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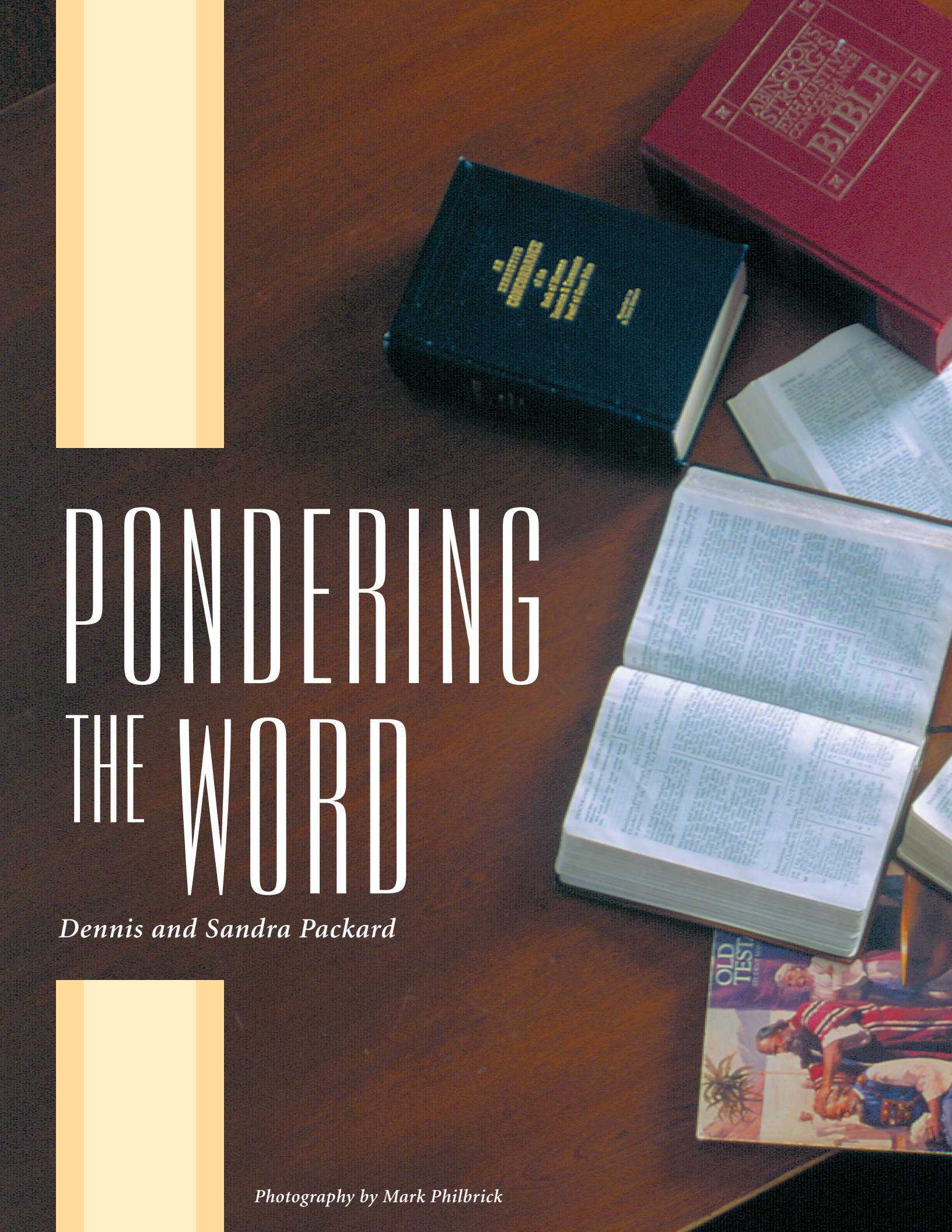
Title Pondering the Word

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Abstract Despite the emphasis that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints places on scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, some members find it difficult to truly love the scriptures. This article claims that by pondering the scriptures often, members can better understand and appreciate the prophetic words. In order to find a deeper love for the scriptures, readers should consider the following details while reading: the setting of a passage; the meaning of various words and phrases; the author's attitude when he wrote the passage; the possible comparisons between passages; the possible implied messages of the authors; the possible reasons for the inclusion of a specific passage; the organization of the scriptures; the repetition of ideas, words, and sounds; and the emphasis of certain words. By pondering each of these aspects, readers can gain a greater love for and appreciation of the scriptures.



PONDERING THE WORD

Dennis and Sandra Packard

Photography by Mark Philbrick

AMERICAN
DICTIONARY OF
THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE



NOAH WEBSTER 1828

Open dictionary page showing text columns.

Open dictionary page being pointed to by a red pencil.

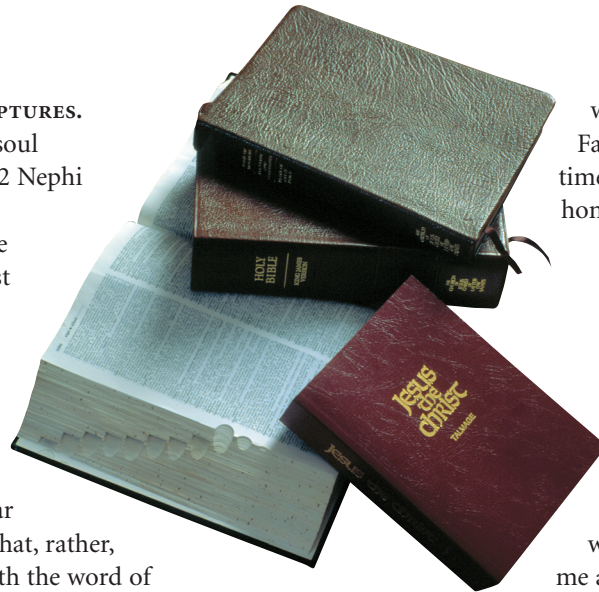
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Bibliography class
Read book - The American Language
by Noah Webster - 1828
1844
1890
1961
American Language - Webster
1828 - 1829 - Dr. Cass



SOME PEOPLE LOVE THE SCRIPTURES.

Anciently, Nephi wrote, “My soul delighteth in the scriptures” (2 Nephi 4:15). Today, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, of the Council of the Twelve, writes, “Surely the best of the ‘best books’ are the scriptures.”¹ And President Gordon B. Hinckley writes, “I am grateful for emphasis on reading the scriptures. I hope that for you this will become something far more enjoyable than a duty; that, rather, it will become a love affair with the word of God. I promise you that as you read, your minds will be enlightened and your spirits will be lifted. At first it may seem tedious, but that will change into a wondrous experience with thoughts and words of things divine.”²

Other people are less enthusiastic. A dedicated Sunday School in-service teacher, with a master’s degree, asks in a candid moment, “Why aren’t the scriptures better written? They are so hard to understand.” A stake leader warns her teachers, “You will have to use the scriptures for some of the lessons in the manual. There is no other way.” A sacrament meeting speaker, apparently concerned about putting people to sleep, apologizes for reading a verse of scripture. A speaker in general priesthood



which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time. Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand” (3 Nephi 17:2–3).

He has repeated this counsel in our time: “My friends, I leave these sayings with you to ponder in your hearts, with this commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall call upon me while I am near—Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me;

ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (D&C 88:62–63). So when we don’t understand and appreciate the scriptures, the Lord’s counsel is to ponder and pray about them. More specifically, we are to ponder first and then to pray. As the Lord says, “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:8).

The Lord’s counsel is good, but many of us have our reasons for not following it. For one thing, most of us are unaccustomed to pondering: “I hardly ever have to read anything with that much attention. It sounds like hard work.” A lot of us feel we don’t have the time: “I just have

THE ABILITY TO NOTICE AND INTERPRET DETAILS TYPICALLY DISTINGUISHES AN EXPERT FROM A LAYMAN.

meeting begins to read a long passage from the Book of Mormon, and a yawn contagiously spreads through the tabernacle. A devoted father wonders, “Why should I read the scriptures if I live and teach gospel principles?” A bishop, in desperation, urges his members to at least hold the Book of Mormon once a day and see if perhaps they don’t find the book opening and themselves reading.

Why do many active members of the church not love the scriptures? We believe it is because they haven’t learned to ponder them. To ponder, according to Webster, means “to weigh in the mind; to think or consider especially quietly, soberly, and deeply.” After a lengthy discourse, the Savior told the Nephites they needed time to ponder and pray about what he was saying: “I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words

too much to do to be sitting around thinking about what a scripture means.” Many of us don’t trust ourselves to probe deeply: “I’ll start asking silly questions and feel stupid. I might even start asking weird questions that will just get me confused and make me think the scriptures can’t hold up, and then I might lose my testimony and become a heretic.” Some of us haven’t yet realized that we can actually learn from the scriptures: “I really don’t know how the Lord let it happen, but the scriptures are usually boring—the same old thing over and over again—or else they are obscure. Maybe the Lord intended the boring parts for those who have to be told over and over again, and the perplexing parts for the scribes, who like that sort of thing.” Whatever the cause, the result of not thoughtfully, prayerfully considering the scriptures

as we read them is the same: we endure them; we don't delight in them.

We might ask why the scriptures have to be pondered to be understood and appreciated. After all, we don't need to ponder newspapers or magazines. We understand them at a first reading. What makes the scriptures different?

An analogy might help. The scriptures are like a symphony. The problem with a symphony, if it can be called a problem, is that there is so much going on at the same time that an inexperienced listener feels bewildered, not knowing what to listen for, or how to make sense of everything. But the music lover knows what to do. He picks out a theme carried by the string section, compares it to a variation on that theme by the oboes, and hears the composer being playful or reflective or joyful. Unlike the novice, he hears and feels the effects of the details that give the symphony, in all its complexity, its power and impact.



The ability to notice and interpret details typically distinguishes an expert from a layman. When an architect looks at a cathedral, a bridge, or a house, she sees more than most of us do, and not because she has better eyesight. What she sees is there for all to see. But she knows what to look for. So does a person who appreciates the

visual arts. Such a person sees a painting differently than a novice. Her eyes move differently, stopping on different features, connecting different points, tracing otherwise unnoticed patterns.

When most of us listen to someone speaking, we are content to get the gist of the message. But a person of discernment notices the tone of voice, the expressions on the speaker's face, the choice of words, and sees into the speaker's soul. Hugh Nibley writes of Brigham Young:

A big black leather chair stood in Brigham Young's office by the Lion House; it faced the window on the opposite wall and the President's desk in the middle of the room. First-time visitors to the office were invited to sit on that chair, facing the strong light of day and the calm blue eyes of Brother Brigham, who sat there at his desk, his back to the window, quietly waiting for

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his guest to say something. After all, the man had come to see him, and it was only right to let him state his business. President Young, according to Grandfather [Charles W. Nibley], would never say a word for the first three minutes. And at the end of those first three minutes he always

knew exactly the sort of man he was dealing with, and the nature—greedy, benign, or sinister—of his business. “And he *never* (here Grandpa smote the arm of his chair) had to change his mind!”—his psychoanalytical techniques, black leather couch and all, were deadly accurate. Brigham Young used to say that no man, if allowed to speak, could possibly avoid revealing his true character.³

A person’s true character, however, is revealed only to the observant, pondering listener. Like symphonic music, cathedrals, paintings, and speech, the scriptures are rich with details to ponder. And it is precisely the richness of the scriptures, the intricately woven truths they contain, that makes them enduring, that makes us want to go back to ponder them again and again. They aren’t like most popular books or songs whose total content is exhausted in one quick reading or hearing. Their culinary equivalent is a gourmet meal, complex in flavor, rich in nutrients, not the fast food most of us are used to. The scriptures are to feast upon, again and again.

What do we do, then, when we encounter obstacles instead of insights as we read the scriptures? We ponder. If we read a verse that leaves us perplexed or bored, we don’t put it aside or force ourselves to read on. We stop, delve, weigh, relate, and discover new meanings. If we aren’t learning enough, we wonder what we have missed. If there is repetition, we look for the reasons for the repetition. If there seems to be no connection between two verses, we try to discover how they relate. And if we are teaching a class and get no reaction to a passage of scripture, we don’t proceed on to new material. We look at the details of the passage with the class until new light dawns. After all, these are the scriptures we are reading, the best of the best books, and we are the Lord’s saints; and he has promised us that we can understand and love his words.

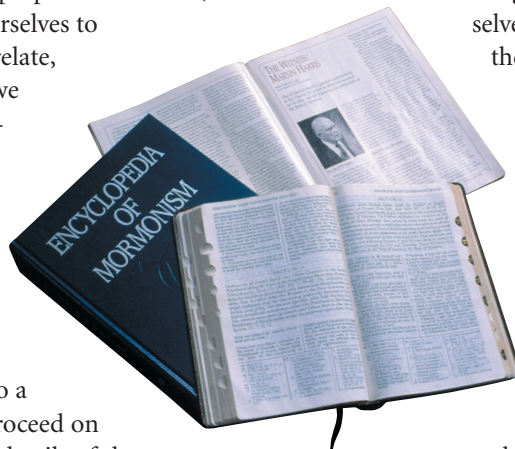
In our own study of the scriptures, we have found that asking certain questions helps us to discover and understand important details about a passage—these questions help us to ponder. We believe that to be faithful readers of the scriptures we need to be full of questions, like four-year-olds eager to understand and to sustain their parents’ words. In the rest of this article, we list cer-

tain types of questions and show how asking and trying to answer them helps us ponder the scriptures. You will gain the most if you try to answer our questions before reading our answers. That way, instead of merely learning more about what we think when we ponder, you will learn what you think when you ponder. Remember, the comments we make are simply our response to the scriptures, given our understanding, experience, and study. They aren’t definitive in any way, doctrinally or otherwise. You may well see things we have missed. Your response as you ponder is what is important. Remember, too, that your insights can change and grow when you reread a passage of scripture. No matter what you see now, you may well see more later.

Setting

Joseph Smith had what he called a key by which he understood the scriptures. He said, “I enquire, what was the question which drew out the answer?”⁴ In other words, he asked about the situation that called forth the passage. That is setting. The setting of a passage might include the geography of an area, the history and customs of the people, or the past behavior of the individuals involved. Frequently, significant aspects of the setting are found in the scriptures themselves, although we may need to search for the relevant information. Often, it is helpful to consult the maps and Bible Dictionary at the back of the LDS edition of the Bible. Other history and reference books may also be useful. Of course, to know what circumstances are relevant, we need to understand the passage itself. The two work together interactively: the more we understand the passage, the better we know what is relevant in the setting; and the more we know about the setting, the more fully we understand the passage. Here are some examples of asking about setting.

Nephi wrote a poetic passage similar to the psalms of David (see 2 Nephi 4:17–35). Some LDS scholars call it the Psalm of Nephi. Nephi begins, “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.” Question: Why is Nephi so disturbed? Here is what we have found. Just before Nephi writes this psalm, Lehi dies and the older brothers become angry with Nephi when he tries to counsel them. Just after the psalm is written, the family splits up. Nephi



must have wanted to keep the family together, for he had seen in vision what separation would mean—wars and contention and ultimately the annihilation of his people (see 1 Nephi 12:1–3, 19). But without Lehi around, trying to keep the family united must have been more frustrating than ever. The passage reveals that Nephi is angry and depressed about the situation he finds himself in, which must be why he calls himself “wretched.” But before the

this question, a dictionary is the most helpful reference book. According to Webster’s 1828 dictionary (an American dictionary from the time of Joseph Smith), “betimes” doesn’t mean “at times,” as we sometimes think; it means, “Seasonably; in good season or time; before it is late.” So if we let our children’s misbehavior pile up without correcting it and then end up exploding, we have done wrong; we have waited too long. Solomon

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“TO WEIGH IN THE MIND; TO THINK OR CONSIDER ESPECIALLY QUIETLY, SOBERLY, AND DEEPLY.” SO WHEN WE DON’T UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE SCRIPTURES, THE LORD’S COUNSEL IS TO PONDER AND PRAY ABOUT THEM. MORE SPECIFICALLY, WE ARE TO PONDER FIRST AND THEN TO PRAY.

psalm ends, Nephi has turned to the Lord and found the peace and courage that enables him to leave his brothers.

The story of David and Bathsheba marks a terrible transition in the life of David (see 2 Samuel 11–12). What led to David’s downfall? (Hint: See verse 1 of chapter 11.) Verse 1 says, “And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time [of the year] when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.” So, instead of leading his armies in battle, as was appropriate for a king to be doing, David tarries at Jerusalem. The writer seems to be tactfully saying that King David’s irresponsibility as commander of his armies, and perhaps his love of luxurious living in the capital, led, in part, to his immoral behavior. We might have missed this connection between irresponsibility and immorality if we hadn’t stopped to ask about the setting.

Meaning of Words and Phrases

Dictionaries, concordances, and other translations of the Bible can help us understand the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases in the scriptures. Here are some examples:

What is the meaning of the word “betimes” in the scripture that begins, “Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:43)? For

wrote in the same vein, “He that loveth him [his son] chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24).

Matthew, describing John’s baptism of Jesus, writes, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Matthew 3:16). Do the pronouns he, him, he, and him refer to John or to Jesus? (Hint: See John 1:32–34—a reference we found by looking up the word dove in a concordance.) John’s account illuminates Matthew’s. The first and last of these pronouns refer to Jesus, who was baptized and on whom the Spirit descended, while the middle two refer to John, who witnessed the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on Christ.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord says, “And when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of my gospel; But they receive it not; for they perceive not the light, and they turn their hearts from me because of the precepts of men. And in that generation shall the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (D&C 45:28–30). Who are the Gentiles? What are the times of the Gentiles? And what does it mean to say the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled? In common usage, and in the Bible, a gentile is a person of a non-Jewish nation or faith. A concordance of the Bible tells us that the Hebrew and Greek words from which the word *gentile* is translated mean a foreign people. The

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compilers of the King James Version translated the Greek and Hebrew words in different places as “gentile,” “heathen,” “nation,” and “people.” But in modern scripture, the people referred to as gentiles are the members of the apostate Christian churches, who believe in the God of the Bible, but who do not correctly understand the gospel, their understanding having been corrupted by heathen philosophies (see 3 Nephi 21:14–23; D&C 90:6–10). The gentiles Nephi saw in his vision were a fair-skinned people who had received and corrupted the Bible and settled the New World (see 1 Nephi 13). This description fits the Christian nations of Europe. Orson Pratt referred to the “nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles” as “the nations of Christendom.”⁵ It is interesting that these nations are the political, cultural, and perhaps, in part, biological heirs of Greco-Roman civilization—the gentile civilization the gospel was taken to after the Jews rejected Christ.

The phrase “the times of the Gentiles” occurs only in this section of the Doctrine and Covenants and in Luke 21:24, where Jesus says, “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Nephi gives us the background for understanding this phrase, even though he doesn’t use the phrase itself: “After he [the Savior] has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (1 Nephi 13:42). So the times of the gentiles appears to be the time period, in the last days, when the gospel in its fulness is taken to the gentiles. This time period begins with the restoration (see D&C 45:28) and ends when the gentiles reject the gospel.

The phrase “fulness of the Gentiles” occurs in Romans 11:25; and the Greek verb from which it is translated, when applied to a period or task, means “to finish.” So to say the times of the gentiles shall be fulfilled means they shall be finished. When they are finished, the fulness of the gospel will be taken from the gentiles and brought to the house of Israel (see 3 Nephi 16:10–11).

The previous passage continues with, “And there shall be men standing in that generation, that shall not pass until they shall see an overflowing scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land” (D&C 45:31). What is a scourge? According to Webster’s 1828 dictionary, the word *scourge* means “a whip; a lash consisting of a strap or cord; an instrument of punishment or discipline,” and “He or that which greatly afflicts, harasses or destroys; particularly, any continued evil or calamity.” The particular scourge referred to here is a desolating sickness that will come in the generation in which the gentiles reject the gospel. We cannot

read this in our generation without thinking of biological warfare. The scourge may be the occasion for permanently calling the missionaries out of the gentile countries, just as they have, in the past, been temporarily called out of countries at war.

Speaker's Attitude

When someone speaks or writes for any length of time, he reveals his attitude toward his subject, his listeners, and himself. Learning to discern attitude in the scriptures can help us learn to discern it in our interactions with others.

What is Sherem's attitude when he says to Jacob, "Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you" (Jacob 7:6)? He seems to be emphasizing his own kindness to "Brother Jacob," whom he thinks is a blasphemer (see Jacob 7:7), and his own diligence in tracking Jacob down. Sherem seems self-important. Jacob says of him that he used "much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil" (Jacob 7:4).

What is Pilate's attitude toward Christ and the truth when he says to Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38)? We don't believe Pilate is sincerely asking about truth. He seems cynical about anyone, including Christ, ever coming to know the truth.

What is the attitude of the Lord when he says of the Saints' enemies, "Let them bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord" (D&C 71:8)? Does he really think they have strong reasons against him? It looks to us as if the Lord is being ironic. By appearing to agree that they have "strong reasons," he is in effect saying how foolish it is to argue with him.

Scriptural Comparisons

Comparing things is a hallmark of pondering. Many things in the scriptures can be compared—individuals, attitudes, events, reactions, themes. Frequently in the scriptures, two things similar in some ways but different in other ways are placed side-by-side so we can compare them—for instance, the reactions of Mary and Zacharias to the similar messages from the angel Gabriel. The scriptures also contain parallel accounts of events and messages—for example, the four gospels, the multiple cre-

ation accounts, the Bible and Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters—and these invite comparison. We can also compare events or individuals in the scriptures to those we are familiar with outside the scriptures. Nephi did this and said, "I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23). We may understand prophecies by looking for historical events that fulfill them.

When Adam and Eve are asked by the Lord if they have partaken of the forbidden fruit, they don't say simply, "We did." Instead, Adam says, "The woman thou gavest me, and commandest that she should remain with me, she gave me of the fruit of the tree and I did eat" (Moses 4:18).

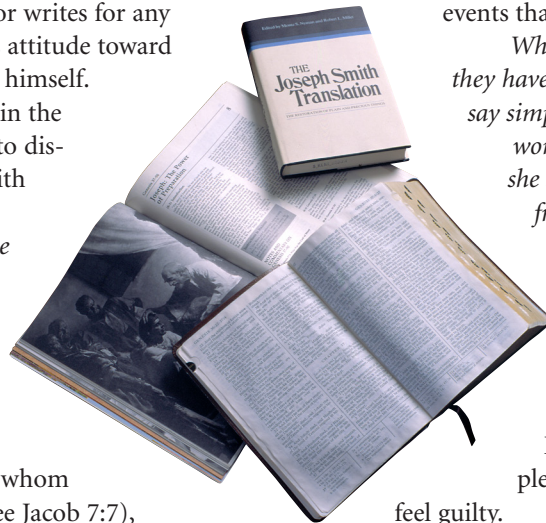
Eve responds, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (Moses 4:19). How are their answers similar? Though

Adam and Eve both admit they have eaten the forbidden fruit, they try to place responsibility elsewhere, Adam on Eve, and Eve on the serpent. Today we still plead "extenuating circumstances" when we

feel guilty.

How are Alma the Younger and Korihor alike and different? Alma and Korihor were both gifted speakers who used their persuasive powers to flatter and deceive people into leaving the church and into committing sin. Both were struck dumb for their iniquities, Alma in terror over an angel's warning, and Korihor by a prophet in response to his request for a sign. The similarity ends there. Alma accepted responsibility for his sins, "repenting nigh unto death" (Mosiah 27:28) and becoming a great missionary of righteousness. Korihor, on the other hand, blamed his sins on the devil, who, he said, appeared to him as an angel of light. He didn't repent and died dumb. The prophet who struck Korihor dumb was the then mature Alma. His own past and repentance must have given him insight into Korihor's soul, for he told Korihor, "If this curse should be taken from thee thou wouldst again lead away the hearts of this people; therefore, it shall be unto thee even as the Lord will" (Alma 30:55).

In the story of Jonah, we read about Jonah's fellow mariners. These men do everything they possibly can to avoid having to throw Jonah overboard, even after he tells them they must do so in order to appease his God (see Jonah 1:4–16). Why is this incident significant in the story of Jonah? Jonah's heathen shipmates provide a stark contrast to Jonah himself, who wants the Lord to destroy the whole city of Nineveh, even after its inhabitants have repented. The mariners' compassion for Jonah and



reverence for his God make Jonah's own selfishness and anger even more repugnant.

How are the story of Jonah and the Parable of the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:11–32) similar in characters and theme? Both stories tell about sinners (the people of Nineveh, the prodigal son), a forgiving person (the Lord, the prodigal's father), and an unforgiving person (Jonah, the prodigal's brother). Both stories are meant to teach us to love and forgive, rather than to condemn, by showing us the goodness in those we consider sinners and the badness in those who consider themselves righteous but don't love.

Implied Messages

Because the scriptures imply more than they actually state, we can learn more from them when we read between the lines.

In Doctrine and Covenants 20:5–6, the Lord says of Joseph Smith, "After it was truly manifested unto this first elder that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; But after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness." What do these verses imply about the First Vision? The angel with white garments must have been Moroni (compare this description of Moroni to the description in Joseph Smith—History 1:32). So, before Moroni's visit, presumably at the First Vision, Joseph was told that his sins were forgiven him (compare D&C 29:3). This fact isn't recorded in the Pearl of Great Price account of the First Vision, though it is in other accounts.

At the waters of Mormon, Alma explains the baptismal covenant, saying, in part, "as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light" (Mosiah 18:8). Later when Alma's people are in bondage, the Lord tells them, "I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me. . . . And I will . . . ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs" (Mosiah 24:13–14). What does the Lord imply here by referring to the baptismal covenant and then alluding to Alma's explanation of that covenant? The Lord seems to be telling his people that as they have covenanted to bear each other's burdens, so he, as one with them, will also bear their burdens. That is what he did in Gethsemane.

What Is or Is Not Included

Frequently, we expect to find something in a scripture that isn't there. Or we are surprised to find some-

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS YOU STUDY AND PONDER THE SCRIPTURES:

Ask about setting

**Investigate the meanings
of words and phrases**

**Learn to discern the
speaker's attitude**

**Look for scriptural
comparisons**

**Discern implied
messages**

**Be aware of what is
or is not included**

**Understand scriptural
organization**

**Be sensitive to repetition of
ideas, words, and sounds**

**Read aloud to
reveal emphasis**

thing there we hadn't expected. When this happens, we should ask ourselves why that particular part was or was not included.

While journeying in the wilderness, Lehi dreams about a dark and dreary wilderness and a tree of life. Nephi records this dream and Lehi's ensuing concern for his children in 1 Nephi 8, beginning with verse 2. But in verse 1 of the same chapter he records, "And it came to pass that we had gathered together all manner of seeds of every kind, both of grain of every kind, and also of the seeds of fruit of every kind." Why is the fact of the seed-gathering recorded here? It doesn't seem to have anything to do with Lehi's dream—or does it? The reference to "fruit of every kind" prepares our minds for the central symbol of Lehi's dream: the fruit of the tree of life, a fruit "desirable above all other fruit" (verse 12). The "seeds" anticipate Lehi's concern for his own "seed" (verse 3); and the repetition of "every kind" foreshadows the variety of people and paths in the dream.

According to Matthew, Christ said to his disciples, "Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:22). But in the Book of Mormon, Christ tells the Nephites, "Whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment" (3 Nephi 12:22). Why isn't the phrase "without a cause" repeated in the Book of Mormon account? First, we might ask ourselves what it means to be "in danger of the judgment." Other translations of this phrase are "brought to

judgment" (New English Bible) and "will answer for it before the court" (Jerusalem Bible). So it appears that an angry person isn't necessarily a sinful one—only that he had better be able to justify his anger. Christ seems to be saying, "If you are angry, watch out!" We know that the Lord himself becomes angry on occasion; but godly anger, like godly sorrow, must be quite different from worldly anger, which, like worldly sorrow, works death, not repentance (see 2 Corinthians 7:10). Most human anger seems to us worldly, not godly. The phrase "without a cause" thus seems unnecessary. If you do have a just cause, and your answer "holds up in court," you won't be condemned. But if you do not, you will be condemned.

Organization

The scriptures aren't organized like a logical treatise, but this doesn't mean they aren't organized documents. Their organization is subtler and far richer than that of most writing. We need to look closely within and between verses, chapters, and books to see their organization. When we understand that organization, the scriptures will convey a more unified, powerful message.

What is the effect of placing the book of Ether, the abridgment of the Jaredite record, near the end of the Book of Mormon, out of chronological order? The book of Ether tells the story of the destruction of the Jaredite civilization, and it comes right next to Mormon and Moroni's account of the destruction of the Nephite civilization. So

the Book of Mormon ends with the account of two civilizations destroying themselves, emphasizing the theme of destruction. In addition, the Book of Mormon starts with the story of a family escaping the destruction of another wicked civilization. The message for us and our civilization is clear: “This is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off” (Ether 2:10).

The second chapter of 1 Nephi begins, “For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream.” In that dream, Lehi is warned to flee from Jerusalem and the Jews who are seeking his life. Why does Nephi begin the verse with “For behold”? Is he implying

Repetition of Ideas, Words, and Sounds

A sound, a word, a phrase, an idea, or a theme convey more meaning when repeated. Little children delight in the repetition they hear in their favorite stories—like Little Red Riding Hood saying, “Oh, grandmother, what big eyes (ears, teeth) you have!” In the scriptures, repetition within and across passages is an art. And when we become sensitive to it, we, like our children, will delight in it and learn from it.

When her sons are slow to return from Jerusalem, Sariah calls her husband “a visionary man” and says, “Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness.” Lehi replies, “I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at

“I PROMISE YOU THAT AS YOU READ, YOUR MINDS WILL BE ENLIGHTENED AND YOUR SPIRITS WILL BE LIFTED. AT FIRST IT MAY SEEM TEDIOUS, BUT THAT WILL CHANGE INTO A WONDROUS EXPERIENCE WITH THOUGHTS AND WORDS OF THINGS DIVINE.”

— PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY

*some relationship between what comes before this connective and what comes after it? At the end of chapter one we read, “I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.” Nephi then proceeds in the second chapter to do just that, showing how the Lord’s mercy in warning Lehi to flee from Jerusalem made Lehi “mighty even unto the power of deliverance.” So Nephi isn’t using the words *for behold* simply as a stylistic marker, but as a signal to the reader that he is about to explain how he knows the Lord supports those who place their trust in him. Connecting words like *for*, *but*, and *thus* imply relationships of explanation or contrast between passages; and we can miss these relationships if we don’t, as a matter of habit, ask ourselves why these connecting words are used.*

Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren. But behold, I have obtained a land of promise, in the which things I do rejoice; yea, and I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 5:2–5). What words and phrases in Sariah’s speech does Lehi repeat in his speech? What is the effect of this repetition? Lehi repeats the following words of Sariah: a visionary man, land, my sons, perish, in the wilderness. This repetition shows that Lehi has heard Sariah and is sympathizing with her. He agrees with Sariah when he says, “I know that I am a visionary man.” Each of her other despairing points he counters with a hopeful one: She says, “Thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance,” and he says, “I have obtained a land of promise.” She says, “My sons are no more,” and he says, “I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban.” She says, “We perish in the wilderness,” and he says, “I had . . . perished with my brethren.” Lehi

even picks up on Sariah's grammatical idiosyncracies: he, like she, speaks in the present tense when the future would be more accurate, saying, "I have obtained a land of promise," to counter her, "My sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness." He is comforting his wife, empathizing with her, yet strengthening her. That is no easy task when one is being harshly criticized.

The Lord describes for Enoch the reunion scene between his city and the New Jerusalem in these words: "They shall see us; and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other" (Moses 7:63). Can you remember similar words elsewhere in the scriptures? (If you can't, a concordance will greatly assist your memory. Look up a word like necks, which probably won't have too many references to sort through.) Similar words are used to describe the reunion scene between Jacob and Esau after years of estrangement: "And Esau ran to meet him [Jacob], and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (Genesis 33:4). These words are also echoed by Jesus in the parable of the Prodigal Son: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). The repetition of these phrases of reconciliation and love from one millennium to the next increases the emotional intensity of each occurrence, helping us share the feeling.

In Doctrine and Covenants 19:23, the Lord entreats Martin Harris, "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me." What repeated sounds do you notice in this verse, and what is their effect? We notice three sounds: (1) *l* (learn, listen), (2) *m* (me, my, meekness, my, me), and (3) *s* (listen, meekness, Spirit, peace). These sounds bind the verse together and help convey the peaceful compassion of the Lord as he beckons to Martin and to us. Even young children who don't yet read can hear sounds like these and tell us how the passage makes them feel.

Emphasis

Because the spoken word is richer than the written word, we can better understand and appreciate the scriptures when we read them aloud, even in individual study. When we read aloud, letting what we are reading affect us and teach us, certain words stand out and we emphasize them as we read them.

Do you emphasize the word all or the word faith when you read this verse aloud: "And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom." (D & C 88:118)? If you emphasize the word *faith*, the verse says to you that diligently seeking and teaching one another

words of wisdom is the next best thing to having faith. But if you emphasize *all*, the verse says that diligently seeking and teaching one another words of wisdom is a way to help everyone gain faith. Changing the emphasis changes the meaning.

Young Joseph Smith was deeply affected when he read the scripture from James which begins, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (James 1:5). Read aloud Joseph Smith—History 1:12, as if you were Joseph telling the story, emphasizing those words that you think Joseph might emphasize. Our reading emphasizes the words we have italicized: "Never did *any* passage of scripture come with *more* power to the heart of man than *this* did at *this* time to mine. It seemed to enter with *great* force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it *again* and again, knowing that if *any* person needed wisdom from God, *I* did; for *how* to act I did not *know*, and unless I could get *more* wisdom than I *then* had, I would *never* know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the *same* passages of scripture so differently as to destroy *all* confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible." When this verse is read with understanding, with key words emphasized, the powerful effect that James 1:5 had on Joseph is easier to feel. But when the verse is read flatly, without emphasis or understanding, we adjust our position on our chair, look at the clock, and hurry on to the next verse.

Conclusion

President Kimball wrote, "I am convinced that each of us, at some time in our lives, must discover the scriptures for ourselves."⁶ For the two of us, the discovery of the scriptures has come through pondering. We have found that when we ponder more, we learn more, and so do those we teach. We have made it a practice when speaking in church to present what we have learned as we have pondered and prayed about the scriptures. When we teach our family at home or a class at church, we select a passage of scripture we have pondered over, carefully divide it into sections, and prepare questions that we have asked about the passage. Then with our family or class we read the passage aloud, a portion at a time, ask the questions and ponder together. When we do this, it isn't uncommon for someone say, "I felt like I was back at the time when the passage was written." We have heard others say, "I could read the scriptures like this all day." When we hear that, we know that someone else has fallen in love with the word of God. □

13. The writings of several prophets that are preserved on the brass plates are not found in the Old Testament: Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias (see 1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 8:19–20).
14. Important articles discussing the exodus typology in the Book of Mormon include George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 75–98.
15. Although the biblical text implies that Moses died, the Book of Mormon makes it clear that he was actually translated (see Alma 45:19).
16. Some scholars have even called him an “anti-Moses.” See, for example, Luis A. Schokel, “Jeremías como anti-Moisés,” in *De la Torah au Messie, Mélanges Henri Cazelles*, ed. M. Carrez, J. Doré, and P. Grelot (Paris: Desclée, 1981), 245–54.
17. Oliver Cowdery’s report is found in the *Messenger and Advocate* 1/5 (1835): 78–80; 1/7 (1935): 108–12; and 1/10 (1835): 156–59. A convenient list and important discussion of these passages can be found in Kent P. Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith (JS—H 1:27–49),” in *Studies in Scripture: Volume Two: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 339–66.
18. See *TPJS*, 14–15.

Pondering the Word
Dennis and Sandra Packard

- * This article has been adapted by the authors from Dennis J. and Sandra Packard, “Pondering the Scriptures,” in *Feasting upon the Word* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981).
1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Daddy, Donna, and Nephi,” *Ensign*, September 1976, 7.
 2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Light Within You,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 99.
 3. Hugh W. Nibley, “Educating the Saints—a Brigham Young Mosaic,” *BYU Studies* 11/1 (1970): 61.
 4. *TPJS*, 276.
 5. *JD*, 7:185.
 6. Spencer W. Kimball, “How Rare a Possession—the Scriptures!” *Ensign*, September 1976, 4.

Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon
John W. Welch

1. I express appreciation to Kent Brown, Claire Foley, and the FARMS editorial staff for their contributions to this article. This article was prepared at the request of the editors to report and develop past and current research by several people on this subject, mentioned in the notes below.
2. The collapse of the rule of law undercut the divinely established base of Nephite civilization. Abinadi plainly prophesied the Lord’s threat to “utterly destroy” the Nephites because “they have hardened their hearts against [the Lord’s] words;

they have repented not of their evil doings; therefore, I will visit them . . . in my fierce anger” (Mosiah 1:8, 1; compare Mormon 1:19). See also the similar lawlessness in Helaman chapters 4, 5, and 7, and in Mormon chapters 1 and 2. Old Testament prophets also condemned the misuse of weights and balances in the marketplace (Hosea 12:7; Amos 8:5) just prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.

3. Keith W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979), 37; Hans J. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 40–49.
4. See Ruth 4:1–2; Harold B. Clark, *Biblical Law* (Portland, Ore.: Binford & Mort, 1943), 260 n.19, “Ordinarily the judges were not paid.” Haim H. Cohn, “Bribery,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 4:1357. “[Judges] are urged to be impartial, and not susceptible to bribes (2 Chronicles 19:7) and reminded that judicial services should be given free (Bek. 29a).”
5. Cohn, “Bribery,” 1368, “Other talmudic jurists carried the rule against bribery to extremes by refusing to sit in judgment over any person who had shown them the slightest courtesy, such as helping them to alight from a boat (Ket. 105a).”
6. See Morris Silver, *Economic Structures of Antiquity* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1995), 97–99.
7. See discussion below.
8. This set of laws appears in English in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 161–63, and Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995), 57–70. See further John W. Welch, “The Laws of Eshnunna and Nephite Economics,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 147–49.
9. Harry A. Hoffner Jr., *The Law of the Hittites* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 10, “The silver equivalent is calculated on the basis of the probable rate of exchange of 4 *PARISU* of barley for [½ shekel] of silver in section 183 and a 30-day Hittite month.”
10. As in most ancient cultures, the metallic pieces of silver and gold probably changed hands rarely in commercial exchanges. Rather, it was the goods themselves that people traded. See Marvin A. Powell Jr., “Ancient Mesopotamian Weight Metrology: Methods, Problems and Perspectives,” in *Studies in Honor of Tom B. Jones*, ed. Marvin A. Powell Jr. and Ronald H. Sack (Neukirchen: Kevelaer, 1979), 86–87.
11. Although economies in the New World must have rested on some sort of standards, only three types of artifacts have survived: (1) weights that are multiples of a single unit, (2) elements of balance scales (so far known only in Andean South America), and (3) a measure of length—“cubit”—that is 20.7 inches. For the weights, see Erlend Nordenskiöld, *The Origin of the Indian Civilization of South America* (Göteborg: Pehrsson, 1933), 278. For elements of balance scales, see *ibid.*, and Walter Hough, “Balances of the Peruvians and Mexicans,” *Science* 21 (1893): 30. For the “cubit” in ancient America, see “An Old-World Cubit in America,” *Nature* 111 (1923): 647. These are cited in John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1996), 29, 192, 478.
12. Bartel L. van der Waerden, *Science Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 49. Gillings, *Mathematics in the Time of the Pharaohs*, 234, “We tend to forget that [the Egyptians] were a people who had no plus, minus, multiplication, or division signs, no equals or square-root signs, no zero and no decimal point, no coinage, no indices, and no means of writing even the common fraction p/q; in fact, nothing even approaching a mathematical notation.”
13. See Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 106; translations mine.
14. See Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala* (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1971), 6. See also the reference to balances in Hough, “Balances of the Peruvians and Mexicans,” 30 (cited in Sorenson and Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact*, 478). I thank John Sorenson for this information.
15. Marvin A. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:898.
16. See the discussion of Egyptian fractions, as they are pictured in the Horus-eye, in Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 197–99 (§266).
17. Gillings, *Mathematics in the Time of the Pharaohs*, 210.
18. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1976), 197.
19. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” 6:897 (Sumerian MA.NA, Akkadian/Assyrian/Babylonian *manum*); s.v. “*manû*,” in Miguel Civil et al., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1977), 10:1:219–21; Dever, “Weights and Measures,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 1127. Compare Akkadian *limnum*, *limnanni*, *limmanum*, etc., in Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965), 604, as among the uses of *manum*.
20. John W. Betlyon, “Coinage,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1076.
21. Compare Dever, “Weights and Measures,” 1128–29; Powell, “Weights and Measures,” 6:906–7.
22. I thank Robert F. Smith for this table and analysis, which is based on many years of research contributions relevant to this subject.
23. Åke Sjöberg, editor, *The Sumerian Dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1984), 2:200. See also Robert F. Smith, “Weights and Measures in the Time of Mosiah II” (FARMS, 1983), 6.

24. The Printer’s Manuscript has *senum*, *ezrum*, and *shilum* in Alma 11, as well as *sheum* in Mosiah 9:9. These may well be Akkadian carryovers from the Jaredites.
25. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 192–94 (§§ 260–61); Antonio Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 60, 71–72.
26. Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Sahidic Coptic* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983), 59, 270.
27. Hildegard Levy, “On Some Old Assyrian Cereal Names,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 76/4 (1956): 201–4; s.v. “*se’u*” in *Assyrian Dictionary*, 17:2:345–50.
28. Robert F. Smith, who first drew attention to this connection, suggested “a Mulekite and possibly, therefore, Jaredite provenance.” But the case is not obvious. See “Some ‘Neologisms’ from the Mormon Canon,” *Conference on the Language of the Mormons 1973* (Provo, Utah: BYU Language Research Center, 1973), 64–67, esp. 66 and note 38.
29. For other possible relationships between Nephite weights and meaningful terms known from other ancient cultures, see Smith, “Nephite Weights and Measures.”
30. See John W. Betlyon, “Coinage,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1079; A. D. H. Bivar, “Coins,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. Eric M. Meyers et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2:41–42; Marvin A. Powell Jr. also notes the use of coinlike silver cubes in the Neo-Babylonian era (sixth–fifth centuries B.C.) in “Ancient Mesopotamian Weight Metrology,” 87.
31. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” 6:905; Barry Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1989), 237, 244–55; J. D. Muhly, “Cyprus,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, 2:92–93.
32. Powell, “Ancient Mesopotamian Weight Metrology,” 72; and “Weights and Measures,” 6:906. The Bible also mentions stone weights. For instance, the Hebrew phrase underlying “diverse weights, a great and a small” (Deuteronomy 25:13) could be translated literally as “stones, a large stone and a small.”
33. Betlyon, “Coinage,” 1:1076–89.

Did the ancient peoples of Mesoamerica use a system of weights and scales in measuring goods and their values?

1. See, for example, Francisco Guerra, “Weights and Measures in Pre-Columbian America,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 15 (1960): 342–44; Daniel G. Brinton, “The Lineal Measures of the Semi-Civilized Nations of Mexico and Central America,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 22: 194–207, 1885; and Fernando Cortés, *His Five Letters of Relation to the Emperor Charles V*, ed. and trans. Francis A. MacNutt (Glorieta, N.Mex.: Rio Grande, 1977), 1:259.
2. See Guerra, “Weights and Measures”; Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala* (New Orleans: Tulane