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Kerry Muhlestein

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Walter Rane, *They Saw a Man Descending Out of Heaven*. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

A Savior with a Sword: The Power of a Fuller Scriptural Picture of Christ

KERRY MUHLESTEIN

Kerry Muhlestein (kerry_muhlestein@byu.edu) is a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

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**W**e have been counseled to draw the power of Christ into our lives and to “begin by learning about him.”<sup>1</sup> The Savior himself commands us, “Learn of me” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:23; Matthew 11:29). In fact, coming to know both God and Christ is a necessary part of receiving eternal life (John 17:3). Many of our students will naturally conclude that to learn about Jesus Christ they should study the Gospels. While this is necessary, it is not sufficient if we are to come to know who our Savior and Redeemer truly is and thus draw on his power. Because only some of his roles were fulfilled during his mortal ministry, our ability to come to know him will be limited if we study only that facet of his existence. Thus, if we focus exclusively—or even largely—on the Gospels, we cannot develop a well-rounded picture of the Son of God. Just as we would be foolish to try to understand his mortal ministry by limiting ourselves to reading only Mark, we are equally foolish if we do not turn to the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants as we seek a more complete understanding of the Savior. By failing to develop a fuller picture of who Christ really is, we rob ourselves of the power that comes with understanding certain aspects of his nature. If we

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are going to help our students take seriously the command to “learn of me” and to experience the powerful rewards that come from doing so, then we are obligated to help them learn to use all the standard works in their efforts to come to know their Savior and Redeemer.

This point demands further elaboration. If we focus too exclusively on the accounts of his mortal ministry, we do not allow Christ to present himself to us in the way he intended, and thus we limit the extent of his power that can come into our lives. This danger is exacerbated by a tendency I have noticed among students, both in and out of university settings. While we tend to focus on the Gospels to learn about Christ, I have observed that even within the Gospels, we are often selective in what we notice about Jesus: we tend to focus on a Jesus who forgives, who gently corrects, and who commands us to love, yet we simultaneously gloss over the episodes of the Savior condemning, warning, cursing, and prophesying of destruction. “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11), spoken to an accused woman resonates with us more strongly than telling Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Matthew 16:23). We often struggle with his decree to potential disciples that if they come unto him and “hate not [their] father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and [their] own life also, [they] cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26) and that he was sent to bring a sword (Matthew 10:34).<sup>2</sup> In other words, my observation is that students tend to come to us having filtered out everything but a warm and merciful Savior. Yet a being that is only warm and merciful doesn’t actually have the power to save. By being selective in what we read and then by further selecting what we self-emphasize while reading that limited excerpt, we create our own vision of him instead of letting Christ himself tell us who he is. Doing so seems to border on creating a false god. At the very least it tends to give us a one-dimensional or watered-down view of our Savior, one that lacks the power we so desperately need. How tragic this is. To avoid such a sad outcome, we must further address how self-selected views of Christ can come about.

At least some of the reason for self-selecting only some aspects of the Savior’s roles must come from the emphasis to follow his example. We are told that we must follow the Savior (2 Nephi 31:10) and that “unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved” (2 Nephi 31:16). As a result we tend to focus on his characteristics that we are taught we should emulate. This is important, but if we are not careful this focus can cause us to skip over those aspects of his

nature that are reserved for the divine. In other words, because some roles and characteristics are reserved for Deity, they are not traits that Christ showed us how to emulate during his mortal ministry. Thus if we focus only on those aspects of Christ that we can and should emulate, we will ignore much of his divine nature. We cannot strip away Christ’s divinity in our mental image of him without also losing the ability to both understand him and partake of his divine power.

How much better to let the Messiah present himself to us throughout scripture in the way he has chosen. I have found that whether teaching the cornerstone course “Jesus Christ and the Everlasting Gospel” or courses on the Old or New Testament, if I take the time to help the students read, ponder, and interact with texts that present many facets of the Son of God, they often experience an initial sense of discomfort followed by one of relief and excitement. In fact, learning more of who Christ is as presented in other scriptural texts can help them trust him more and simultaneously helps them better appreciate and understand his mortal ministry. Greater familiarity with how the Redeemer is presented in other biblical texts and modern revelation will help our students increase their faith and confidence in him and can aid many as they fight their own personal plagues from which they can see no deliverance. It can also allow for a better understanding of the New Testament texts they are already familiar with. While this larger view of the Savior can develop naturally in a well-planned course of “Jesus Christ and the Everlasting Gospel,” it requires some conscious planning in Old Testament or New Testament courses if we want to help our students realize that there is more to learn about Christ than what they will come to know in the current course they are taking.

### **Jehovah of the Old Testament and Restoration Scripture**

It is well beyond the scope of this essay to discuss all the roles the Son of God fills as the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Instead I will focus on one that, while teaching the Old Testament for a quarter of a century, I have witnessed students struggle with frequently. I have had students discuss being “bothered” or “disturbed” by language that describes Jehovah acting violently or that speaks of his wrath, anger, or fury. I have had others tell me that as they started reading the Old Testament, they soon closed the book, saying to themselves, “This is not the Jesus I know.” Why do our students struggle so much with the phrases and images that the Great Jehovah chose to have his

prophets use to describe him?<sup>3</sup> At least part of the answer must be that they have not been guided through these descriptions (see Acts 8:31). Additionally, they seem to have mistakenly assumed that if *they* are not supposed to seek vengeance or feel wrath, neither should their God. They apparently believe that the example he set for them in mortality represents the entirety of his divine character. Thus they may be creating God in their own image.<sup>4</sup> By focusing almost exclusively on a Savior who forgives as opposed to one who can also mete out forceful justice or blazing deliverance, we may ask ourselves if our students are creating an image of the divine that has “a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5; Joseph Smith—History 1:19). How can they draw the power of Christ into their lives if they deny, or dismiss, his power?

Another problem stems from selectively looking at scriptural texts rather than studying their entirety. While I have written extensively elsewhere about the mercy and love of God as shown in the Old Testament,<sup>5</sup> here only a few examples must suffice. Some people are shocked by the story of Miriam being struck with leprosy. Numbers 12 describes that as Israel struggled to understand the balance between personal revelation and having an inspired leader for all of Israel, Aaron and Miriam accused Moses of taking too much power upon himself and not sharing enough with them.<sup>6</sup> They knew firsthand that God would indeed speak to all of them, but they didn’t yet understand that God would speak only to Moses when he wanted to reveal something to his people as a whole. Because they did not yet know this, Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses.

The Lord answered their challenge with a symbolic action—the most powerful teaching tool with which Israel was familiar.<sup>7</sup> God showed all of Israel that Miriam and Aaron were wrong to make such a challenge by striking Miriam with leprosy;<sup>8</sup> this made her ritually unclean and forced her to withdraw from the camp of Israel. For many readers this is disquieting. This kind of answer from God seems so dramatic, so overblown, so severe. Students seem to get mired in this first part of the story and often come away feeling that it is a depiction of a harsh, easily angered, unforgiving God. It hurts to think of God in this way. Doing so seems contradictory to how we usually picture him. It can even cause fear as we wonder how he may react to things we do.

This response stems from not looking at the whole story. What we forget is that Miriam was quickly healed; her suffering lasted for only a brief time

and had no lasting consequences. Under the law of Moses, after being healed she still had to wait outside the camp of Israel during a period of purification (Leviticus 13:4–6). During this waiting period, Israel did not move on without Miriam. They stopped. They waited for her. The mercy of God is abundantly apparent when we realize that Miriam was immediately healed and that after a week she had been fully reintegrated into the house of Israel (Numbers 12:14), taking up her former position as if she had done nothing wrong. It was only then that the Israelites were prepared to continue their journey.

Now, think of that! When we look at the complete story, we don’t see a tale of an unpredictably angry God. Instead, we see a God of power coupled with a God of patience and mercy. We can remember that God’s first priority was the spiritual salvation of his children. Thus lessons that would affect Miriam, Aaron, and all of Israel spiritually were far more important than whether someone experienced physical or social discomfort for a time. Still, God quickly allayed the physical discomfort as well. Looking at the big picture of this story we see that when Miriam acted inappropriately, God punished her in a way that would teach her and all Israel, leading them to a better understanding. He then immediately accepted her repentance, healed her, and soon fully restored her as if she had never done anything wrong. He and his people did not move on without Miriam. They did not hold it against her. They waited for her and restored her.

This is the kind of God who can inspire hope in students as they make their own mistakes. The Old Testament is replete with stories like this, but we often fail to follow the full story. Such examples take place on the scale of personal stories and on the scale of the stories of tribes and nations. Perhaps the largest-scale example is in the scattering of Israel. The destruction of the Northern Kingdom and their subsequent scattering is a somber tale. When we include the gathering of Israel with it, the story encompasses patience, hope, and eventual triumph. The triumph is possible because of the earlier punishment combined with God’s patience. It is important to see both the small- and big-picture stories of the scriptures that teach us these lessons about Jehovah’s attributes. Students often need help to take a step back and see the whole big-picture story. They will grasp the seriousness of the scattering of Israel but do not always automatically put it together with the mercy of God in patiently gathering them thousands of years later.

We are fortunate that we have Restoration scripture to help us further understand Jehovah's nature. Speaking of humankind in the days of Noah, Jehovah tells Enoch in vision that "the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them" (Moses 7:34). That language is about as wrathful as you can get! Yet Enoch has already seen that Jehovah weeps over this, and just a few verses later the Lord himself says, "Wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?" (Moses 7:37). Here we see a God who, for the good of his people, must come out in judgment against them; yet, at the same time, he weeps over it all.

This same image is painted of the great God whom Isaiah writes about. In chapter 25, Isaiah speaks of Jehovah destroying cities, of nations fearing him, of bringing down strangers and terrible ones, of his treading down Moab, and laying fortresses to the dust. Yet all these images are interspersed with contrasting pictures: he is a strength to the poor and needy who are in distress, he is a refuge from the storm, and he brings a feast for his people. Perhaps the interrelation between Jehovah's warrior traits and merciful nature is summed up best in verse 8: "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." As a result those who have waited for Jehovah "will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9). While Jehovah will fight many battles for us, his battle with death is the greatest, and that victory is the most meaningful for us.

A few chapters later, this same interrelationship is highlighted again when Jehovah is described as the Divine Warrior,<sup>9</sup> one who is mighty in war for his people in a battle with Leviathan, who serves as a symbol for Satan and hell. "In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea" (Isaiah 27:1). Then the Lord himself speaks of these attributes: "Fury is not in me: who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me. He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud" (Isaiah 27:4-6). It is because he can conquer in any and every kind of battle that Jehovah has the ability to redeem us.<sup>10</sup> It is the sword he holds in one hand that allows him to wipe away our tears with the other.

Having learned of God's simultaneous wrath and weeping from these stories, we can assume that same character prevails in the being who in the latter days has said things like "mine anger is kindled against them" (Doctrine and Covenants 5:8) and that he would cause that "a desolating scourge shall go forth among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty, and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away and utterly destroyed by the brightness of my coming" (Doctrine and Covenants 5:19).

The imagery of Jehovah as a divine warrior is prevalent in the Old Testament.<sup>11</sup> In our current culture, the depiction of a warrior God can be jarring and disconcerting. It is incumbent upon us as teachers to help our students see past their initial reactions and recognize the comfort that can flow from these images. When the Israelites were faced with an army too great for them, they were told, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13). They were also assured that "the Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:14). After their deliverance from the Egyptians, the Israelites described the Great Jehovah by saying, "The Lord is a man of war" (Exodus 15:3)—they praised him for having "triumphed gloriously" (Exodus 15:21) and extolled his ability to erase the great Egyptian army with "a blast of [his] nostrils" (Exodus 15:8). Having seen the power of their divine warrior, Israel could more easily trust in him in the future. Thus it was this knowledge of a mighty God who could triumph in battle that added power to his later command to "fear not, neither be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 1:21), or to "be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Significantly, Jehovah's warrior-like acts usually either teach his people or protect them from injustice and suffering at the hands of others. Thus his ability to extend mercy is created by his ability to conquer, ranging from deliverance from mortal armies to his triumph over the grave and hell. He can even conquer our fallen natures, a battle he will fight simultaneously for *and* with us that allows him to shower us with great mercy. The better our students recognize Christ's past victories, the more fully they can trust that he can mercifully deliver them from every form of enemy that besets them, including themselves. Now, that is power to be drawn into our lives!

Our understanding of this point expands as the Old Testament teaches about the future Messiah. Students can be taken aback when they learn how to interpret Isaiah well enough to understand what Isaiah 63 discusses. While the treading of the winepress spoken of in that chapter surely refers in large

degree to his atoning sufferings in the meridian of time, it is also clear imagery about the wrathful judgment of the Second Coming, when he will “trample them [the wicked] in [his] fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon [his] garments” (Isaiah 63:3). In this case, the red on his garments is the blood of the wicked. He says he will “tread down the people in [his] anger, and make them drunk in [his] fury” (Isaiah 63:6). This is clearly a passage about the Savior destroying and killing the wicked when he comes again.<sup>12</sup> Yet this language is juxtaposed with phrases such as those found in the verse immediately following: “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses” (Isaiah 63:7).

A very consistent theme in Isaiah, especially in the latter chapters of the book,<sup>13</sup> is the idea that God will save the righteous by punishing those who oppress them.<sup>14</sup> This is part of what is conveyed in chapter 63—that the mercy shown to those who follow God will at least partially take the form of destruction for those who oppress them. This same language that elicits images of a divine warrior who saves by trampling the winepress in fierce wrath is conveyed by the latter-day Jehovah as well (see Doctrine and Covenants 76:107; 88:106).

While there is likely some degree of literalness in this description—meaning that flesh-and-blood enemies will be conquered by the Lord—there is surely also a high degree of symbolic application to be drawn. In some ways, we are being assured that the Lord will conquer our great oppressors of death and hell (see 2 Nephi 9).<sup>15</sup> Yet, in other ways, these passages can illustrate that no matter what is oppressing us in life—whether that be temptation, mental health issues, or spiritual plagues—we can find reassurance in knowing that at some point the Divine Warrior will conquer these oppressors for us, thus providing liberty to us even while in our captive states. The mercy we rightly love to see in our Savior is possible only because he has fought battles for us in Gethsemane and on the cross and thus has set us free. There could be no power or efficacy behind his mercy if there were not also power behind his ability to wage war for us.

The Savior is insistent that he is a divine warrior, even in the era of the Restoration. For example, in section 87 of the Doctrine and Covenants the Savior says that he wants the cries and blood of the Saints to “cease to come

up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, from the earth, to be avenged of their enemies” (Doctrine and Covenants 87:7). Because the Hebrew word *Sabaoth* comes from the word for “fighting” or “war” and literally means men “of war,” it is usually translated as “hosts,” or “armies.”<sup>16</sup> The phrase has a very clear connection to warfare that is designed to elicit images of an army captain leading his troops into victorious battle. Because the use of the term in the Doctrine and Covenants is tied to imagery of avenging the wrongdoings of the Saints’ enemies, this seems a clear allusion to the Savior coming with a heavenly host, or army, to wage war on the wicked in order to avenge the Saints of their wrongs, similar to the imagery in Isaiah 63. This idea is also conveyed earlier in Restoration revelations, when the Savior refers to himself as the “Lord of Hosts” as he speaks of burning up the proud and wicked (Doctrine and Covenants 29:9). Two verses later, we read of the wicked not being able to stand when he reveals himself in power and great glory along with all the hosts (or armies) of heaven (Doctrine and Covenants 29:11). In fact, it seems that the Lord really wants us to perceive him in this light since seven other times in the Doctrine and Covenants he describes himself as the Lord of Hosts while detailing his intent to destroy the wicked (Doctrine and Covenants 64:24; 121:23; 127:3-4; 133:64; 135:7) and when speaking of the need to purge his church (Doctrine and Covenants 56:10; 85:5). Because this phrase is used in the Old Testament in connection with Jehovah being a man of war who fights for his people (e.g., Genesis 32:2; Joshua 5:14; 1 Samuel 4:4; 1 Samuel 15:2; 1 Samuel 17:45; 2 Kings 19:31; Psalm 59:5; Isaiah 8:13; Jeremiah 8:3), it seems clear that in these Restoration revelations, that same being intends for himself to be seen in the same way that he was in Old Testament times. We cannot help but conclude that the Jehovah of the Old Testament continues to want people in our day to see him, at least in some instances, as a man of war.

I have found that when I teach students that Jehovah is indeed the Divine Warrior, they come to find great comfort in the concept, despite some initial shock and a few growing pains as they gain greater understanding. In each class we teach, we almost certainly have someone who is struggling with pornography, other addictions, anxiety, depression, or some other overwhelming burden. These students can experience a great sense of relief—even an increase of faith—when they are taught that the Lord they worship is one who has conquered greater foes than those, and that he will do so again on their behalf. I have witnessed some who are brought to tears as they picture

a Savior who has conquered their own individual and personal leviathans and who then, with that defending and conquering sword still in one hand, reaches out with the other to gently wipe away their tears.

### The Messiah of the New Testament

Understanding better who Jehovah is will help our students better appreciate his mortal ministry. This is true both in terms of recognizing the contrast between his majesty and his humble mortal beginnings and in regard to how he continues to function as the Divine Warrior even in mortality. In some ways the culmination of his role as warrior takes place in the New Testament, but that is not usually recognized without prior preparation to see it.

Still, in contrast to stories and descriptions that create images of a divine warrior, the Gospels (particularly Luke) present us with a story that creates an image of the humble beginnings of the Savior. In Nephi's vision the angel speaks of the "condescension" of God (1 Nephi 11:16). While this phrase entails much more, one of the things it does is encapsulate so well the act of the mighty Jehovah coming to earth in such humble circumstances. Historical and archaeological evidence can round out our understanding even more because it paints a picture that we do not often examine but that can also help us understand our Savior more completely.

Christ grew up in Nazareth, a town of only a few hundred people.<sup>17</sup> This was one of the smallest villages of the Galilee area (probably no larger than ten acres),<sup>18</sup> which was the most rural and humble area of Jewry at the time.<sup>19</sup> The vast majority of those who lived in the Galilee made their subsistence in some kind of agricultural endeavor, and their major economic goal was day-to-day survival.<sup>20</sup> While there certainly was a group who were truly destitute, most were gliding just above the subsistence level: hard pressed but able—through substantial and unrelenting work—to feed themselves, barring unforeseen but not uncommon disasters.<sup>21</sup> Builders such as Joseph of Nazareth would likely have fit into this category.<sup>22</sup>

In Galilee, the towns along the lakeshores were probably the most prosperous.<sup>23</sup> But even in these better-off towns like Capernaum, it is clear that the people possessed mostly modest housing.<sup>24</sup> While it was in those lakeside towns that the Savior spent much of his ministry, he did not grow up there. As meager as Capernaum would have been, less prosperous towns, such as Nazareth, were even more simple. In the smaller villages, the streets were typically narrow and small and made of hard-packed dirt, as were the floors of



Robert T. Barrett, *Christ Creating the Earth*. All rights reserved; used by permission.

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houses in such circumstances (Capernaum would have been similar). There was no running water and no sewer system in these small communities as there could be in the prosperous Roman cities of the time. Bathing in the way we think of it was a luxury seldom seen in a tiny town like Nazareth, although it did have several springs that served as freshwater sources.<sup>25</sup> The

Herodian-period winepress and terraced vineyard area found in Nazareth (along with several small granaries, oil presses, and places for storing oil and wine jars)<sup>26</sup> make it clear that at least part—and probably most—of Nazareth's economy was agrarian,<sup>27</sup> with a much lower rate of agricultural production than we experience today.<sup>28</sup> Homes were apparently mostly mud-mortared fieldstones with reed and palm-thatched roofs,<sup>29</sup> but to create some of the structures in Nazareth, the builders carved into the limestone hills to form some of the walls.<sup>30</sup> Joseph, and seemingly Jesus (Mark 6:3), were construction workers, probably working more with stone than wood since that was the primary building material of the area. Though Nazareth itself had limestone as the primary available material, most of the building done in the wider Galilee area was of basalt—a sharp and hard stone. Working the stone would have required difficult labor.

The Savior's parables provide hints about the kinds of places he lived and the people he interacted with in the Galilee area. They are full of agricultural metaphors (Matthew 13:1–32), stories of people not able to pay their debts (Matthew 18:21–35), of being cast into prison for not meeting their obligations (Luke 12:58–59), of the need to divide land inheritances (Luke 12:13), of people who are hungry or naked or without a place to stay (Matthew 25:35–36). In other settings he counsels people to invite the poor to their feasts (Luke 14:12–14), and some express dismay when costly things are used rather than putting those resources toward feeding the poor (Mark 14:3–9). To be sure, the Savior's teachings also include examples of the rich. Yet because his teachings and parables typically drew upon experiences he and his listeners were familiar with, it appears that the Savior was well acquainted with the poor and struggling.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, nutrition was not typically of the highest level, and overall health suffered. Diseases, often including dental diseases, were a contributing factor to a generally low life expectancy in that time period.<sup>32</sup> The Savior clearly survived well into adulthood, and some of his apostles survived much beyond that. This means they were among the more healthy and robust of their population. Still, it is likely that they all suffered from some of the privations that naturally accompanied life in the Galilee at the time. Furthermore, Isaiah tells us that there was nothing about Christ's physical appearance that would set him apart (Isaiah 53:2). This does not necessarily mean he was unattractive, but it probably indicates he was intentionally nondescript. This lack of being physically distinctive from others suggests that he was not

spared from the deprivations of his fellow villagers, such as periods of hunger, disease, fatigue, and so on.

At least for much of his ministry, he was homeless (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). He and his disciples sometimes had to glean food from the fields of others in order to eat (Matthew 12:1; Mark 2:23). The scriptures make it clear that during at least the years of his teaching ministry, he was often—if not always—dependent upon others for places to stay and food to eat (Luke 8:2–3; 10:38; John 12:1–2). He traveled hundreds and hundreds of miles in a region full of steep hills that were often blisteringly hot and, in the Galilee area, oppressively humid. From all scriptural indications, he traveled on foot, with the exception of one journey down the Mount of Olives to the Temple Mount on a donkey (Matthew 21:1–11). He came not just to take care of the commoners, the poor, and the struggling; he came to *be* one of them.<sup>33</sup> In so many ways, he came to this earth to descend below all things in the flesh (Doctrine and Covenants 88:6; 122:8) so that he could succor us in our need, which is possible only through his intimate understanding of our mortal situation (Alma 7:12).

Studying the birth and life of the Savior along with all this context helps us better appreciate his condescension. Further, our understanding of his humility is heightened all the more when we remember the majesty and might of the Great Jehovah—the Divine Warrior—as depicted in the Old Testament and Doctrine and Covenants. When we willingly study the images of kingship, power, and might that those scriptural books paint of the Holy One of Israel, then his condescension becomes all the more poignant. He who conquered leviathan with his great sword was born in a stable and laid in a manger. The being who caused his enemies to tremble with fear grew up in a tiny village, sleeping in a home with dirt floors. The God who had destroyed the greatest army on earth with “a blast of his nostrils,” that great “man of war” probably had to deal with disease, infection, and somewhat poor nutrition throughout his mortal life in a place and time that had little in the way of medical resources. The great Creator of heaven and earth spent much of his life hewing rugged, brittle basalt into shapes that could be used for building homes. He who laid wicked cities to waste groaned beneath the load of our sins. The same being who had judged the earth and administered necessary justice would be falsely accused and condemned by sham trials before tribunals of mere mortals, some of whom knew him to be innocent. The same God whose thoughts and ways are higher than ours was ridiculed for not

identifying those who smote him. The master of heaven and earth, who had opened up the earth in order to swallow rebels, was mocked for not coming down off the cross. He who destroyed the Assyrian army in order to relieve his people later pleaded for deliverance from his own suffering, and then willingly endured that suffering instead (Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:19–20). He who could assure his people to “be still” and “fear not” because he would fight their battles for them voluntarily died for us, choosing to fight a battle with death on our behalf rather than fight against his own persecutors. The dirt of the Mount of Olives soaked up the blood of the being who had created that mountain. It is only after we understand this contrast that we can really understand the words we often sing: “The Lord of glory died for men.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, recognizing that Jesus of Nazareth is also the Great Jehovah, who both “keep[s] anger” and is “merciful” (Jeremiah 3:12), allows us to better appreciate his mortal life and ministry. Further, understanding the varying facets of his many roles enables us to draw greater meaning from the New Testament. When we understand the aforementioned interrelationship between his sword-filled and his tear-wiping roles, we come to see Christ as a divine warrior in the New Testament. Thus we can gain a greater sense of his power and majesty and derive more meaning from the stories of healing the blind and lame, of casting out devils, and of raising the dead. We see it most poignantly in his meekest moments—at Gethsemane and Calvary. We can come to understand that his unfathomable suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross were in fact his greatest battles. Because he conquered there, he can be victorious in every other aspect of both mortal and immortal life. Understanding this allows our students to rejoice in Christ’s unique ability to conquer—an attribute he does not intend for us to emulate precisely because he has done the conquering for us.

My experience in the classroom has shown me that we need to help our students look more carefully at Christ’s majestic roles as portrayed predominantly in scripture outside of the Gospels. We need to help them view him as Jehovah, a divine being who displayed immense power and mercy. They need to avoid thinking solely of a Savior whose primary role was to walk around forgiving and healing, though that was certainly a crucial aspect of his ministry. Instead, our students need to study all of our Savior’s experiences in his mortal life—from those difficult challenges of mortality to the instances where he acted as both an exacting yet benevolent judge—not only the many beautiful examples of his crucial acts of healing, forgiving, and extending

mercy. It is only when we put all of this together that we can come closer to understanding the true nature of the being whom we worship. This can unlock a great deal more power to draw into our lives.

There are many more of Christ’s roles that can and should be explored. The purpose of this essay is to take only a few representative examples that have helped my students. Whether we are teaching a course that is designed to cover more than one book of scripture, such as “Jesus Christ and the Everlasting Gospel,” or one that focuses on just a small portion of scripture, such as Old or New Testament courses, our students will be better served if we help them explore relevant portions of other books of scripture that can help them develop a more well-rounded view of their Savior and Redeemer. Their proclivities may be to focus on one aspect of Christ, and moving beyond that limited view can sometimes be initially uncomfortable for them. Despite this disquiet, they can and should find greater peace, faith, and power if they are guided through a quest to come to know Jesus Christ in a more complete way. **RE**

#### Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2017.
2. We see jarring language used in the Doctrine and Covenants as well, such as “the anger of the Lord is kindled, and his sword is bathed in heaven, and it shall fall on the inhabitants of the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:13).
3. There is, of course, a complicated transmission and translation history behind the texts as we now have them. While the exact nuance of the words used may be slightly different than the original authors intended, it is also clear that the general tenor of what they were trying to convey is still preserved when we have so many authors saying the same kind of thing over such a long period of time.
4. See Jeffery R. Holland, “The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship,” *Ensign*, May 2014.
5. Kerry Muhlestein, *Return unto Me: Messages of Love, Hope and Inspiration from the Old Testament and Other Scriptures* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2013).
6. Adapted from something I wrote about this episode and similar ones in Kerry Muhlestein, “Keys to Making the Old Testament a Powerful Force in Your Life,” *Meridian Magazine*, 2014, <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/article-1-14107/>.
7. Donald W. Parry, “Symbolic Action as Prophecy in the Old Testament” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 337–35; and Kerry Muhlestein, “Symbolic Action: A Key to Understanding the Old Testament,” in *Meridian Magazine*, 2014, <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/article-1-14330/>.

8. It should be noted that students will typically wonder why Miriam was stricken and not Aaron, especially because in our era this tends to carry with it a gendered message. We do not know why only Miriam was chosen for this punishment. Perhaps it had to do with the ritual purity requirements for priests. Perhaps Miriam played a greater part in the complaint, or Aaron would learn best as he saw that others would suffer if the priest went astray. We just don't have enough information about the story to fully understand why Miriam was stricken and Aaron was not.

9. On the Divine Warrior, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

10. On this same idea in the Book of Mormon, see Daniel Belnap, "I Will Contend with Them That Contendeth with Thee': The Divine Warrior in Jacob's Speech of 2 Nephi 6–10," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17, nos. 1–2 (2008): 20–39.

11. See Patrick D. Miller Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); or Tremper Longman III, "Psalm 90: A Divine Warrior Victory Song," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 3 (1984), 26–74; or Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

12. See Kerry Muhlestein, *Scripture Study Made Simple: The Old Testament Text and Commentary in a Single Volume* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2017), 410–11.

13. Many scholars argue that the section of Isaiah I speak of here was written by a different person than the Isaiah passages quoted above. This is a complicated issue, though in my opinion the Book of Mormon casts serious doubt on this idea. Either way, the authorship of this second half is irrelevant to the point I am making here.

14. Muhlestein, "Scripture Study Made Simple," 410–11.

15. See Belnap, "I Will Contend with Them That Contendeth with Thee," 20–39.

16. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 838–39. Also G. Johannes Botterwick, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 12:211–32.

17. On the archaeology of Nazareth, see Bellarmino Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth, Volume I: From the Beginning until the XII Century* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing, 1969). Estimates place the population at a maximum of four hundred people. See Johnathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 83; also Mark T. Schuler, "Recent Archaeology of the Interpretation of Texts from the Galilean Ministry of Jesus," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2007): 105.

18. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 82.

19. During the Savior's lifetime the Galilee area was mostly rural and agricultural in nature, though the growth of the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias induced some growth in the area and an increase in the economic possibilities of agriculture. See Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 81–89.

20. Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 13–14.

21. Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit*, 13–14. See also John Gee, "The Cares of This World: Roman Economics and the New Testament," in *New Testament: History, Culture,*

*and Society*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 219–21.

22. Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit*, 13–14.

23. Sean Freyne, "Galilee, Jesus, and the Contribution of Archaeology," *Expository Times* 119:12 (2008), 581.

24. Peter Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 135.

25. Ken Dark, "Early Roman-Period Nazareth and the Sisters of Nazareth Convent," *Antiquaries Journal* 92 (2012), 43.

26. Vassilios Izaffers, "Nazareth," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 3, ed. Ephraim Stern, assistant ed. Ayelet Lewinson-Gilboa (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1993), 1104.

27. James H. Charlesworth, "Jesus Research and Archaeology, a New Perspective," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 38. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.4, who describes the Galilee as producing crops from one end of it to the other.

28. K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 98, who estimate that in the Savior's day one could expect a yield of ten to fifteen times that which was sown, in contrast with today's forty times yield. Gee, "Cares of This World," 219, claims a sixfold harvest.

29. Schuler, "Recent Archaeology," 105.

30. Dark, "Early Roman-Period Nazareth," 45–48, 61–62.

31. See Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 97.

32. Much of this is apparent from my own excavations of contemporary burials in Egypt, but see also Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 75–90.

33. While this is a subject I have thought about and taught for a long time, my ideas have recently been aided by personal communications with Matthew and Mary Grey, whom I thank for these conversations. See, for example, Mary Grey, "The Divine Christ and the Human Jesus," on the *Times and Seasons* blog at <https://www.timesandseasons.org/index.php/2018/06/the-divine-christ-and-the-human-jesus/>.

34. Isaac Watts, "He Died! The Great Redeemer Died," in *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), no. 192.