–14:** What is the significance of the symbols that Zedekiah is shown in the two visions that he recounts?

To what is Jeremiah compared by the Lord? What do these symbols connote? Why would the Lord use symbols like these in calling a prophet?

Jeremiah's first vision (verses 11–12) depends on a word-play in Hebrew: *shaqed* means "almond" and *shoqed* means "watching."

What do you understand the first of these two visions to mean? The second vision (verses 13–15) is the image of a large pot for boiling food. Cooking in pots was the most advanced cooking technology for several thousand more years. Whatever one had to eat was put into a large pot on an open fire. Soup/stew is one of the oldest foods.

In this vision, the pot is tipped toward the north and, because of a hard northerly wind that increases the heat of the fire, it is boiling over. How is the vision relevant to the meaning that the prophet explains in verses 15–19?

**Verses 15–19:** Do verses like these, of which there are many in Isaiah and Jeremiah, have anything to teach us today?

## Jeremiah 2

**Verses 1–9:** When the Lord compares early Israel to Israel in Jeremiah's time, what differences does he note? Why might he compare the beginning to the end?

What does the Lord intend when he describes himself as remembering his youthful love (verse 2)? Is he remembering something that ever actually happened? If so, when?

Who are the pastors if they are not the priestly leaders (verse 8)? Whom does the Lord hold responsible for Israel's apostasy?

**Verses 10–19:** *Chittim* is Cyprus, to the west; *Kedar*, the name of a tribe living to the east; *Noph* is Memphis in Egypt, and *Tahapanes*, a city on the eastern edge of the Egyptian delta. It may be the city where the Israelites lived during their captivity.

Explain the metaphor in verse 13. Barday Newman and Philip Stine say:

In the land of Canaan where fresh springs of water were not readily available, the people had to depend upon water stored in cisterns. The limestone in which the cisterns were cut was of porous nature, so that it was necessary to line them with a non-porous plaster. But if the plaster cracked, then the water would seep out through the crack into the porous limestone.<sup>1</sup>

What is Judah's central problem (verses 11 and 13)? Are we ever guilty of the problems mentioned in verse 13?

Compare verse 14 with verse 3, and explain the contrast and what it tells us.

What does the Lord teach when he says, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee" (verse 19)? Do we often see this in our own lives? How so?

**Verses 20–25:** To what does God compare Judah (verses 20, 21, and 23–25)? How does each of these comparisons work?

**Verses 26–37:** Again, who bears the burden of guilt in Israel (verse 26)? If we apply the same principle to ourselves, what does it suggest about us?

What are God's symbols for the false gods? What new symbolism does he add to the idea of the unfaithful beloved?

## Jeremiah 15

**Verse 1:** Why might God have chosen Moses and Samuel as examples of those who have successfully pled with God in

times past? (Cf. Exodus 32:11–32; Numbers 14:13–19; and 1 Samuel 7:8–9; 12:19–23.) When did they do so?

Does the prophet plead for us today? If you say yes, what is your evidence? If you say no, why not? Does it matter that he pleads for us? How?

**Verses 2–4:** What is in store for Israel’s future?

Whom does the Lord hold responsible for Judah’s problems?

To what event is the Lord referring?

**Verses 5–9:** What might the Lord mean when he says, “I am weary with repenting”? One modern translation renders this “I can no longer show compassion.”

Why had he instructed Jeremiah not to pray for this people (Jeremiah 14:11–12)? Are there limits to his compassion for his people? How could there be? If there are, how do we avoid reaching those limits ourselves? If there are not, what do these verses mean?

**Verses 10–21:** If Jeremiah was called while he was still in the womb, what does it mean for him to curse the day of his birth (verse 10)?

What do you make of Jeremiah’s “proof” of his righteousness at the end of verse 10? What does it tell us about Israel? What is his complaint (verses 10, 15–18)?

What is the Lord’s response to Jeremiah’s lamentations (verses 11–14, 19–21)?

Why does the Lord require Jeremiah’s repentance (verse 19)?

How does this event compare to the Prophet Joseph's experience in Liberty Jail (D&C 122)? How is the Lord's response similar? How different?

How does Jeremiah's experience relate to Job's lamentations?

What can Jeremiah's experience tell us about our own times of psychological (rather than chemical) depression?

## Jeremiah 20

**Verses 1–6:** Pashur appears to have been the officer in charge of the temple guards. Why would he have arrested Jeremiah?

What does Jeremiah tell Pashur will happen to Jerusalem and to Pashur personally (verse 4)?

The name Magormissabib that Jeremiah gives Pashur probably means "terror on every side." Is he the terror, or is he going to be surrounded by terror?

What does it mean to be a terror to oneself (verse 4)? Why is it a curse to be a terror to one's enemies?

Why would Pashur have thought it a curse to be buried in a strange land (verse 6)?

**Verses 7–18:** What evidence do we have of Jeremiah's suffering by this time in his life? What do verses 14–18 tell us about his feelings?

If being the prophet was so hard on him, why didn't he just quit preaching (verse 9)?

What do you make of his demand for vengeance on his enemies (verse 12)? Is that the way you think of a prophet? If not, how do you explain Jeremiah's demand?

## Jeremiah 26

**Verses 1–7:** What message was Jeremiah to take to the people in Jerusalem?

Where was the message to be delivered? Why there?

**Verses 8–16:** These verses contain the accusations made against Jeremiah. Review the trial of Abinadi before the priests of Noah (Mosiah 11–17). What similarities do you see, both between the priests in each group and the prophet in each?

How do you understand the phrase “the priests and the prophets and all the people” (verse 8)? Doesn’t “all the people” include the priests, and if it does, then why bother to name them?

**Verses 17–24:** What type of defense did some of the elders in the land bring in support of Jeremiah? What do we learn about their legal system from this defense—especially in the use of precedent? Note also the reference to the prophet Micah, whose works we studied earlier.

What difference do they point out in the case of righteous Hezekiah and that of his wicked descendant Jehoiakim?

Concerning Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, see 2 Kings 22:3–10; Jeremiah 36:10, 25; 39:14; and 40:5–10.

## Jeremiah 36

**Verses 1–8:** How does this process of receiving and disseminating scripture compare to that during the Restoration?

What task was Baruch assigned to do? Why in the temple?

To whom can we compare Baruch in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith?

**Verses 9–32:** What was the result of the second reading of the Jeremiah scroll in the temple?

What was the result of the third reading to the princes (or elders)? What was their reaction? What was the reaction of the king?

Why did Jehudi burn Jeremiah's prophecy (verse 23)?

Why does verse 24 tell us that neither the king nor his servants were afraid? Afraid of what? What does their lack of fear show?

What did the Lord instruct Jeremiah to do because of the king's actions? What information was put on the second scroll? Do we have that scroll today?

## Jeremiah 37

**Verses 1–11:** With this chapter we move to the reign of Zedekiah. The Book of Mormon tells us that Lehi is now in the picture prophesying, though he is not mentioned by Jeremiah.

What seems to be Zedekiah's feelings about Jeremiah? How are those feelings tempered by the feelings of the people?

Note also that the army of Babylon is moving through the streets of Jerusalem and that they flee before the armies of Egypt. Lehi tells us nothing of this, but must have been aware of these armies, unless he had already left. How do

the things we have read so far help us understand the first part of 1 Nephi?

**Verses 12–21:** What charge was made against Jeremiah that caused him to be returned to Jerusalem, beaten, and imprisoned? Why did Zedekiah take him from the prison? How do you account for Zedekiah's conflicted behavior toward Jeremiah?

### Jeremiah 38

**Verses 1–6:** Why was Jeremiah again returned to imprisonment?

What was the condition of the dungeon (it seems to have been a cistern) into which Jeremiah was placed? What were his chances of survival in that place?

**Verses 7–13:** How did Jeremiah escape from the cistern? Why would Hezekiah have sent such a large body of men to remove Jeremiah from the pit? Did he fear an attempted escape?

**Verses 14–28:** This meeting between the king and Jeremiah suggests the king's real feelings and the fear he harbored of his own people. What must have been Zedekiah's state of mind upon hearing Jeremiah's message?



THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

## Lesson 42

Jeremiah 16; 23; 29; 31

As you read Jeremiah, you should do what the lesson materials for Isaiah suggested: ask how those to whom Jeremiah was speaking would have understood his prophecies, how those in the Book of Mormon (who had a record of part of his prophecies) would have understood them, how Christians in New Testament times would have understood them, how we can understand them today, and how they may teach us of things yet to come. Looking at each prophecy from these perspectives may help us (1) see things we might otherwise overlook and (2) understand better why some things are opaque to us.

As you read, also think about Jeremiah's situation. We know that he was reluctant to serve as a prophet. (See Jeremiah 1:6–8, 17.) He probably knew Lehi, and it isn't difficult to imagine him wondering, "Why me? I've been called to remain unmarried and without children, and to be persecuted for prophesying, whereas Lehi has been called to prophesy and then, after relatively brief persecution, to take his family with him to a promised land. That doesn't seem fair." Whether Jeremiah wondered something like that or not, what was his response to his call?

Look at Jeremiah 1:18: "I have made thee a defenced city, an iron pillar, and brasen walls [i.e., walls of brass] against the whole land." What does this image suggest about what

Jeremiah can expect his relation with Judah to be like? What particulars of Jeremiah's biography bear out this image? (Read about Jeremiah in the LDS Bible Dictionary.) How does the Lord strengthen him for his task?

Because of Jeremiah's personal sufferings and the horrific nature of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem and her defeat, we often focus on the woes that he pronounces. In fact, his name has become a word we use for any lamenting and denunciatory complaint: a jeremiad. But if we are to understand Jeremiah's prophetic message, it is crucial to remember that he does not only prophesy woe; he also prophesies restoration.

Of course, the story of woe and restoration is the story that the scriptures tell over and over again, in a very real sense the *only* story they tell: though Israel was blessed and in covenant with God, it gave up its blessing and renounced its covenant, falling into sin and error; because of that, woe will come; nevertheless, there will be a restoration of the blessings and the covenant—Israel will return to her former state of grace. That story is also the story of every individual human being.

## Jeremiah 16

**Verses 1–4:** The family lives of other prophets have also been used symbolically, sometimes in ways that we find shocking (Genesis 22; Hosea 1–3; Isaiah 7–8; Ezekiel 24:15–27). What did failure to have children mean in ancient Israel? Does the Lord's use of the prophets in this way teach us anything about how he teaches?

Not marrying was so unusual in Israel that ancient Hebrew had no word for bachelor. Why, specifically, does the Lord command Jeremiah not to marry? What might that have meant symbolically?

**Verses 5–7:** Why shouldn't Jeremiah mourn for Judah or join in the mourning of its people?

**Verses 8–9:** Why shouldn't he join in their rejoicing at the wedding feasts?

**Verse 10:** How will the people of Judah respond to these signs and prophecies?

**Verses 11–13:** What does it mean to forsake the Lord? Does that add to the meaning of these verses?

Why is exile thought by the Jews to be a harsh punishment? My family is originally from Missouri, and we have been “exiled” to another state, but we don't mind that and have no plans to return. Though we love our family there, we have homes and family here, and with each generation the connection to Missouri is weaker and weaker. I doubt that my children have anything but a kind of theoretical connection to Missouri: “My father/grandfather was born in Missouri.” Having lived their whole lives in Utah, they feel a connection to it. I would bet that is what happens with most exiles—connection to the “home country” becomes very quickly attenuated. So why was the threat of exile in Babylon, where those exiled appear to have prospered and lived reasonably well, a serious threat?

To Judah and Israel, what does the promise of a homeland signify? What meaning does that have for us? In

other words, how can we understand the homeland literally? Symbolically? We have had our own ideas about a homeland, first Missouri and then Utah. How did the LDS Church make the change from understanding the homeland—the gathering place—as literal (Missouri or Utah) to understanding it as symbolic (the stakes of Zion, wherever they are)? What difference does that change make?

**Verses 14–15:** “The Lord liveth,” which occurs two times in these verses, should probably be translated “as the Lord liveth.” This was a phrase used at the beginning of oaths. What is the significance of the Lord making this prophecy in terms of an oath?

Before this, what has been the sign that the Lord watches over Israel? Now what will be the sign? Does this sign describe the events at any other time periods than the return from Babylon? For example, does it describe events at the time of Christ? At the time of the latter-day restoration?

Is there any sense in which might we say that we have been brought back into the land that the Lord gave to our fathers, particularly if we live outside the “Mormon corridor”?

**Verses 16–18:** What did the image of fishers and hunters mean to Judah at the time of Jeremiah? (The fisherman image appears to have been a well-known metaphor. Compare Ezekial 12:13; 29:4–5; Amos 4:2; Habakkuk 1:14–17.) Who are being hunted and fished? Who will do that hunting and fishing? Does this image have meaning for us today beyond its use as a scripture encouraging missionary work?

Notice the order of ideas in these verses: “I will hunt them out because they cannot hide from me and because I know

their iniquity.” What point is the Lord making? How does that point help us understand the fishing and hunting of verse 16?

Why do you think that the sin the Lord singles out for mention in these verses is the profanation of the temple with sacrifices to other gods? How is that sin related to the sin of forsaking the Lord (verse 11)? And how are profaning of the temple and forsaking the Lord related to the sins of injustice among neighbors and the oppression of the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, as well as to idolatry (Jeremiah 7:5–7)?

Do we ever profane the temple today? How is our profanation of the temple related to injustice? To oppression of the stranger, the orphan, and the widow? Are we ever guilty of idolatry?

**Verses 19–21:** What promise does the Lord make in these verses? To whom is the promise made? How is that promise relevant to what was prophesied in verses 16–19? How does the promise of these verses relate to us in the latter days?

## Jeremiah 23

**Verses 1–9:** What is the job of a shepherd? What do *these* shepherds do?

These shepherds were probably the kings of Judah. What were they doing to scatter their people? Who are our shepherds? What might one of them do to scatter the flock?

What promise for the future is held out for God’s people? Who will eventually bring them back to their own homes?

Who is the “righteous Branch”? To whom do you think those who heard Jeremiah prophesy would have understood him to refer? Why refer to that person as a branch? A branch of what? The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon gives the first meaning of the Hebrew word translated “branch” as “sprout, growth.” The third meaning is “future ruler, under fig. of *sprout* from David tree.”

What does Jeremiah mean when he talks of the return of judgment and justice? How are the two related?

In what way is the gathering of Israel in the last days akin to the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt? How are they different?

**Verses 9–40:** In reading these verses, remember that Jerusalem was full of self-appointed prophets who opposed Jeremiah. How are Jeremiah’s times like Christ’s in this respect (though we have little biblical evidence that Jerusalem was filled with self-appointed prophets during Jesus’s life)?

Are there false prophets today? Where do we find them? How do Jeremiah and the Lord describe these prophets and priests? What makes someone a false prophet? (Remember that the primary duty of a prophet is to preach the gospel, *not* to foretell the future.)

Why the reference to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom? In what way is the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah applicable?

Why would the false prophets’ message of peace have been confusing to people such as Laman and Lemuel? Might

that explain some of their reluctance to go with their father into the desert?

## Jeremiah 29

**Verses 1–3:** Jeremiah writes a letter to the Jews already in Babylon, those deported in 597 BC. (The final deportation will occur in 586 BC.) Why are they described as “the residue”? In other words, why would those who have been deported be the residue rather than those who remained behind?

According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon, the word translated “residue” means “remainder,” but it also means “excess” (as in Jeremiah 27:19; 39:9; 52:15) as well as “pre-eminence” (as in Genesis 49:3).

**Verses 4–7:** What is the substance of Jeremiah’s letter?

Why did the Lord give this commandment rather than a commandment to rebel and escape?

How does Jeremiah’s instruction compare to the twelfth article of faith? Are there any important differences?

**Verses 10–14:** Note that “seventy years” probably isn’t intended to denote a specific period of time. More likely it means “a long, indefinite time.” What does the Lord promise them at the end of that time? (In verse 11, “expected end” is probably better translated “hopeful future.”)

On what condition will the promise be fulfilled?

What does it mean to seek the Lord with *all* one’s heart?

What indication do we have in these verses that this promise refers to more than just a return from Babylon?



**Verses 8–9, 15–32:** Note that the false prophets had also arisen in Babylon. What does the Lord decree for them? Notice the wish in verse 22 that they be burned in a fiery furnace. What had they been doing wrong in Babylon?

Some of the false prophets, such as Shemaiah, vilified Jeremiah even after they were taken captive into Babylon. Why might they have done so?

## Jeremiah 31

This chapter consists of an introduction, verse 1, and four poems: verses 2–6, 7–14, 15–22, and 35–37.

**Verse 1:** Of what time is the Lord speaking here?

Is it significant that he speaks of being the God of all the *families* of Israel rather than of all the individuals of Israel? If so, how?

**Verses 2–6:** What does the Lord promise for the future of Israel?

Of what is the wilderness or desert a symbol in verse 2?

What does he mean by the term “everlasting love” (verse 3)? In what sense is his love everlasting? Why is it everlasting? In what has the Lord shown his love for Israel? The word *lovingkindness* in verse 3 translates the Hebrew word *hesed*, “goodness, kindness.” With the word *love* (*hb*), *hesed* is a word used in covenants.

Usually watchmen keep intruders and thieves out. What do these watchmen do (verse 6)?

**Verses 7–14:** In Israel’s history, where have we previously seen this event? When will those taken into Babylon see it? What does it mean to us?

In verse 8, why does the Lord emphasize the return of those who are physically disadvantaged?

How will this journey in the wilderness differ from the earlier one (verse 9)?

Why are the islands of the sea and distant nations called as witnesses (verse 10)?

Compare and contrast the scene of this poem to that of Jeremiah 6:26 and 16:1–9. What do you learn?

**Verses 15–22:** Ramah (verse 15) was the home of Samuel and near the burial place of Rachel. (Compare Genesis 35:18–19.) Jeremiah 40:1 tells us that Ramah was a stopping off place for those on their way from Jerusalem to exile in Babylon. How is it relevant to this poetic prophecy?

How did Matthew use this verse from Jeremiah (Matthew 2:18)? What does that tell us about ancient biblical interpretation? Does it suggest anything about how biblical writers understood what they were doing?

Compare verse 18 to Hosea 4:16 and 10:11. What does that comparison reveal? What does Jeremiah mean by comparing Ephraim to a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke (verse 18)? Keep in mind that the bull (or calf) is sometimes used as the symbol of Ephraim—for example, in the construction of the golden calf by the northern tribes after their break from Jerusalem. What is the yoke in the analogy?

How does the Lord feel about the tribe of Ephraim? Is this one of the reasons that only Joseph and his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh will be given a home in the New Jerusalem, while all the other tribes will be headquartered in Jerusalem? In verse 22, perhaps the word *compass* should instead be translated “protect.”

**Verses 23–40:** What blessing do verses 23–25 describe?

Recall that Jeremiah’s call (Jeremiah 1:19) was twofold: to pull down and to build. Where have you seen him doing this?

What does Jeremiah mean when he says “the fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (verse 29)? How are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children? Why does the Lord change this (verse 30)?

What does the Lord mean by a *new* covenant (verse 31; note that the covenant will be made with both north and south, in other words, all of the house of Israel)? To make a covenant in the Old Testament is literally to *cut* a covenant. Why? How might that be relevant here?

How is this covenant different from the first covenant? What does the Lord mean when he says that the covenant will be a “law in their inward parts” and “in their hearts” (verse 31)?

What will happen to proselytizing in that day (verse 34)? Why?

What might the Lord mean by the term *know* (verse 34) in this context? Does it mean simply an awareness of? This is the same word used in Genesis 4:1. Does that suggest anything about what it means to know the Lord? (Compare Hosea 8:1–2.)

How is the event described in verse 34 related to the prophecy of verse 33? The word *ordinances* could also be translated “order” (verse 35).

What do verses 35–36 mean? How is that relevant to what the Lord has been saying previously in this poem?

What is the point of verse 37?

Verses 38–40 are an apocalyptic vision of the sanctification of Jerusalem. The places mentioned seem to be ones surrounding Jerusalem, recited in a clockwise direction if we are looking at a map. However, not all of them are identifiable.

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

# Lesson 43

Ezekiel 18; 34; and 37

Chronologically we turn backwards at this point. Jeremiah was the prophet in 595 BC, when Jerusalem was finally captured and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and its people were carried into Babylon. Like Lehi, Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, but Ezekiel did not prophesy with them. Instead, like Daniel, Ezekiel was with the large group from Judah who had been taken captive into Babylon earlier. He began to prophesy only after arriving in Babylon, so prophets in Jerusalem, like Lehi and Jeremiah, may not even have known about Ezekiel. Tradition has it that he died and was buried in Babylon. With that in mind, as you read Ezekiel, ask yourself what difference the absence of the temple makes to his preaching and teaching.

## Ezekiel 18

**Verses 1–4:** The people of Israel seem to have used the proverb of verse 2 against the Lord. Can you explain how the proverb works as a complaint? Why might that complaint have arisen in Babylon?

Why does the Lord speak here of his ownership of all souls?

What point is he making when he speaks of the soul of the father and the soul of the son?

How is he responding to the criticism of him implicit in the proverb?

**Verses 5–9:** In the Old Testament, what does it mean to be just (verse 5)? Does it mean perfect obedience to all the commandments? Can you explain why you answer that question as you do?

What does it mean to walk in the statutes of God (verse 9)? To “deal truly”?

Why does verse 9 end by repeating what was said in verse 5? What does that suggest about the material in between?

**Verses 10–20:** What is the point of these verses? How do they apply to Israel in Babylon?

**Verses 21–24:** What has been the Lord’s point in the chapter so far? What does the Lord mean when he asks, “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?”

**Verses 25–29:** What complaint is the Lord responding to in verse 25? Do we ever make a similar complaint? When? What is the Lord’s answer?

Explain the last half of verse 29.

**Verses 30–32:** Why does this section begin with the word *therefore*?

## Ezekiel 34

**Verses 1–10:** How does this passage describe the shepherds—leaders—that Israel has had? (Clearly Ezekiel is using Jeremiah 23 as his model.) How is the Babylonian captivity related to these verses?

It is easy enough to think of ways that these verses may apply to others, especially those who lead earthly governments. But how might they apply to *us*? (Remember that Nephi says, “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.” He doesn’t say, “I did liken all scripture unto *others*.”)

In verse 3, the correct translation is probably “milk” rather than “fat”: “Ye eat the milk, and ye clothe you with the wool.”

Here is an alternative translation of verse 10: “Thus says the Lord GOD: I swear I am coming against these shepherds. I will claim my sheep from them and put a stop to their shepherding my sheep so that they may no longer pasture themselves [i.e., feed themselves instead of the sheep]. I will save my sheep, that they may no longer be food for their mouths” (New American Bible). Does that change your understanding of that verse?

**Verses 11–22:** How does the Lord’s leadership contrast with that of the leaders of Israel? Can you list the different things that the Lord does as shepherd and explain what each of those might model for us?

Consider the context and the theme of these verses and the previous ten verses: What do you think the rams and the he-goats in verse 17 might represent? What about the lean cattle and the fat cattle in verse 22?

**Verses 23–31:** Why does the Lord use King David to represent the ideal shepherd who will govern Israel? For us, who is that shepherd? Is he someone who has already come? Someone with us? Someone yet to come?



Do you see the ways in which these verses promise to fulfill the covenant made to Abraham (Genesis 17:2–8; 22:16–18)? Does it fulfill the restatement of that covenant that the Lord made through Moses (Exodus 19:4–6)?

**Verses 25–30:** In these verses we don't see the shepherd theme that has previously dominated this chapter. Why not?

What is the Lord talking about? What is he promising?

Compare these verses to Leviticus 26:3–7. What's the connection?

## Ezekiel 37

Rather than a “mere” prophecy, we have here the record of a prophetic vision.

**Verses 1–14:** Can you think of different ways to understand this prophecy of the resurrection? For example, what might the dry bones have meant to the Israelites in Babylonian captivity, those to whom Ezekiel delivered this prophecy? What might the resurrection represent to them?

Many contemporary Jews read this chapter as something other than a prophecy of resurrection. How do you think they do so? Are we forced to choose between the various possible, reasonable interpretations? Why or why not?

What do you make of the fact that Ezekiel brings about the resurrection of these bones by preaching “the word of the Lord” to them? What might “word of the Lord” mean here?

In verse 11, the phrase “we are cut off for our parts” can also be translated “we are clean cut off.” What is Israel saying in verse 11?

What does verse 14 promise?

The word *spirit* could also be translated “breath.” How does that connect verse 14 to verses 5 and 9? Does this give us any clue as to different ways of understanding the resurrection described here?

**Verses 15–23:** What is the overall theme of these verses? (Notice that verses 15–20 describe an “object lesson” that is used in Ezekiel’s preaching in verses 21–23.) In that context, how would those in Babylon have understood the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph?

How do we understand those two sticks? How are those two understandings related to each other?

Most Old Testament scholars—though not all—understand the sticks to be exactly that, sticks, rather than scrolls (as in Isaiah 8:1) or wooden writing tablets (as in Habakkuk 2:2). They appear to understand the sticks as the scepters of the nations’ rulers.<sup>1</sup> Consider each possible interpretation as if it were true. What understanding of the prophecy does each interpretation yield? Must we insist on the truth of one interpretation to the exclusion of the others?

Are we supposed to see a parallel between the coming together of the bones and the coming together of the sticks? What is the significance of the sticks being “in thine hand before their eyes” (verse 20)?

**Verses 24–28:** Is there a difference between a king and a shepherd (verse 24)?

Why is David used as a figure of the Messiah?

What promises does the Lord make in these verses? (There appear to be four, marked by the words *for ever* and *everlasting*—which translate the same Hebrew word.) How do those promises correlate with the Abrahamic covenant and its Mosaic clarification?

How do these promises relate to the new covenant that Jeremiah promised (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8:8)?

Do they relate to us in any way? If so, how?

# Lesson 44

Ezekiel 43–44; 47

Ezekiel's book goes back and forth between telling of the literal return from Babylon to Jerusalem (in ways that we can also read to refer to the last days) to speaking directly of the last days. Beginning in chapter 40, he has a vision of the temple in Jerusalem and of the order of temple worship there. What kind of vision do you think this is?

In Ezekiel 37:26–28, the Lord promised the temple as part of the covenant of peace he will make with Israel. You may wish to review those verses to prepare for this lesson. What is the covenant of peace, and why does the Lord call it specifically a covenant of *peace*? What kind of peace? Peace with whom? For whom? How is the temple relevant to that covenant?

What do the end of verse 26 and the end of verse 28 suggest about the purpose of the temple?

The temple worship that Ezekiel describes in these chapters speaks of different sacrifices and different numbers of sacrifices than are mentioned in the Mosaic law. (Because of this, at one time the Jews considered excluding the book of Ezekiel from the Bible.) What do you think this shows?

## Ezekiel 43

**Verses 2–4:** In Ezekiel 10:19, the Spirit of the Lord abandoned the temple by way of the east gate and took up his

residence on the Mount of Olives. Here, the Spirit returns to the temple from the east, presumably from the Mount of Olives. What do you make of that?

**Verse 7:** The former temple was described as the footstool of God (e.g., 1 Chronicles 28:2). This temple is described as “the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet.” How is that different? Where do we find God’s throne otherwise? (See, for example, Psalm 132:7.)

What does the difference between the former temple and this temple teach us?

Does this prophecy explain the prophecy of 1 Kings 9:5? If so, how?

**Verse 10:** Ezekiel is commanded to show Israel the plan of the temple so that they will be ashamed of their sins. Why would seeing the plan of the temple have that effect on them? Does this teach us anything about our own lives and our relation to the temple?

**Verse 22:** This is one of the differences between the offerings of the first temple and the offerings of this one: the dedication of the first temple didn’t include the sacrifice of a “kid of the goats,” in other words, a he-goat. (See also verse 25.) Why would the temple of the future offer a he-goat as a sin offering? What might the significance of this offering be?

## Ezekiel 44

**Verse 1:** Why is the east gate to be permanently shut? Of what is its closure a symbol?

**Verse 4:** Why is the ruler of Israel referred to as a prince (*nasi*) here rather than as a king (*melech*)? Who is now the king?

**Verses 4–14:** The Lord speaks of the requirements for temple service. What problem is he speaking of in verses 7 and 9? What would a comparable problem be for us, and how do we guard against it?

In verse 10, the Levites are told that they will have to bear their iniquity. What was that iniquity?

Verse 11 assigns the Levites temple work that previously had been assigned to others, including non-priests; it describes a demotion. Verse 13 continues to describe this demotion: the Aaronic priesthood will not be allowed in the inner courts of the temple. Why this exclusion?

Where might we see a type or shadow of this exclusion in our own temple ritual?

**Verses 15–27:** In Numbers 25:11–13, Phinehas was given the covenant of an everlasting priesthood. Zadok, the high priest in Solomon’s temple, was a descendant of Phinehas, and by Jewish law after David only a descendant of Zadok could be the high priest at the temple. Of what or whom, then, do you think “the sons of Zadok” are a type?

Verse 19 says that the priests must not wear their temple clothing in public, but keep it within the temple. Verse 21 says that the priests of the temple should have medium-length hair: they should neither shave their heads nor let their hair grow long since both were customs of the idolaters. What is the point of these rules?

What does verse 22 tell us about whom the sons of Zadok should marry? How does this apply to us?

What does verse 23 mean? What does it mean to us?

## Ezekiel 47

**Verses 1–12:** Notice that the prophet is guided to what he sees (verse 1). He was previously in the outer court (Ezekiel 46:21–24), where the cooking was done for the temple. Is this change of place in the temple significant for understanding Ezekiel’s vision? Is it significant that he was led? For both questions: if so, how so?

At each thousand cubits from the temple, the stream that comes from underneath the temple is deeper until, at four thousand cubits, it can be crossed only by swimming. Of what might the stream that grows into a river be a symbol?

What might the trees on the sides of the river teach us?

When the waters enter the Dead Sea, they heal it (verses 8–12). Of what do you think that is a symbol?

Try to think of more than one symbol in each case. Which makes the most sense and why? Which group of symbols—for the river, the trees, the Dead Sea—makes the most sense as a group?

**Verses 13–23:** The Lord describes the future borders of Israel. The maps in your Bible can help you see what those borders will be. How would this have been important to the Jewish captives living in Babylon? Is it important to us? How?

## Lesson 45

Daniel 1; 3; and 6; Esther 3–5; 7–8

There is considerable material in the readings for this lesson, so these study questions will concentrate on the book of Esther (the entire book rather than only the parts assigned for Sunday School). They will do that because it is one of the books of the Old Testament with which Latter-day Saints are least familiar. That lack of familiarity is ironic, given that Esther is perhaps the Old Testament book best known among the Jews outside the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament). Esther is the only book that is still usually read from a scroll on ceremonial occasions, and Jews often publish beautiful editions of it.

Esther is the last of five books gathered together as a collection and called the Five Megilloth, meaning “the Five Scrolls.” These books—Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther—are a subcollection within that part of the Old Testament called the Writings. These are books read at each of the Jewish religious feasts:

Song of Songs at Passover (approximately the same time as Easter, a celebration of the angel of death passing over the children of Israel in Egypt)

Ruth at Pentecost (an agricultural festival held fifty days after Passover, in May or June)



Lamentations on the Ninth of Ab (commemorating the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar on the ninth day of the fifth month—July or August on our calendar)

Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles (in Hebrew, *sukkoth*—a feast, usually in October, commemorating the Exodus: people built huts of branches and lived in them for five days)

Esther at Purim (a celebration of Esther saving Israel from annihilation in Babylon, in April or March)

What do you make of the fact that four of the five Jewish religious feasts have something to do with destruction or exile? Why would a people put those events at the heart of their worship? What might it say about their self-understanding? About their relation to God? Does that suggest anything about our religious practices, our self-understanding, or our relation to God, perhaps something we should remember as we worship?

Why do you think the book of Esther and the event that it commemorates is so important to the Jews? What does it mean to them?

How might its meaning for them be relevant to us? What event or events in our history might be comparable in meaning? Is there a danger in comparing their experience and ours? If so, what is that danger?

One of the most striking things about the book of Esther is that it never uses any of the names of divinity, though it is clearly about how God saves his people: an entire book

of scripture that never mentions God. In fact, in places the book seems to go out of its way not to do so. (See, for example, Esther 4:14.) Since that can hardly be an accident, what do you think the best explanation for the omission would be?

The material that follows provides an outline of the story, with some comments about the material and study questions.

## Esther 1

**Verses 1–8:** We learn about the festivals of Ahasueras (485–464 BC). His Greek name is Artaxerxes, and he was the king of Persia. Since Artaxerxes is easier to remember and say, these notes will use that name in the rest of these materials. We are not sure who this king was. The ancient historian Josephus identifies him with Cyrus. Eusebius, a later ancient historian, argues that he must have been king after Darius.

The word translated “feast” means, literally, “a drinking,” since that was the main activity at the feast.

We know that the king was drunk (see verse 10), but there is a good chance that everyone else was also drunk, including Vashti, the king’s wife who is overseeing another feast at the same time.

**Verses 9–12:** Vashti refuses to leave the feast she is overseeing to appear at the king’s feast. Many argue that the command in verse 11, “to bring the queen before the king with the crown royal,” means “wearing *only* the crown.” Whether or not that is true, since the king had absolute power, Vashti’s refusal was dangerous.

**Verses 13–22:** Artaxerxes consults with his wise men—those who know the law (“the times,” verse 13)—about how to deal with Vashti’s refusal. One of them, Memucan, suggests that Vashti has insulted not only the king with her disobedience but also the whole country. She has set a dangerous precedent, he argues, for if the king allows her to get away with her refusal, then other wives will also refuse to do what their husbands tell them to do. Memucan advises Artaxerxes to exile Vashti permanently, and he does.

This tells us a great deal about how the Persians thought of their wives. Can you think of anything in our own culture that is comparable to the way that Memucan thinks of women and, in particular, wives? What does the story of Esther tell us about attitudes like Memucan’s?

As you read the story of Esther, ask yourself what the story teaches about the role of women.

Given that this is such a petty matter, do you think the writer is making fun of the Persians when he refers to the wise men in verse 13 or when he speaks of the rebellion that may arise as a result in verse 18?

Frederic W. Bush quotes D. J. A. Clines:

The opening chapter has set a tone that cannot be forgotten, conditioning the reader not to take the king, his princes, or his law at their face value, and alerting the reader to keep his eyes open for ironies that will doubtless be implicit in the story that is yet to unfold. Without the rather obvious satire of the first chapter we might well be in more doubt over the propriety

of ironic readings in the body of the book. Chapter 1 licenses a hermeneutic of suspicion.<sup>1</sup>

Of what things might we be suspicious as we read the book?

## Esther 2

**Verses 1–4:** It seems that Artaxerxes was remorseful. (That he “remembered Vashti” cannot simply mean that he had forgotten about her.) But since his decree had been made into law, it was irrevocable.

Why would an ancient kingdom have a practice that made the legal decrees of the king irrevocable? How is that an advantage to the kingdom? What might the revocation of a decree suggest about a king?

Since Artaxerxes cannot revoke his decree, his ministers suggest that he search the kingdom for someone to replace Vashti.

What does this suggest about the general status of women in Artaxerxes’s kingdom?

The phrasing of the language in verses 3 and 4 is very similar to the phrasing of Genesis 41:34–37. The person who wrote the book of Esther may be trying to draw a parallel between the story of Joseph and the story of Esther.

What kinds of parallels can you think of between Joseph and Esther? Why would the writer of Esther want to make the stories parallel? What does Esther teach us that we may also see in the story of Joseph?

**Verses 5–7:** Though Mordecai is a Benjamite, he is described as a Jew. Why?

Mordecai has raised the orphan daughter of his uncle whose Hebrew name seems to be Hadassah (“Myrtle”) and whose Persian name was Esther (either “Star” or a variation of the name of the Persian goddess, Ishtar).

**Verses 8–11:** Esther is one of those chosen as a candidate for the king’s wife. Some believe that when verse 8 says that she was “taken,” it means that she was taken by force, against the wishes of Mordecai.

Esther conceals the fact that she is a Jew from the king because Mordecai told her to do so, and Mordecai paces back and forth in front of the king’s harem trying to find out how Esther is doing.

**Verses 12–14:** Each of the women chosen is taken to sleep with Artaxerxes by turns. If the king sends her back to the harem, she remains his wife but will not see him again unless the king calls her by name to come back to the palace. In all probability, she will spend the rest of her life in the harem, a concubine (a wife with secondary status) of the king living as if she were a widow.

**Verses 15–18:** When Esther’s turn comes, the king falls in love with her and makes her his queen (his primary wife).

**Verses 19–23:** Still Esther does not reveal to the king that she is a Jew because Mordecai has told her not to do so.

Compare Esther’s behavior to that of Daniel and his companions. They live in the court of the king, but they refuse not to do the things that Jews do, so they are immediately

noticed as different, and those differences create problems for them. In contrast, Esther is married to the king and no one has yet noticed that she is any different from other Persians. It seems that she was not living any differently than those around her. There are times when it is important that we insist on our differences from others, as with Daniel, and there are times when it is important that we not insist on them, as with Esther. How do we differentiate those times?

Mordecai learns of a plot to assassinate the king and tells Esther of the plot. In turn, she tells the king and tells him that she has learned this from Mordecai. The king's scribes record what Mordecai has done in the royal chronicles.

### Esther 3

**Verses 1–5:** The king chooses Haman, a descendent of Agag, king of Amalek (see 1 Samuel 15:9), as his prime minister. Mordecai and Haman are from families that have traditionally been enemies. When the other servants bow down to Haman, Mordecai refuses to do so and Haman becomes angry with him.

Verse 4 tells us that Mordecai had told the other servants that he was a Jew, presumably as his explanation for why he wouldn't bow down. But it wasn't forbidden for the Jews to bow down to a ruler (see Genesis 42:6 and 43:28, for example), so why do you think Mordecai refused to do so?

If Mordecai was willing to let the other servants know that he is a Jew, why did he tell Esther that she ought not to reveal that she is a Jew?

**Verses 6–11:** Haman knows that it will look bad if he merely takes revenge on Mordecai. He will obviously be acting arbitrarily, and he doesn't want to seem arbitrary. So he plots to have all Jews in Persia killed!

What is it about the Jews that offends Haman? What is comparable today to having a large group of people spread throughout the country with a different culture?

What does Haman's reasoning tell us about his character?

Though few of us would be as evil as Haman, do we ever do what he did here, try to avoid appearing to do some smaller evil by doing a great evil? Is taking revenge against a whole group because of a problem with one person or a small group of people something that we see in our own day? Is it something that is sometimes done to us? Is it something that we sometimes do to others? How do we avoid falling into this behavior unconsciously?

Haman tells the king that there are people in the kingdom who have their own laws (which is true) and who do not obey the laws of the land (which is probably not generally true, for it would be contrary to the teachings of Jeremiah; see Jeremiah 29:7). Haman adds a bribe to his lie about the Jews: ten thousand talents of silver. The weight of a talent varied, but in the late Old Testament period, it seems to have been about 20.4 kg. So if the number recorded is accurate and not exaggerated (and it may be exaggerated to make a point), Haman offered the king 204,000 kilograms (448,800 pounds) of silver! Verse 11 may seem to suggest that the king did not accept the bribe or that he paid Haman instead. However, Esther 4:7 tells

us that King Artaxerxes accepted the bribe. Artaxerxes tells Haman to do what he wants to with these people, and he gives him his seal as a sign of the king's authority.

**Verses 12–15:** The decree is made in the city, and immediately letters go out to all of the provinces of the Persian empire instructing officials there to kill all the Jews and to seize their property. The decree specifies the date on which the slaughter is to occur.

Notice the literary power of verse 15: Haman orders the slaughter of tens of thousands of people, and then he and the king sit down to feast. The people of the city of Shushan are perplexed by the decree. Perhaps the verse also means that they were perplexed by the nonchalance with which Haman and the king could order such a thing.

## Esther 4

**Verses 1–3:** On hearing of the decree, Mordecai and all of the Jews go into deep mourning.

**Verses 4–8:** In the palace, Esther is unaware of the decree and seems to be unaware that the Jews as a whole are mourning. But she does hear of Mordecai's mourning, and she sends him clothing, for when he is wearing the sackcloth of mourning he cannot enter into the palace to talk with her. Mordecai won't accept the clothing, so he cannot come into the palace.

Esther sends a servant, Hathach, to ask Mordecai why he is mourning. Mordecai tells Hathach everything, including the bribe, and he gives Hathach a copy of the decree. Mordecai



tells Hathach to tell Esther that she must go to the king and beg him for the lives of his people.

**Verses 9–12:** When Esther hears Mordecai’s demand, she responds by reminding him that if she appears before the king without being summoned, she will be executed unless the king chooses to spare her—and she hasn’t been summoned to the king for a month.

**Verses 12–17:** Mordecai reminds Esther that because of the decree she will be killed if she does *not* appear before the king. Esther asks Mordecai to have all of the Jews of the city to fast with her and her maidens. Then she will appear before the king.

What does Esther mean when she says, “If I perish, I perish”? Compare this to Daniel 3:17–18. What kind of attitude does this reveal, and how can we emulate that attitude? Should we emulate it? If not, why not? If so, when?

Ambrose (AD 337–497) points out that we see a number of unusual acts in this story:

1. Esther exposed herself to death when she could have avoided it.
2. Artaxerxes honored Mordecai, though Mordecai had revealed the weakness of his kingdom.
3. Artaxerxes had the second most powerful person in his kingdom executed, probably his best friend, because he had given him bad counsel.

What things might we learn from these aspects of the story?

## Esther 5

**Verses 1–4:** Esther appears before the king in her royal robes. Notice the parallel between Vashti and Esther: Vashti refused to appear when she was summoned to appear naked, and Esther appeared clothed when she was not summoned. What do you think this reversed parallel suggests?

The king not only spares Esther's life, but he offers her anything she wants, up to half of the kingdom (which is probably not a serious possibility, but a formal exaggeration intended to let her know that she can ask for a great deal).

**Verses 5–8:** Esther asks only that the king and Haman come to a banquet that she has prepared. In verse 6, at the banquet, the king repeats his offer. He seems to know that she hadn't risked her life only to invite him to a banquet. But Esther requests the same thing again: let Haman and the king come to another banquet.

Why does Esther's keep putting off the king? What is the point of this elaborate plan? Mordecai has instructed her to tell the king that she is a Jew so that he will not kill her people, but she goes far beyond merely doing that, inventing an ingenious plan for saving them. What does her ingenuity teach?

**Verses 9–14:** Haman is happy to be invited, but his happiness turns to anger when, once again, he feels that Mordecai is slighting him. He tells his wife and friends how he has been elevated in the kingdom and that he is rich and has been invited to the queen's special banquet for only Haman

and the king, but none of that is enough as long as Mordecai is sitting at the king's gate.

In what ways are we sometimes like Haman?

His wife and friends tell him that he should build a gallows and hang Mordecai on the gallows before the banquet.

## Esther 6

**Verses 1–11:** Unable to sleep, the king has his servants read from the royal chronicles. They read to him about how Mordecai saved him from assassination by reporting the plot. When the king asks what reward Mordecai was given, he discovers that he was given no reward. Asking who was available in the court, the king was told that Haman was. Haman, waiting outside to visit the king in order to arrange for Mordecai's execution, is summoned before the king and asked what the king should do for someone he wants to honor. Thinking that the king wants to honor him, Mordecai suggests that the king should honor such a person by putting royal clothing on him, mounting him on the royal horse, and parading him through the city as if he were the king. The king thinks this is an excellent idea and commands that Haman, Mordecai's enemy, clothe Mordecai in royal clothing, put him on the king's horse, and parade him through Shushan saying, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor."

What can we learn from this story? Why do you think this part of the story is so popular with those who read it?

**Verses 12–14:** Humiliated, Haman returns to his house where his wife and friends tell him that, because Mordecai is a Jew, Haman cannot win against him.

What do they mean by what they say? Is what they say true in spite of what they mean?

With that advice, Haman leaves for the banquet.

## Esther 7

**Verses 1–6:** The king once again repeats his request: “name what you want and it is yours.” Esther says, “Spare me, spare my people.” Angry at the idea that someone would threaten his wife and her people, Artaxerxes demands to know who it is, and Esther tells him: wicked Haman.

**Verses 7–10:** In a fury, the king goes into the garden. Terrified, Haman throws himself on the queen’s couch to plead for her intercession (like the Greeks and others, the Persians ate lying on couches rather than sitting in chairs). But when the king comes back in and sees Haman on Esther’s couch, he thinks that Haman is trying to rape her, and he has Haman hanged on the gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai.

Should Esther have corrected the king’s misperception about what Haman was trying to do? Even if she did, why might the writer of the story not include that?

## Esther 8

**Verses 1–2:** Esther is given Haman’s property (it was normal for the property of an executed criminal to become

the property of the king). The king makes Mordecai the prime minister and Esther makes him the steward over Haman's property.

**Verses 3–7:** Esther asks the king to revoke the decree calling for the extermination of the Jews.

**Verses 8–14:** Artaxerxes tells Esther and Haman to decree whatever they wish concerning the Jews, though we know already that they cannot reverse the previous decree. They have to find a way of saving the Jews with a decree that doesn't reverse the previous decree.

Mordecai sends out a decree granting the Jews in Shushan and all of the provinces the right to defend themselves against attack on the day that they are to be slaughtered. They are only granted the right of self-defense, not the right of attack, but as was customary, they are granted the right to seize the property of all those whom they destroy.

What is the writer showing us about Mordecai?

**Verses 15–17:** The Jews rejoice at this turn of events by feasting, and many who were not Jews are converted.

What does their conversion signify, a change of belief or opportunism? What do you think the writer wants us to see by those conversions?

## Esther 9

**Verses 1–10:** The Jews slay those who sought to destroy them (their understanding of self-defense didn't require that the other person attack first, only that he be someone whom one expects to attack), and they are aided by many

of those in the Persian government. They kill five hundred people in the capital, Shushan, as well as Haman and his ten sons. But they do not take any of the property of those they kill.

**Verses 11–17:** The king once more tells Esther that she can ask for whatever she wishes and he will give it to her. She asks for one more day for the Jews to be able to kill their enemies, and he grants her request. She also asks that the ten sons of Haman be hanged. Since they had been executed by hanging earlier in the day, this seems to be a request that the sons (or their heads) be impaled publicly, a common way of continuing punishment after death and making an example of wrongdoers.

The Jews kill three hundred more of their enemies in Shushan on the next day. We learn that in the provinces they slew seventy-five thousand of their enemies. Again, the Jews refrained from taking the property of those they killed.

How are we supposed to understand this massacre—not “How do we understand this, given our moral system?” but “How were the first readers of this text supposed to understand it?”

Why would the Jews refrain from taking the property when it was legal and customary to do so? What do they show by not taking it? Is there anything comparable to this in our own lives?

**Verses 18–19:** The Jews celebrate their salvation with a feast.

**Verses 20–23:** Mordecai institutes the feast as an official feast: Purim (“Lots”; see Esther 3:7).

**Verses 24–28:** The writer gives a summary of the story.

# Lesson 46

## Daniel 2

### Daniel 2

**Verses 4–5:** Why does the king make this demand on his wise men?

**Verses 10–12:** What did it mean to be a wise man in Babylon? Why was the king angry?

Why do you think that the gods of Babylon are never mentioned in this story, not even negatively?

**Verse 24:** Why does Daniel save the other wise men of Babylon?

**Verse 28:** Why would a king living hundreds of years before Christ's birth be interested in what would happen at the age when the end of the world would come? ("Latter days" is probably better translated "at the end of days.") Why should anyone but those who live in the latter days care about them?

Books about the last days and prophecies of them were not uncommon during the time after the Jewish exile in Babylon, but why?

Why are they still important to us?

**Verse 32:** The Greek poet Hesiod uses the image of world history having four parts, each less happy than the last, and



each designated by a metal of decreasing value: gold, silver, bronze, iron. The Persians had a similar understanding of the ages of human existence: gold, silver, steel, and iron mixed with clay. Nebuchadnezzar's dream is a mixture of the two traditions. Why would a revelation from the God of Israel come to Nebuchadnezzar in those terms?

**Verse 34:** What is the stone cut from the mountain without hands? Why do you think that? How does your identification of that stone fit with your identification of the parts of the image in the next verses? Can this image have more than one meaning?

**Verses 36–45:** It appears that the Jews before Christ's time understood world history to be encapsulated in the reigns of the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Greeks. So it was probably in those terms that the prophecy was understood up to the time of Christ.

The traditional Catholic interpretation was that the four parts of the image represent the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, culminating in the birth of Christ.

Joseph Smith didn't seem particularly interested in discussing those kingdoms.<sup>1</sup>

**Verses 41–44:** However, Joseph Smith *was* interested in the feet and toes:

The feet of the image, is the government of these united States, other Nations & Kingdoms are looking up to her, for an example, of union freedom and equal rights, and therefore worship her, like as Daniel saw in the vision, although they are beginning to loose

confidence in her, seeing the broils and discord that distract, her political & religious horizon; this Image is characteristic of all governments and institutions or most of them; as they begin with a head of gold and terminate in the contemptible feet of Iron & clay: making a splendid appearance at first, proposing to do much more than they can perform, and finally end in degradation and sink, in infamy; we should not only start to come out of Babylon but leave it entirely lest we are overthrown in her ruins.<sup>2</sup>

How did Joseph Smith understand the prophecy of Daniel? What import does it have for us today?

How did Joseph Smith understand what it meant to come out of Babylon? How ought we to understand it?

**Verse 44:** What kingdom will consume all other kingdoms? What is the relation of the LDS Church to that kingdom?

Given these biblical and prophetic teachings, why does the LDS Church require our obedience to earthly governments?

THE OLD TESTAMENT MADE HARDER: SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

## Lesson 47

Ezra 1–8; Nehemiah 1–2; 4; 6; 8

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were considered one book until well after the time of Christ.

The rough chronology below will help place this week's material in its historical context (all dates are BC).

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 606 | The fall of Nineveh, capital of Assyria. Babylon becomes the major power. Daniel and others are taken to Babylon from Israel.   |
| 604 | Nebuchadnezzar is king of Babylon.  |
| 598 | Judah's king, Jehoiachin, and the prophet Ezekiel (with thousands of others) are carried captive into Babylon. Lehi leaves Jerusalem. Habakkuk and Ezekiel prophesy.        |
| 587 | The fall of Jerusalem; much of the population of Judah is taken captive into Babylon. Some, including Jeremiah (who is a hostage), escape to Egypt. Mulek leaves Jerusalem. |
| 562 | The death of Nebuchadnezzar and the beginning of the decline of Babylon.  |

- 538 Babylon (in modern-day Iraq) falls to Cyrus, king of Persia (in modern-day Iran). Cyrus reads the Hebrew scriptures and encourages the Jews to return to Jerusalem.
- 535 Zerubbabel and Jeshua lead approximately 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.
- 533 The cornerstone of the temple is laid.
- 522 Haggai and Zechariah encourage the Jews to finish the temple after Samaritan opposition and Jewish indifference had forced a stoppage. King Darius of Persia commands the opposition to cease.
- 516 Zerubbabel's temple is completed.
- 486 Esther, wife of King Xerxes in Persia (460 BC?).
- 458 Ezra leads a second group (of 1,496 exiles) back to Jerusalem.
- 445 Nehemiah (Artaxerxes's cupbearer) arrives in Jerusalem.
- 433 Nehemiah returns to the service of Artaxerxes in Persia.
- 431 Nehemiah's second mission to Jerusalem; the probable time of Malachi.

## Outline

The facts about the return of the Jews from exile are not clear. There are a number of difficulties created by the different versions of the return story in these documents. In fact, many scholars believe that the records have been purposefully altered. So the following reconstruction of the events of the return are a good guess, but they remain hypothetical.

1. Cyrus, king of Persia, allows the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4).
2. Under the direction of Zerubbabel and Joshua, a group returns to rebuild the temple. Zerubbabel was a Jewish political leader who was appointed governor of Palestine by Cyrus; he was also one of Jesus's ancestors. (See Matthew 1:12 and Luke 3:27.) Jeshua was the high priest (Ezra 2:2; 3:2–8; 5:2; Nehemiah 7:7; 12:1; see also Haggai 1:1–14; Zechariah 4:6–10).
3. In the first year, Zerubbabel and Jeshua build the altar of burnt offerings and reinstitute the Mosaic sacrifices (Ezra 3:2–6).
4. In the second year, they begin to build the temple itself (Ezra 3:8–13).
5. The Samaritans—descendants of those left behind when Israel and Judah were carried into captivity—offer to help build the temple. However, because the Jews reject their offer, they cause the work to cease temporarily (Ezra 4:1–24; 5:1–4).

6. Haggai and Zechariah persuade the Israelites to continue building the temple (Ezra 5:1–2; Haggai 1:1–14).
7. The temple is completed following an edict from Darius, the king of Persia, to allow the work to go forward (Ezra 5:3–15).
8. Ezra, a scribe, leads a second migration from Babylon and becomes a teacher for his people (Ezra 7).
9. Nehemiah, the Jewish leader of those remaining in Persia and the king's cupbearer, travels to Jerusalem from Babylon with the blessings of King Artaxerxes and supervises the rebuilding of the protective wall around Jerusalem despite opposition from the Samaritans, Ammonites, and Arabs (Nehemiah 1–2; 4).
10. Ezra teaches his people the law of Moses and leads them to renew their covenants (Nehemiah 8). (Some contemporary scholars believe that this may be one of the occasions when the scriptures were edited.)
11. Nehemiah returns to Babylon for a while, and then once again comes back to Jerusalem. He finds the people already beginning to renege on their covenants. Nehemiah initiates a religious revival (Nehemiah 13:6–31).

## Ezra 1

**Verses 1–6 (and Ezra 2:64–65):** Why does Cyrus allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem? (See also Isaiah 44:28.)

**Verses 3–6:** To what two groups does Cyrus address his proclamation? What does he expect of each group?

### Ezra 3

**Verse 2:** The priesthood leader who leads a major group from Babylon to Israel was named Jeshua—or Joshua or Jesus, each a different way of spelling the same name in English. The name Joshua means “Yahweh saves.” Is it significant that for both the first return to the promised land (coming from Egypt) and this one (coming from Babylon), the children of Israel are led by a man whose name is a form of Jesus? What do you make of that?

### Ezra 4

**Verses 1–5:** Why wouldn’t the Israelites accept help from the Samaritans in rebuilding the temple? Does this story have anything to do with the hatred of the Samaritans that we see in the New Testament (for example, in the story of the Good Samaritan)? Can we trust the reason given in Ezra to be accurate? In other words, is it free from self-justification? If not, what might the real reason for refusing their help have been?

**Verses 6–8:** What was a scribe in ancient Israel? *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* says this of the scribes:

In Ezra 8–10, Ezra the scribe functions as the leader of the returnees in conjunction with leading priests, Levites, and families. Though Ezra is of high priestly stock, he does not officiate at the cult [i.e., in the temple



rituals] but is a religious leader, while Nehemiah is governor (Nehemiah 8–9). As such he exercised the office of teacher and priest by reading from the Law to the people while a group of Levites helped the people understand the law and led the people in prayer and sacrifice (Ezra 8).

[Ezra] was certainly a recognized authority in the Jewish community because he was of high priestly descent and also learned in the law. He had enough access to the Persian court to obtain a favor from the king and enough community standing to lead a group to Jerusalem and establish himself there. The continuing problems with intermarriage and the opposition to Ezra indicate that he was one of a number of influential and powerful forces in the Jerusalem community but that his views did not immediately predominate.

One other scribe appears in Ezra and Nehemiah—Zadok, who was appointed with a priest and Levite to be a treasurer of the storehouses where the tithes were brought (Neh 12:12–13). This text suggests that scribes were part of society and its leadership in Jerusalem. In the postexilic Jewish community the roles of priests, Levites, scribes, and other Jewish leaders overlapped. Ezra was a priest, scribe, and community leader, and possibly a government-appointed leader (Ezra 7).

How has Israelite worship changed from what it was prior to the exile?

After the return from exile, who seems to have the most authority, and what seems to have become the most impor-

tant aspect of worship? What implications does this have for people at the time of Christ?

## Nehemiah 1

**Verses 5–11:** Can you put Nehemiah’s prayer in your own words?

Why does he begin with a confession of sin? Why does he confess that his father has sinned?

What is he suggesting in verses 8–10?

What is he asking for in verse 11?

**Verses 1–16:** Why does Nehemiah keep his travels around Jerusalem secret?

## Nehemiah 4

**Verses 7–8:** Why would non-Israelites have been opposed to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem?

**Verses 1–10:** Why were some Jews in bondage to others?

Why is Nehemiah angry? Our economy could not function without “usury”—in other words, if those who loaned money did not receive interest, the money a lender charges another person for using his money. (*Use* and *usury* have the same root.)

We allow usury and don’t always consider it to be economic bondage. But are there kinds of economic bondage into which we place each other? If so, how can we free those whom we have placed in that bondage?

## Nehemiah 8

**Verses 8–9, 12–14:** Compare this meeting to that organized by King Benjamin (Mosiah 2–5). How are the two similar in content, audience, delivery, response, and so on?

Why do the people weep when they hear the Law?

What does verse 14 tell us about their knowledge of the Law?

This is the second time we have seen the people of Israel discover that they have not been keeping the law, and then mourning in response. The first was during the reign of Josiah. (See 2 Chronicles 34:14–35:6.) What do these stories suggest about how we should understand Israelite worship during most of the Old Testament times?

How does our response to scripture compare to that of Ezra's people? How is scripture important to us?

# Lesson 48

Zechariah 10–14; Malachi

## Zechariah 1

**Verses 7–6, 8:** We *may* be able to read the first six chapters of Zechariah as having a roughly chiasmic structure. As with many chiasmuses, however, deciding whether this is a chiasmus is a matter of judgment rather than fact.

- A 1:7–17: The Lord’s omniscience
- B 1:18–21: Judah and the empires
- C 2:1–5: Jerusalem’s territory (2:6–13: reiterates the first three parts)
- D 3:1–10: Joshua the high priest
- D’ 4:1–14: The temple itself
- C’ 5:1–4: Jerusalem’s self-rule (the scroll of the law?)
- B’ 5:5–11: Judah and Persia (perhaps a “counter-temple”?)
- A’ 6:1–8: The Lord’s omnipotence

If this analysis is correct, the chiastic structure helps us understand better some of the more difficult parts of Zechariah's vision. Earlier parts of the chiasm help "define" later, more obscure parts.

Notice that each step in the chiasm progressively narrows the scope from the Lord to the international empires to Jerusalem and to Joshua (Jeshua) and the temple. The focus of the vision is clearly on the priesthood and on the temple standing at the "center" of the world.

The return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple were of critical interest to the Jews. Why? Many had become quite settled and successful in Babylon. What would be the appeal of returning to the Jerusalem area? (We can reasonably suppose that a number remained behind.)

What part might prophecies like Zechariah's have played in the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the temple?

Prior to the exile, there had been several temples in Israel. Temples outside of Jerusalem weren't unheard of. For example, in addition to the temples in places like Beth-el, the Israelites who escaped into Egypt built a temple there. Why hadn't they built a temple in Babylon? When they returned, why did they rebuild only one?

## Zechariah 6

**Verses 9–15:** What purpose do the three men mentioned in verse 10 (and again in verse 14—Heldai is probably the same person as Helem) serve? What is Joshua's significance?

To understand this prophecy fully, it is important to remember that Joshua is Jesus's name in Hebrew. What is the significance of the crowns? What might they represent?

## Zechariah 10

**Verses 6–8:** How would these prophecies and related ones in 12:3–5 and 14:6–9 have been important to Jews at the time of the return from exile in Babylon? Why would Messianic prophecies be important to them? How are they important to us today? What difference does it make whether we know what will happen at the end if we live our lives as we ought day by day?

The book of Zechariah is an excellent prophecy for seeing how prophecy can have multiple fulfillments. Was this prophecy fulfilled during the lifetime of Zechariah? If so, how? If not, what meaning did it have for the people of his time? How was it fulfilled with the first coming of the Savior? How will it be fulfilled with his second coming?

## Malachi 1

**Verses 6–8, 11–14:** What is the Lord's complaint against the priests? What does this tell us about Malachi's day? How do these verses apply to us?

## Malachi 2

**Verses 1–9:** These verses give more details of the complaint. What does it mean to "cause many to stumble at the law" (verse 8)? How might the priests have corrupted the covenant?

## Malachi 3

**Verses 1–4:** What must happen before the Levites can again offer a righteous offering? Compare these verses to D&C 13. How are these two passages of scripture related to each other?

**Verses 5, 7–8, 14–15:** What is the connection between the sins listed in Malachi 3:5 and those listed in verses 7–8?

Why does tithing come up in a complaint about Israelite failure to keep the ordinances?

Can you think of contemporary equivalents to the sins described in verses 14–15?

## Malachi 4

**Verses 5–6:** How would Israelites listening to or reading Malachi's prophecy have understood verses 5–6? How is their understanding related to the way we use these verses today?

# Endnotes

## Background Information

1. He appears to do so in several places, for example, in Romans 5:12; compare Wisdom 2:24.
2. Marcion was a second-century-AD Christian who rejected the use of the Hebrew Bible and all of what came to be the New Testament except parts of Luke (which he edited) and ten of Paul's letters. He believed that the God of Israel was a different god than the God of the New Testament. According to Marcion, the God of Israel was a malevolent god.
3. E.g., Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 18.
4. Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 17.
5. The Coptic and Ethiopian churches also include more books in their versions of the Old Testament than do the Protestants. The Coptic Church is a very old Christian church (in existence since AD 451) and is the largest Christian church in Egypt, though its members live also in other places. As its name suggests, the Ethiopian Church is a



branch of the Coptic Church that is now recognized as a separate church. Most of its membership is in Ethiopia.

6. For other scriptures that also reflect it, see Zechariah 7:12; Matthew 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16; 24:44; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; Romans 3:21; 3 Nephi 12:17; 14:12; 15:10; and D&C 59:22.

## Understanding and Studying the Old Testament

1. On searching the scriptures, see also Proverbs 25:2; Ecclesiastes 1:13; 7:25; 1 Nephi 5:10; 2 Nephi 5:33; 32:7; Jacob 4:6; Mosiah 1:7; Alma 14:1; 33:2; 3 Nephi 10:14; 20:11; 23:1, 5; Mormon 8:23; Moroni 7:19; and D&C 1:37.

## Overview of Genesis

1. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004), 44.

2. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), xxi.

3. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 10.

4. Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 11.

5. Cited in Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 29.

6. Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 29.

7. Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 29.

## Lesson 2

1. For more on the history of the idea of facts, see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

## Lesson 3

1. Gregory K. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/1 (March 2005): 7–8.

2. See, for example, Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 175.

3. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 50).

## Lesson 4

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 76.

2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 322.

3. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 84.

## Lesson 6

1. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part II: From Noah to Abraham* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1949), 113.

2. Cassuto, *Genesis, Part II*, 158.
3. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 198.

## Lesson 7

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 256–58.

## Lesson 8

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 47.

## Lesson 9

1. Johann Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Genesis* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 410.
2. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1998), 16.
3. I have taken these four ways, loosely, from Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*.

## Lesson 10

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 178.
2. See David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 193–200.

## Lesson 11

1. For an excellent discussion of this chapter, read Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 445–75.
2. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 344.
3. Cited in William David Reayburn and Euan McGregor Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 848.
4. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 364.
5. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 107–12.
6. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 423–27.

## Lesson 12

1. Joseph Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1959), 48.
2. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 318–419.

## Lesson 14

1. André LaCocque, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” in André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 71–109, esp. 74–75.

2. John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 274.

## Lesson 15

1. Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar (Numbers)*, trans. Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: Eliner Library, Dept. for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, The Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, 1993), 260.

2. Quoted in Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar (Numbers)*, 264.

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1. Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, vol. 5, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1984), 263.

2. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 437.

3. Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar (Numbers)* trans. Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1982).

4. Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar (Numbers)*, 3 284.

5. Ashley, *Book of Numbers*, 445–46.

6. Ashley, *Book of Numbers*, 454.

7. David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:546.

8. See Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar (Numbers)*, 316–17.

9. Leibowitz, *Studies in Bamidbar (Numbers)*, 326–27.

## Lesson 17

1. In Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 1:102.
2. See, for example, André LaCocque, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” in André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 71–109.

## Lesson 18

1. Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, vol. 7, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Inc., 1984), 10.
2. David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:549.
3. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 1:147–48.

## Lesson 21

1. David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 160–61.

## Lesson 22

1. David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 270.

2. Cited in Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, vol. 10, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1983), 85.

## Lesson 25

1. Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 420.

## Lesson 27

1. Andrew C. Skinner, “Kings and Prophets in Divided Israel,” in *Studies in Scripture, vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 22n5.

2. Simon J. Devries, *1 Kings*, vol. 12, Word Biblical Commentary, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 163.

3. Devries, *1 Kings*, 173.

## Lesson 28

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 337.

2. *History of the Church*, 6:254.

3. Private communication.

## Lesson 31

1. A. Schoors. “La structure littéraire de Qohéleth,” *Orientalia lovaniensia periodica* 13:91–116 (1982).

## Lesson 32

1. David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, vol. 17, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1989), ix.
2. Richard G. Scott, "Trust in the Lord," *Ensign*, October 1995.

## Lesson 33

1. I have adapted parts of these from a work that Arthur Bassett did several years ago, but don't hold him responsible for any mistakes you see here. They are probably mine.
2. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana, IL: Illini Books, 1996), 283.
3. Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Johah*, vol. 31, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 451.
4. *Journal of Discourses*, 7:333.
5. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 1:635.
6. Brown, Fitzmeyer, and Murphy, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1:636.

## Lesson 34

1. Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical



Commentary on the Bible, trans. Gary Stansell, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), xxix.

2. Wolff, *Hosea*, 214.

### Lesson 35

1. David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:143.

2. Kelly Ogden, “The Book of Amos,” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 54–55.

### Lesson 36

1. For more understanding of the importance of Isaiah in the latter days, see also 1 Nephi 15:20; 19:23; 2 Nephi 6:4–5; 11:8; Helaman 8:20; 3 Nephi 20:11–12; and Joseph Smith—History 1:40.

2. N. De Caqueray, cited in Marlène Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 47n35.

3. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, vol. \*\*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1985), xxv–xxvi.

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1. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 330.

2. Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–45*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 346.
3. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 365–66.

## Lesson 40

1. Brigham Young in October Conference 1849, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:333.
2. Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 430–31.
3. John D. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, vol. 25, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 233–35.
4. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 465.
3. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 245–46.

## Lesson 41

1. Barday M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on Jeremiah* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003), 61.

## Lesson 43

1. See, for example, Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 273–74.

## Lesson 45

1. Cited in Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, vol. 9, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1996), 355.

## Lesson 46

1. See Dean C. Jessee, comp., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 77.
2. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 77–78; spelling and capitalization modernized.