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**Abstract** Review of *Searching the Scriptures: Bringing Power to Your Personal and Family Study* (1997), by Gene R. Cook; *Treasure Up the Word* (1997), by Jay E. Jensen; and *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* (1999), by James E. Faulconer.

## FOR GREATER LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING: THREE GUIDES FOR THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

Keith H. Lane

Since the ministries of President Spencer W. Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson, Latter-day Saints have been admonished to give more serious attention to scriptures and scripture study than has been given before. The church in general has been responsive to that counsel. One can see greater emphasis given to the scriptures in our meetings, in LDS publications, and in the numbers of those who are studying the scriptures individually and in families. The three books under review here are designed to encourage this important activity and to help improve the quality of scripture study. Though all are successful in these efforts, each book has a particular emphasis that will make it most useful in specific situations. I will not attempt to show all the suggested techniques and principles taught in these books but to give the reader a general sense of the strengths, spirit,

Review of Gene R. Cook. *Searching the Scriptures: Bringing Power to Your Personal and Family Study*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997. xii + 228 pp., with subject index. \$16.95.

Review of Jay E. Jensen. *Treasure Up the Word*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997. xi + 151 pp., with subject index. \$10.95.

Review of James E. Faulconer. *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions*. Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999. vi + 157 pp., with appendixes and subject index. \$9.95.

and direction of each book, along with my own suggestions of who might profit most by which book.

Elder Gene R. Cook's *Searching the Scriptures: Bringing Power to Your Personal and Family Study* reveals his deep love for the scriptures and his intense desire that we study them more diligently. The spirit of this book is perhaps best captured at the end of a short section in which Cook speaks about what the scriptures are not (they aren't merely history, a reference volume, something used primarily in crises): "They are not to be read simply in response to feelings of guilt or just because you know you ought to. They are to be read because you love the Lord, because you love his words of truth and counsel, and because you love to grow closer to him" (p. 27). The essence of this book is its fervent testimony that we can and must use the scriptures "as a tool to help us hear the voice of the Lord"—a blessing that comes only through sincere effort (p. xi).

Cook's book is divided into three sections, with several chapters in each section. The first part, "The Purpose of the Scriptures: The Power and Blessing of the Lord's Word," seeks to show why the scriptures are important and to motivate readers to give more serious, heartfelt attention to them. It contains stories, both personal stories from Cook himself and accounts of others and their involvement with and love of the scriptures.

The second part, "Personal Study: A Key to Revelation and Peace," gives suggestions for getting more out of scripture reading. Among other things, Cook gives advice for hearing the voice of the Lord in the scriptures, pondering and asking questions, and finding patterns and personal applications in what one reads. He also provides suggestions for making one's reading a richer experience. For instance, under the category of patterns, he shows the pattern of reversal of meaning—that is to say, we see some of the meaning in the scriptures by noting what is not there, or we see the truth by noting its opposite. "When we note the absence of a word or concept in the scriptures, and then try to discover the meaning of its absence (or reverse meaning), we can learn as much as we can about things that are there" (pp. 77–78). Cook gives a number of examples, such as the term *free agency*, the word *leadership*, and so on (terms that seem im-



portant to many but which are not in the scriptures). The crucial thing to note, then, is which terms do occur in the scriptures and what the absence of the other terms might mean (i.e., *free agency* doesn't occur, but *agency* and *moral agency* do). Asking these questions and searching for such answers can open up the meaning of the scriptures more fully.

The third part, "Blessing Your Family with the Word of the Lord," gives testimonials, examples, encouragement, and advice for implementing scripture study in families. For those needing motivation to read in families, this section gives counsel and witness as to why family study is needed. This section also gives ideas for starting scripture study in families, making family study a good experience for all, and avoiding some of the natural difficulties involved in getting a family together to read and enjoy the scriptures. Cook deals head-on with such issues as time, motivation, differences in age and interests, and logistical challenges. He is rightly firm in insisting that we do all we can to have family scripture study and is practical in how a family might succeed in this effort. He asks parents to give children some responsibility in making the scripture study successful, but also adds that "we need to make sure it's good enough that they will want to be there" (p. 180).

What is distinct about Cook's book are the numerous stories from church history and the testimonials of everyday, rank-and-file members, as well as Cook's personal experiences. While the other two books have some narrative events and testimony, Cook's book is replete with them and in this area is distinct from the other two. This means that this book would be the best one for those who desire motivation to study the scriptures. Cook's book also deals at greater length with family scripture study than the other two books and consequently may be of more help in this regard.

Elder Jay E. Jensen's *Treasure Up the Word* is written by one who has spent many years studying the scriptures and teaching them in church settings (including the Church Educational System). The wisdom and insights of these years show. The book has thirteen chapters that focus on helpful techniques and principles such as definitions, lists, and homilies (inspirational catchphrases), and on uniting truths

between passages of scripture, discovering story parallels, and marking scriptures. As Jensen is careful to point out, “the scripture study and marking techniques in this book are not an end in themselves; rather, they are the means to a far greater end,” contributing to “the Father’s work and glory, and support[ing] the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (p. xi).

Jensen’s suggestions are genuinely helpful in that they give good advice as well as necessary cautions about pitfalls. For instance, in the chapter about marking scriptures, he advises that we mark in order to facilitate recall, teaching, and learning (pp. 34–35), also noting that our method of scripture study largely determines our method of marking. These sound ideas are coupled with this equally sound observation: “Indiscriminate marking or shading entire columns and chapters may be no better than leaving them unmarked” (p. 33). Without being overly prescriptive, Jensen suggests simple but helpful ways to go about marking scriptures.

Another strength of Jensen’s book is that his techniques help to bring out more clearly what is actually in the scriptures (rather than what we think is or ought to be there). This can be seen, for example, in his chapter on lists. Asserting that finding lists moves one from merely reading to studying the scriptures (and again reminding us that “lists are not an end but rather a means to an end” [p. 59]), Jensen shows how one finds and numbers such lists in the scriptures. In Doctrine and Covenants 19:18, Jensen finds the following list (and sublist) regarding the Savior’s suffering during the atonement: “Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, (1) to tremble because of pain, and (2) to bleed at every pore, and (3) to suffer both (a) body and (b) spirit” (p. 58). Such lists help us study more closely and see more clearly what the verses at hand contain. And what is significant is that a person making these lists focuses on what is in the passage itself rather than being influenced by a preconceived list into which everything is then packaged. Such a technique is very helpful in bringing out what is found in a passage and can be used as an excellent aid in teaching in a way that keeps all in-

volved focused on the scriptures, scriptural language, and scriptural concepts.

Readers will also be helped greatly by the chapter “Story Parallels,” which provides a clear way of taking stories from the scriptures and, in Nephi’s phrase, likening them unto ourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23). Jensen does a commendable job of taking a story bit by bit and showing ways that the story parallels events in our own life—even when context and culture may be millennia away.

The chapter on visualizing the scriptures gives advice about drawing or diagramming concepts, principles, or stories found in the scriptures. While I did not find the chapter helpful to me personally, simply because I am not much of a visual learner, I can see that such suggestions would be helpful to many and especially helpful to those who teach and who want to reach all sorts of students. And it is in this area (teaching) where I think Jensen’s book is most helpful. Anyone could benefit by reading and following the suggestions in this book, but to me its greatest strength is that these techniques can also be extremely helpful in teaching the scriptures in class or group scripture study.

Latter-day Saints are fairly faithful at reading scriptures, claims James E. Faulconer, but may need help studying them. Indeed, the spirit of Professor Faulconer’s *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* is captured in the description of his recommended method of scripture study: close reading. Faulconer recommends a rigorous method of scripture study that asks (1) that we remember that “the words and sentences of the scriptures are the source of divine truth” and that “the scriptures are not just about the truths of God. They are not simply descriptions of those truths or directions for using them. With continuing revelation, they are the very source of those truths, and they are the standard by which we judge personal revelation” (pp. 10–11). Another related aspect of this method is (2) that we should assume “that the scriptures mean exactly what they say and, more important, assume that we do not already know what they say” (p. 11). This helps prevent the error of supplanting what the scriptures



actually say with our own ideas. Similarly, the method asks (3) that we generally concentrate on questions about the text in front of us rather than focusing on particular doctrines. There are clearly times when doctrinal questions are valuable, but “when we start our study with doctrinal questions, we often have difficulty getting beyond what we think we already know—difficulty learning from the scriptures” (p. 11).

The first chapter explains differing ways of studying scripture, argues for “close reading,” and sets the framework for the rest of the book. The following chapters concentrate on the specific suggestions and tools for close reading. Chapter 2, “Outlining,” recommends a few ways of outlining what one reads in order to gain an overview. Chapter 3 contains important suggestions about asking detailed questions of a scriptural passage. Chapters 4 through 7 deal with using the LDS edition of the scriptures, cross-referencing (particularly learning from the differences in the use of similar words or phrases), using English historical dictionaries to understand the history and various meanings a word or phrase might have had, and doing research with Hebrew and Greek lexicons (and other similar aids) for those who do not know these languages. Chapter 8 guides one on parsing sentences of scripture for greater understanding, and chapters 9 and 10 give recommendations for understanding the rhetorical aspects and context of the passage being read. In addition, chapter 11 includes sample study notes (from Moroni 4) and chapter 12 gives welcome advice about one way to write a talk centered on a passage of scripture. At the end of the book are two appendixes: “Scripture and History” and “Hebrew versus Greek Thinking” (both short but stimulating essays).

Rather than say more about the specific suggestions given in each chapter, I will show what Faulconer intends with his suggestion to “read closely” by referring to the sample questions given in chapter 3, “Asking Questions.” Faulconer first recommends asking the following kinds of questions for any passage one reads: “What does this word mean? Why did the writer say this rather than that? Why did he put things in this particular order?” (p. 25). These questions will help us pay attention to the details of a text, but they “are useful only insofar



as they help us hear the questions that the Lord puts to each of us through the scriptures and his prophets” (p. 27). The chapter then takes Genesis 22 (the story of the binding of Isaac) and asks careful questions about the details of each verse, its relation to the other verses in the chapter, and their relation to the book of Genesis and to other books of scripture. Of verse 2 alone, Faulconer asks these questions:

Why is Isaac said to be Abraham’s only son? What about Ishmael? Similarly, why is the Savior said to be the Father’s only Son (see D&C 20:21)? Are we not also children of our Father in Heaven? Does considering this question as it applies to Abraham help us understand the question as it applies to Heavenly Father? Why does the Lord refer to what Abraham must do as a burnt offering? Is it significant that the word *sacrifice* is not used in this chapter? Why does the Lord not tell Abraham which mountain he is to go to? Why wait to tell him? (p. 28)

These are questions drawn from concentrating on the verse, and they flow from attention to detail. When combined with many such questions from the other verses, one has a genuine, extended, and meaningful interaction with the passage of scripture. Such detailed questions help us focus on and find meaning from the text itself, not from some broad philosophical scheme. Some might be surprised that Faulconer (a philosopher) recommends against “moving immediately to the broad ‘philosophical’ questions.” He explains at least one reason for this recommendation: “I may not yet really understand the scriptures, [and] my response to those broad questions will be what I already know or what others say in response to those questions most of the time” (p. 27). When we turn too readily to such questions, Faulconer warns, we risk mixing what is generally assumed to be true (the philosophies of men) with scripture, rather than letting the scriptures teach us.

The tools and suggestions are straightforwardly presented and easy to understand. The essays in the appendix, however, take a more philosophical bent, and the reader must exert more careful attention.

Nevertheless, readers should not be deterred, for in these essays Faulconer gives a rationale (mostly indirectly) for reading scripture in the way he recommends in his chapters on tools and suggestions. More important, understanding what is said here will help one better understand the mindset of those who wrote scripture. Faulconer sets forth what history would have meant to them and explains how a narrow, modern view of history may diminish our study and understanding of the scriptures. These essays do a commendable job of taking rather complex ideas and presenting the heart of the matter in understandable prose that does not lose the rigor of careful thought.

*Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* will be well received by anyone serious about studying scripture more effectively, but it is designed in many ways for a slightly more academic audience than invoked in either of the other two books. One who is already reasonably adept at scripture study will benefit most by this book, particularly because it often deals with pitfalls of more consistent readers, not novice readers.

I am glad to have read all three books. No one will be hurt by reading any of them, and good can be found in all, although, as I have indicated in this review, each book has particular strengths that make it most effective for particular persons and particular settings. The main thing is that we get on with the job of reading, studying, and teaching the word of the Lord more consistently and more effectively.