Growing Old Graciously: Lessons from a Centenarian
Elder Stephen Berg Oveson and Mary Louise Oveson Stoddard

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Helping Students Understand the Principles of Personal Revelation
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"Wars and Rumors of Wars": A Restoration Perspective
Daniel K Judd and Benjamin M. Rogers
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Editors’ Introduction

At age ninety-eight, Mal Berg Oveson began reading the entire Old Testament for the first time. Now at age one hundred, she continues to study the scriptures each day. In an interview with two of her children, Sister Oveson offers some lessons on life and tips on aging graciously. Believing that life is sweet, she continues to show the same kindness she has displayed all her life.

We know much about the translation of the Book of Mormon, but the Bible has quite a story of its own, from the translation process to its typesetting and printing. In this issue, four BYU professors offer a concise history behind many printings of the Bible, beginning with Tyndale’s translation. Complementing this article are images with vignettes on many early editions of the Bible.

The Fall of Adam and Eve is a challenging yet crucial doctrine to explain to students. Douglas S. Ladle, a member of the BYU—Idaho faculty, provides a useful approach for understanding and teaching the Fall, clearly defining the roles of God, Satan, Adam, and Eve in this pivotal event in earth’s history.

Ronald E. Bartholomew, instructor at the Orem Utah Institute of Religion, writes of the need to teach students how to receive inspiration, noting that they are “in those seasons of life where there seems to be a more urgent need to learn to receive and understand personal revelation.” He uses Doctrine and Covenants 6–11 as a model for teaching the process of receiving revelation.

The debate over the war in Iraq and the events of September 11, 2001, raise questions about the legitimacy of war and the need to defend ourselves as a nation. Authors Daniel K Judd and Benjamin M. Rogers probe deeply into these issues, writing of “the sobering reality that the future will not be free from terror, destruction, and war.” This article provides prophetic guidance on wars and on our responsibilities as Latter-day Saints.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Editor-in-Chief
Ted D. Stoddard, Associate Editor
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Mal Berg Oveson reading her scriptures in November 2003

Courtesy Kristy Merrill, a granddaughter
As our mother approached her one hundredth birthday, we began to think seriously about her contributions to her family, to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and to society. In the process, we were particularly impressed that everyone has always loved her dearly and has always admired her attitudes toward life, especially in her twilight years. Within the last five years, as we assisted her in preparing an exhaustive account of her life history, we realized that our mother is the epitome of a person who has grown old graciously by reflecting courtesy and consideration to everyone. We soon saw the value of using her lifetime experiences as the basis for detailing lessons she has exhibited and taught about growing old graciously.

Lessons from Early Life

Mal Berg was born on December 26, 1903, in Castle Dale, Utah, the fifth of seven children born to Carl Rasmus Engelbregn Berg and Martha Amalia Ungerman. Mother has always been proud of her strong Danish ancestry and credits her longevity to this heritage. She is not the only one of her family to live a long life. Her mother lived to be ninety-three, and four of Mother’s siblings lived to about that same age.

Growing up in Castle Dale, Utah, was wonderful, our mother says. She tells us of the love her entire family shared one for another. As children, we learned very young how hardworking and dedicated to their family her parents were and how kind and courteous they were to their children. When we as children visited with our grandparents, we could
see these behaviors for ourselves. Mom was taught that having good work habits and working hard bring rewards. As a family, they raised all their food, whether fruit, vegetable, or meat. The children learned at a very young age to cook, can, wash, iron, and sew. Almost everything was done in the home, as there was not much money for shopping in the stores.

As we were growing up and being taught, Mom always encouraged us to be like her family—close, loving, kind, and courteous to one another as well as dependent on each other. She always reminded us of her desires through stories of her youth, and we recall those stories constantly today. One such story she loved telling is about graciousness through sharing. Occasionally, one or two extra eggs were available in the household of her youth, and one of the children was designated to go to the store and trade an egg for candy. Mom explained that on the way home, her and her siblings’ temptation was great to sneak a piece before the “dividing up.” She can still remember vividly waiting for the candy to come and then having everyone gather around the old dining table while the candy was doled out into seven piles before everyone took his or hers. She says it always tasted sweeter because no one had been left out. To this day, she counsels us to be gracious by sharing with each other in everything life has to offer.

Mom’s family was very aware of the need to acquire a good education and often reflected on how blessed they were to live in an area that offered educational opportunities. This lesson was learned from their father, who interrupted his schooling at a young age to go to work to help support his family while they were still living in Denmark. Because of this limitation, Mother’s father often sat with the children around the old dining room table in Castle Dale, Utah, in the evenings as they did their homework so he could learn to read and write English. Our grandfather felt it was very important that he learn good English and anything else he could glean from his children. In turn, Mom has always taught us to be gracious by teaching one another and learning from each other.

From our mother, we learned the positive outcomes of having dedicated parents who foster a loving, gracious family atmosphere; consciously shape and direct the lives of their children; and teach values to children as an outgrowth of scripture study and family togetherness. Her insistence on being involved in her children’s lives continued as a dominant aspect of her life as she approached her hundredth birthday.

Mother graduated at seventeen from Emery Stake Academy, the equivalent of a high school. She was a member of the last class to
graduate from the academy. When she was a junior, the valley citizens learned that the Church was going to transfer jurisdiction of the Church schools to the state system. Her principal wanted to have a large graduating class that last year, so he told all the juniors that if they could acquire the appropriate number of credits during the year, they could graduate with the seniors. Mom was an excellent student, and she quickly fulfilled that requirement, graduating a year early at the age of seventeen.

After graduation, she accepted a job in Salt Lake City for one year at the telephone company. She soon found that living away from home and working at a job she really detested—to this day—was not as fun as she had pictured it when making her initial plans. After working for eight months, she wrote to her parents, asking if she could come home. In reply, she received a letter from her father telling her that they would love having her home again but only after she had fulfilled her commitment of the one year. This was a very sobering experience for our mother—one she has shared with us on many occasions. From this and similar experiences of our mother, we learned the lesson that commitments made should result in commitments fulfilled. Fulfilling commitments throughout her lifetime and our lifetimes has helped her and us be gracious by being at peace with ourselves despite our limitations.

Lessons from Marriage and Family

Upon finishing her job in Salt Lake (Mom has always emphasized the fact that she quit on the exact day that marked the end of her one-year commitment), she returned home to find that her parents had decided they would send her to Brigham Young University. She was thrilled. She attended school for one year and then began teaching elementary school, serving in this capacity for three years before she married.

Her meeting and courtship with our father followed a natural sequence through the years prior to their marriage. Our father, Merrill Mahonri Oveson, was three years older than Mother and therefore had different friends. However, through the years of mission and schooling, they soon caught up with each other and found themselves in the same groups. Upon becoming engaged, they set about making plans for their future. Dad graduated from BYU and had to choose between two great opportunities. One was to move to Idaho to be a seminary teacher for the Church, and the other was to further his education at Oregon State University by obtaining a master’s degree in agronomy. He and Mother made the decision together. Mom has made the point over and over that they spent considerable time talking through the pros and cons
and finally made the decision jointly to move to Oregon to attend graduate school. Mother knew that Dad leaned toward farming, as he had grown up in a farming environment. Farming was a deeply ingrained love of his, and Mom wanted to support him in whatever would make him happy—even if it meant leaving her home, her parents, and all her friends. To this day, she continues to counsel us that gracious behavior requires us to consider the wishes of our spouses, to carefully analyze decisions together, and to be willing to adapt lifestyles to meet the needs of decisions that have been jointly made.

In today’s world, where a wedding with all the trimmings is such a big event, Mom has always lovingly spoken of her wedding day. The event as it transpired would be very unusual today but apparently was very normal for young couples in the 1920s. The day before their wedding, Dad picked Mom up at her home. She said good-bye to her parents at the gate. Dad and Grandpa Oveson loaded her one trunk into the back of Grandpa’s Model T, the three of them climbed in, and they waved as they drove off to Price to catch the train to Salt Lake City. Grandpa Oveson got them to the train, said his good-byes, and returned to Castle Dale. Mom and Dad rode the train to Provo, where Dad got off to finalize some plans between BYU and Oregon State University. Mom went on to Salt Lake City, where she was met by her sister, Leone, with whom she spent the night. Dad followed on the next train and was met by his sister, Nora, with whom he spent the night.

The following morning at 8 A.M., Mom and Dad met at the temple. Mom received her endowment, and they were then married. No one was with them except Dad’s great-aunt, who was a temple worker. Mom remembers leaving the temple around 3 P.M., going out for a very nice dinner, and then retiring to the Hotel Utah for the night. The following morning they left by train to Oregon, where they lived for the next forty years. Mother continues to emphasize that growing old graciously involves the scriptural injunction to leave father and mother, cleave unto each other, and “be one flesh” (see Matthew 19:5).

Corvallis, Oregon, was home for our father and mother for the next two years. While Dad attended classes and studied, Mom learned to live on seventy-five dollars a month. This amount covered their rent, school supplies, food, and entertainment. Mom had five dollars a week
for food, and she learned very early how to plan and make do. Through much trial and error, she became a marvelous cook and manager, and we all delight to listen to her tell of those early years. She and Dad made close, lifelong friends who were in the same financial straits as they were; working together, they created their own entertainment. We have heard wonderful stories of their canoeing, bicycling, hiking, and getting together to pool leftovers for fun dinners followed by board games or good conversation. As a family, all of us have emulated our parents’ thrifty ways when necessary, and we continue to get together frequently as a reflection of our mother’s insistence that we share life’s experiences with each other.

Upon receiving his master’s degree, Dad was offered a job on an agricultural experiment station in the central part of Oregon in a small, rural farming town called Moro. Mom recalls the first morning she awoke in Moro as one of quiet misgivings. She said she awoke and looked out the window and saw nothing but open space full of brown dirt. She wondered just what kind of a place Dad had brought her to. However, during the twenty years they lived in this small town, they became pillars of the community. Friendships continue to this day, even though most of those who were their closest friends have now passed away. Mom always speaks very lovingly of Moro and how she often misses those open spaces where she watched the cycle of wheat growing from green shoots to golden brown, of wheat being harvested, and of the land returning again to brown dirt. It was during those years in Moro that Mom and Dad were blessed with four children. Life was sweet.

The main drawback of living in Moro was a total lack of Latter-day Saints beyond our immediate family. We were the only members for miles. The closest branch was in The Dalles, Oregon, forty miles away, and that branch was not formed until after Mom and Dad had lived in Moro for several years. During the years of World War II, with our growing up without any organized religion and with gas rationing prohibiting the drive to The Dalles every Sunday, Dad asked for and received permission from the mission president in Portland to hold our own “home Sunday School.” That decision turned out to be the single thing that did the most to cement our family together in the gospel. From this beginning, we as a family have moved on to our parents serving a mission together, two sons serving foreign missions, all four children marrying in the temple, two sons serving as mission presidents, two daughters serving in numerous ward and stake callings, one daughter serving a temple mission, and one son serving as a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy. Our parents had great
wisdom and the strength to go forth and do those things they had been taught in the homes of their youth. Obviously, we feel that the things they taught in their home pointed the way to grow old graciously—by making the gospel and the Church a part of our lives no matter where we are or what we are doing.

In August 1947, our family experienced an unforgettable tragedy. Our home burned completely, and we lost everything we owned. Mom has told us since just how difficult this tragedy was for her. The small town of Moro quickly surrounded us and showered us with love and help. This help came in the form of replacing items that were needed to begin again—furniture, clothes, kitchen items, bedding, and so forth. It was overwhelming to us to witness the outpouring of goods that we needed. Mom expressed her hesitation in accepting all this outpouring of love through donations in our behalf, but she realized that the items were really needed and that they were given with much love and sincerity. We learned a great lesson in graciousness—that while it is greater to give than to receive, some situations require the receiver to allow the giver the opportunity of blessings by receiving graciously. Mom has items in her kitchen today that she received on that occasion. From this experience, our parents, especially our mother, taught us a lesson that has endured to this day—being a gracious receiver is just as important as being a gracious giver.

In 1948, our father was offered a significant promotion from Oregon State University and simultaneously offered related agronomy work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These offers required us to move to the experiment station in Pendleton, Oregon, where Dad did experimental agronomy work for Oregon State and the USDA. However, the primary deciding factor for our parents to accept the move was the simple fact that Pendleton had a small Church ward and that we would have the opportunity to share the gospel with others and participate in more Church activities. With mixed emotions, we left Moro—after twenty years for our parents—and started over. This was a sacrifice that Mom
and Dad made mainly for our sakes. We were welcomed with open arms in Pendleton, and Mom and Dad soon had Church callings with major responsibilities.

At one point, Dad and Mom were serving in stake leadership positions, and they had to travel a great deal in fulfilling Church assignments on weekends. Our stake center was located in LaGrande, Oregon, sixty miles from Pendleton; and the stake area was even larger, extending to Baker, Oregon, and up into the Wallowa Mountains. Travel requirements resulted in no serious accidents but did result in faith-building experiences for both Mom and Dad while they were going about the duties of the Savior. All of these responsibilities were taken in stride, but our gracious parents taught us to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in daily living.

One example occurred when Mom was stake Relief Society president and was driving home from LaGrande with her close friends in the stake Relief Society presidency. As they were driving, a car came around the corner at full speed driving on their side of the road. Mom had no choice but to drive off the right side of the road. It was a rather deep embankment, and as they sat in the car in a stunned state, they took awhile to take stock of their situation. The bank was too steep to drive out, so they climbed out of the car and started walking, looking for a way out. Soon they came upon some old wagon tracks that stretched ahead of them. They returned to the car, and Mom drove along the tracks until they eventually led back onto the highway. They finished their trip, discussing what could have happened.

Upon arriving home, Mom told Dad about the incident, but he was not very concerned; he just checked the car to see if anything had been damaged. The next trip to LaGrande, Mom and Dad went together, and when they came to the spot where Mom had driven off, they stopped and looked it over. Dad was amazed. He said to Mom, “You couldn’t have driven down there without rolling over. Someone picked you up and set you down.” Mom has had her share of situations where she has been “picked up and set down” and kept safe. The foundation in the Church our parents sought for us by moving to Pendleton worked for them as well. Not only were they active in community affairs but they also became pillars of the Church in Pendleton.

**Lessons from Retirement Years**

Throughout her years of Church service in the Union Stake in Oregon, Mom had always wanted to serve a mission for the Church. Dad
had served as a young man in the Southern States Mission, and they truly desired to serve a mission together. Soon after Dad’s retirement in October 1966, they left for the Southern States Mission—Dad’s second time there. They served for two years and found much enjoyment and fulfillment in serving in this capacity. During their last two months in the South, Oregon State University once again contacted Dad and asked if he would be available to go to Amman, Jordan, for eighteen months of service as an agronomist consultant with the United States Agency for International Development. Mom and Dad talked about it and agreed that they should go. They left just three months following their return from their mission.

This move was quite a change in their lives. They were now living in a Muslim country where the Sabbath was on Saturday. This situation, however, did not stop them from going back to their roots in Moro, Oregon: each Sunday they held their own religious services. Mom has expressed many times the joy these times gave them—just the two of them sharing the gospel and the sacrament. Mom said her favorite days were fast Sundays, when she and Dad took turns expressing their testimonies to each other. “Life was sweet,” she has said many times about these occasions, and she has counseled us often to adopt that same attitude throughout our lives.

Upon returning from Jordan, our parents settled in Tempe, Arizona, where they were close to their son Stephen and his family and where they worked for several years in the Mesa Temple. These became trying years for Mom and Dad. Dad was diagnosed with cancer and spent his last few years valiantly fighting a losing battle. Mom was very dedicated in her attention to every detail for him during this time. In July 1980, Dad passed away, leaving Mom alone for the first time since September 7, 1927. For nearly fifty-three years, they had worked together. They had raised their family together, served in the Church together, and retired together.

After living in Tempe for ten years, Mom made the decision to move to Provo, Utah, and to build a home so she could be close to her son Dick and her daughter Mary. At the age of eighty, she bought a lot and built herself a home. She still continues to live there by herself and still exudes the warmth, concern, and charity that are so much a part of her example of growing old graciously. In the process, she has indeed grown old graciously by teaching us to accept our roles in life, whatever they are; to bear testimony to our spouses and children routinely and frequently; to be independent but also dependent; and to remind ourselves routinely and frequently that “life is sweet.”
An Interview on Growing Old Graciously

Thus far, we have expressed our feelings and remembrances about our centenarian mother and her teachings about and example of growing old graciously. We decided we should also include her personal thoughts and feelings about the process, so shortly before her hundredth birthday, we asked her the following questions and then transcribed her responses.

Are you happy you have lived to be a centenarian?

I don’t know whether I’m happy or not. I have always just taken life as it comes. I do want to say, though, that I have never given up having goals. I have always looked forward, and I have always had things I wanted to accomplish or things I wanted to tell somebody or things that are wrong that I’ve wanted to make right.

One example is that in January of 2003, I looked forward to the new year and said to myself, “This year I’m going to read the scriptures every day.” I of course have missed a few days. I started out reading the New Testament, and I enjoyed it immensely. And when I got through, I looked at the Old Testament and realized that I had never really read it word for word. I had heard the Old Testament stories all my life, but I really had never read it. So I decided that reading the Old Testament would be part of my scripture-reading goal for the year. And I am happy to report that I read every word in the Old Testament. Now I’m about to finish the Doctrine and Covenants. Then, at the first of 2004, during my 101st year, my new goal will be to read the Book of Mormon again.

So I have something to look forward to and something to refresh my memory and strengthen my testimony and make me realize how blessed we are to belong to the Church and what hope it brings us. I don’t know how people live without such hope in their lives.

What are you looking forward to? Where does life go from here?

I am so fortunate because of my family. I look forward to seeing my great-grandchildren go on missions, get married in the temple, and live good, productive lives. I look forward to all my posterity being kind to others and being honest because those are two of the most essential qualities that anyone can have.

Looking to the future, although this may sound a little selfish, I hope I can stay in my own home. But if it comes to the point I can’t,
I hope I will accept the consequences graciously and make the best of it. I of course would be most happy to live alone in my own home and be as independent as I can.

_What does “growing old graciously” mean to you?_

I’ve never consciously thought of myself as a gracious person—and that may be part of growing old graciously. I just take each day as it comes. I do know that I don’t want to hurt people—by words, deeds, or looks. I think that growing old graciously means that we avoid speaking ill of others—that we don’t gossip—and that we try to be kind and thoughtful to others.

_What advice do you give your posterity to help them grow old graciously?_

I want my posterity to be honest and trustworthy in everything they do. I want them to love their neighbors as themselves—they can’t go wrong in doing that. I want them to be grateful for their blessings.

Living the principles of the gospel is the best way to get blessings and thereby to grow old graciously. I think the gospel brings peace of mind. The hope and knowledge that the gospel brings us is so wonderful, and it’s sad that everybody doesn’t have it. My hope is that when I’m gone, I will have so lived that I can receive the blessings Heavenly Father has in store for me and that my posterity will have done the same. It will be just perfect to have all my family with me. That is my foremost hope.

One thing I do for my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren is pray for them every night. I pray for all good things for all of them. And I hope they do the same throughout their lives.

_Did some of your growing old graciously come from the example you had as a little girl in seeing your grandmother grow old in your home?_

My grandmother lived with us for thirteen years, and never did any one of us hear a cross word spoken to her. On the morning Merrill and I left for Price to get on the train to go to Salt Lake to get married, we went in to say good-bye to Grandmother. She had on a little cap she wore to bed, and she said to me, “Mal, before you leave this home, I want to tell you something. Never in all the years that I have lived here has your father ever made me feel anything but welcome in his home.” And I’ve always appreciated so much Grandmother telling me that because, as far as I knew, it was the truth. She had the best room in the
house—in fact, the only nice bedroom in the house—and she never was a troublemaker. She spent a lot of time in that room. She subscribed to a daily Danish newspaper and read it, and in the summers she sat in the little green chair that I have in my bathroom and watched us play. Grandmother was a gracious, sweet old lady, and she never interfered in anything. She was certainly a good example to all of us.

Has Church service helped you grow old graciously?
Yes. It was just wonderful when we moved to Pendleton and were finally able to serve in the Church. I'll never forget the first Sunday in December 1948 when we walked into that little church down by the river. The chapel had blue drapes and blue carpeting, and there was a grand piano on the stand—in stark contrast to the miserable place down in The Dalles. I felt like we had come to heaven. I really did. And that very day they told us they were building a new church in Pendleton. I was perfectly happy. I thought what we had was wonderful.

Church service made me accept responsibility that I have tried to do my best with. It has helped my testimony. It has made me meet a lot of people I would not have met otherwise. It made me understand the importance of the auxiliaries.

What role has adversity played in your growing old graciously?
Losing my husband, Merrill, was the hardest thing I've gone through. But with the hope the gospel brings and an assurance of being with him again, the sting has certainly been taken out of his passing. I don't know what people do when they lose loved ones and they don't have the hope the gospel offers.

The gospel is a way of life; it is part of the plan to help us avoid bitterness. More than ever, I believe that this life is good but that the next life is better. My own adversities have made me understand other people’s adversities. Many of my very best friends are now widows, and like me, they’re all grateful they belong to the Church and have the hope it brings.

Life is full of adversities. But I have learned to cope by living a clean life, trying to understand other people’s problems, being kind and thoughtful, and always thinking of others. Living graciously is a many-splendored thing that has touched every aspect of my life. I’ve dealt with adversity by living one day at a time. I never dreamed I would live to be a hundred, but I’m glad I did. Life is still sweet for me.
Conclusion

Maintaining her independence, our mother has lived alone in her wonderful home for nineteen years. She drove a car until the age of ninety-four and would be still be driving if her children had not stepped in and said, “Enough!” Driving her own car was a singular event that defined her independence. Giving up her car was her first step into dependency. It was extremely difficult for her to realize that she must call for a ride or for help. It was not an easy acceptance, but she was willing to do whatever we asked. The roles of parent and children were beginning to reverse.

Even though she had given up her car, she did not give up her Church callings. She served as a visiting teacher until the age of ninety-eight and held a Church calling until the age of ninety-nine. She gave up these responsibilities because of decisions made by her ward leaders, and she received their decisions graciously. She has continued to attend at least sacrament meetings every Sunday, she is on schedule in reading the standard works of the Church, and she continues to lead and direct her family. She continues to be very supportive of and involved in the lives of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

As our mother approached and passed the ninety-year point in her life, she began to find her roles reversed from previous years. She found herself deferring to her children for assistance with important activities and decisions. But she noticeably did so graciously because the wishes and needs of others were always uppermost in her mind.

As she pointed out in her comments above, in her ninety-eighth year she set out to read the standard works—the entire Old Testament for the first time and the other scriptures one more time among many. Her inquisitiveness and alertness at what she has read from day to day were inspiring and delightful to observe. In the latter half of her ninety-ninth year, we were constantly amazed at her insightful comments and questions about events she encountered in the Old Testament. We were as thrilled as she was when she announced, “Today I’ve finished reading the Old Testament. I read every word in it.” That comment made us appreciative once more of the age in which we live as we remembered Dr. Merrill Oaks and the cataract surgery he performed on both of Mom’s eyes during her eighty-seventh year. The surgery has enabled her to continue enjoying the blessing of excellent eyesight, probably for the rest of her life.

At Thanksgiving time in 2003, just one month before her hundredth birthday, we asked her to tell us her primary thoughts about
Growing old graciously. She quickly detailed them for us:

- Keep interested in family, community, and world affairs.
- Read the scriptures every day.
- Express thanks constantly for all aspects of life.
- Be grateful for kindnesses from others, and openly express appreciation where appropriate.
- Remember and enjoy friends and associates.
- Enjoy flowers and all things associated with nature.
- Constantly think about loved ones, especially those who have passed on.

One of our mother’s favorite quotations is one from Francis of Assisi. The quotation epitomizes her behavior throughout her hundred years of living it and of growing old graciously: “Preach the gospel every day; if necessary, use words.”

On numerous occasions as we have talked to her about being a hundred years old, she has commented that life is sweet. We know that she is prepared to accept whatever the Lord has in store for her.
The Pentateuch by William Tindall 1530 8vo. *This is the first Edition of extraordinary rarity & value.*

Belloc's Anecdotes of Literature Vol. 2 Page 319 — Only two Copies Known.

1530 Tyndale Bible

Courtesy American Bible Society, October 2002
The Bible has had a tremendous impact on societies the world over and has been heralded as the most influential book ever published.¹ The Bible not only records history but has a history of its own. Its preservation through the centuries and publication in modern times are nothing short of miraculous. In part, that is why Latter-day Saints revere this sacred text. The Prophet Joseph Smith was once asked, “Wherein do you differ from other sects?” He responded, “In that we believe the Bible.”² Latter-day Saints accept the Bible and study it as one of the standard works of sacred scripture governing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Unfortunately, printers’ mistakes, errors caused by faulty or weak translation, or errors caused by copyists failing to faithfully transmit ancient records from one generation to the next have all had an impact on the conveyance of God’s word to mortals. Some copying and printing errors were occasionally made but were corrected in subsequent editions. Others were not. The preservation and publication history of the English Bible can help us to appreciate and better understand the revealed word of God and how it has been preserved and handed down through the ages—despite the errors.

Some Bibles gained notoriety as a result of the printing errors and eccentric or incorrect translations of words or phrases they contained. In this article, we discuss some of the challenges associated with the typesetting and printing of early English Bibles as well as a few of the interesting errors preserved in their various editions. The accompanying
images are photographs taken by the authors from sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century English Bibles from Bible collections housed in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., the New York Public Library, the archives of the American Bible Society of New York, the Houghton Library of Harvard University in Boston, and the Bible collection of the Harold B. Lee Library of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

The Genealogy of the Early English Bibles

In discussing the English Bible, some background information about the history of early English Bibles is important. A good deal of the credit for the quality of prose and clarity of expression found in early English Bibles is due to William Tyndale, who suffered martyrdom to put the English Bible in the hands of lay people. He was the first to translate much of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts into a form of English resembling our own. The basic structure of Tyndale’s translations (1526, 1530, 1534) has endured in many subsequent versions and translations. “Tyndale’s version is important not only because it was a pioneer effort in translating the Scriptures from the original languages into English, but also because of the great influence it had upon later translations.”

For example, the recent work of scholars at Brigham Young University who compared the King James Version of the Bible with Tyndale’s English Bible has shown “that nearly 84 percent of the New Testament and close to 76 percent of the portions of the Old Testament that Tyndale translated have been transmitted to the KJV just as he left them.” Truly, Tyndale was an intellectual and spiritual giant. He has been called “one of history’s greatest heroes,” whose influence on the history of the English language was significant (even if “virtually unknown to the general populace”).

However, it is important to note that the English language changed considerably since the time of William Tyndale, and this evolution both affected and was affected by each new printing of the Bible. The following chart will help identify the Bibles growing out of Tyndale’s work that are mentioned in this article.
Difficulties Encountered in Printing English Bibles

The invention of printing was a monumental, even singular, development in the history of civilization. Modern revelation indicates that records have been kept from the earliest times of scriptural history. Adam and Eve and their posterity were blessed by the Lord with a knowledge of how to read and write: “And a book of remembrance was kept, in the which was recorded, in the language of Adam, for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration” (Moses 6:5). Many sacred texts have been written, but none have
experienced the widespread distribution of the Bible. President Joseph Fielding Smith indicated that the discovery of printing, the invention of movable type, a knowledge of papermaking, and the creation of suitable ink for printing have had the greatest impact on the dissemination of God’s word to mankind:

It is declared by many scholars that the discovery, or invention, of printing is the greatest of all inventions. Whether or not this be true, it must be conceded that printing has had a most powerful effect upon the civilization of the world. While the idea is erroneous that in ancient times very few of the people were educated enough to read and write, the incentive for knowledge increased with leaps and bounds after the invention of printing.

Printing with movable type is of comparatively recent times. Printing from blocks and clay tablets was practiced in China and other lands before the Christian Era. The great discovery was that of forming each letter separately, so as to make possible the rearranging and forming of the words, lines and pages of a printed book, thus avoiding the cutting of new blocks for each page. The claim of Johannes Gutenberg to the invention of this kind of type is generally conceded, although there has been some dispute in relation to this matter. Printing dates from about 1438. In the middle of the fifteenth century there were several books printed by means of movable type, and before 1500 printing presses had been set up in some 220 different places in Europe.

The art of printing would have been greatly hampered had it not been for the discovery of how to make paper. The making of paper dates from, at least, the twelfth century, and from very early times papyrus and the costly parchments and tables of wood and stone could not be continued in the time of printing with any degree of success. It was about the time of the invention of printing that the perfecting of paper making out of rags was accomplished. This discovery did away with the expensive means of making books by hand which was the custom in the days when scribes had to write each volume with a pen.

To appreciate and understand the challenges of printing the English Bible, we must understand a few things about the printing process. Gutenberg did not just invent movable type; he also created an entirely new system of printing that included the manufacture of a new form of paper and suitable ink. Also fundamental to the printing press was the production of letters for typesetting. The process began by crafting individual letters out of a hard metal. Each crafted letter was then used to punch a reverse image into a softer metal, often brass. The interchangeable reverse-image letters were then attached to a mold, where molten lead was poured into its cavity. The resulting letter, with its shank, could then be quickly removed. The whole process
was designed in a way that hundreds of letters could be made by one person in a relatively short period of time. At some point in time, the letters of the alphabet were placed in individual boxes within various trays for convenience. Capital letters went into the upper-case tray and small letters into the lower tray (hence the terms upper and lower case). In addition to being made for single letters of the alphabet, casts were made for abbreviations, italicized letters, spaces, punctuation marks, new paragraph markers, and numerous letter combinations such as \textit{fi}, \textit{se}, \textit{sh}, \textit{th}, and so on. By the time a typesetter had completed the task of assembling the letters and punctuation marks for printing, there would be multiple trays and as many as 250 boxes to draw from—a daunting task for anyone to keep straight.\footnote{When a page of type was broken down, some letters closely resembling one another, such as \textit{q} and \textit{p}, ended up in the wrong compartment. This naturally meant that the next page of type set up would have typographical mistakes from the faulty redistribution of the type in the upper and lower cases. Moreover, typesetting mistakes could have resulted from something as minor as a compositor placing his hand in the wrong letter compartment. Even so, with such an array of letters and punctuation marks to choose from, the compositor had the challenge of selecting them in the correct order and placing them in such a way (backward and right to left) that when the printing was completed, the printed matter could be accurately read.}
Typesetters and printers faced a number of challenges while working on any given project. For example, the compositor had the responsibility to make certain that the letters fit within a limited amount of space. Early printed manuscripts indicate that many compositors were given latitude in revising a manuscript in order to print the text within the space allotted. With the high cost of vellum (thin sheets made of animal hide), abbreviations became plentiful as compositors crowded as much text as they could onto each page. This practice allowed the compositor to make a line of print the desired length regardless of where it ended, including midword at times. Thus, printing became an art that allowed the compositor great latitude throughout the publication process.

Another challenge for printers was setting type from handwritten manuscript pages. For example, John H. Gilbert, the principal compositor of the Book of Mormon, commented that the manuscript he was given to work from was one flowing stream of dictation, “closely written and legible, but not a punctuation mark from beginning to end.” The typesetter was thus responsible to set the type “on the fly.” Since corrections were made as the type was set, it appears that “in many cases it would seem that the omission of words in the manuscript [in biblical manuscripts] was made for typographical rather than for linguistic or stylistic reasons.”

Early English printers also lacked standardized dictionaries and handbooks to govern spelling and grammar. We might expect that a rigorous system of proofreading would have been developed to ensure proper printed matter, but circumstances of the day indicate that “it was usually only the larger monastic scriptoria which employed a supervisor to check on what the scribes had written.” The primary reason for employing fewer proofreaders was to increase the already slim margin of profitability in the printing business. Since there was no uniform spelling, the compositor “would use different spellings or abbreviations to help him” fit the text into a given line. To further complicate matters, some printing establishments used more than one compositor to typeset the same Bible for publication. Herein was a “source of inconsistency and occasionally of error; for compositors had their personal styles and conventions in matters of spelling, punctuation, and abbreviation.” These typesetting inconsistencies could often produce errors within the printed text of the Bible and would remain there until some semblance of consistency could be incorporated into the printing process.

As just noted, typesetting, proofreading, and printing the early English Bible was a daunting task. If the printers of this important
book did not realize the challenges they faced at the outset, they soon became painfully aware of them. Richard Grafton, the printer of the Great Bible in 1538 (so called because of its size), saw the possibilities of numerous printing errors when he exclaimed to Thomas Cromwell, “Look, however so many sentences there are in the Bible—even so many faults and errors shall be made.” Robert Barker, the printer of the 1611 King James Bible, bemoaned his frustrations by stating, “I do groan under the burden of this book.” Barker was right to complain, for the 1611 King James Bible contained on average at least one typographical error for every ten pages of printed text.  

The printing oddities in the early English Bibles, and particularly the King James Version, were of two kinds. The first was the printing of text containing eccentric or incorrect translations of a word or phrase. Much to the relief of the printers, this type of mistake was usually the fault of the translator or reviser. The second type of printing error was due to typographical errors in the typesetting of the text and was usually the fault of the printing establishment. Examples of this could include omission of words, incorrect spellings, or insertion of a word that was not originally in the translator’s text.  

Numerous examples of these types of printing errors had disastrous consequences for both the printer and the final product. Indeed, many of these Bibles were nicknamed for their specific printing error or peculiarity of language, such as the “He Bible,” “She Bible,” or “Murderers Bible,” and so on. These errors have created some rather unique editions of our beloved Bible.

**Peculiar Bible Editions Resulting from Typographical Errors**

Typographical errors contributed to the creation of some interesting editions of the King James Bible. Some of these inadvertent typographical errors have had the impact of actually—and unfortunately—changing doctrinal understanding. Andrew Anderson is remembered as one of the worst printers ever known in Scotland. In the seventeenth century, he issued a Bible with two thousand misprints in the New Testament alone, which dramatizes the fact that human hands and words still had to be involved in the transmission of the text, however divinely appointed it was.

**The Placemakers Bible**

The second edition of the 1562 Geneva Bible misprinted the word *peacemakers* as *placemakers*, making the Savior’s statement in the Ser-
mon on the Mount read: “Blessed are the placemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (see Matthew 5:9).\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{The Judas Bible}

In the 1609 Geneva Bible, the typesetters mistakenly replaced Jesus’s name with that of Judas. John 6:67 reads: “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said \textit{Judas} unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?”

\textit{The He and She Bibles}

One of the earliest printing mishaps in the first edition of the 1611 King James Bible occurred in the text of Ruth, where it states that “he went into the city,” when it should have read “she [referring to Ruth] went into the city” (Ruth 3:15). Some historians believe that the 1611 King James Bible was probably typeset and printed in two different printing offices to speed production of this important book.\textsuperscript{19} Unfortunately for Robert Barker, the king’s printer, one printing establishment typeset the passage in Ruth to read “he” whereas the other set the text as “she.” For some unknown reason, the She Bible typeset in 1611 was not completed until 1613. Thus, from 1611 to 1614—the year in which the He Bible was discontinued—there were numerous He and She Bibles circulating throughout the British Isles. The word “she” became the accepted text in the later editions of the King James Bible.

\textit{Thy Doctrine Bible}

A 1629 Cambridge printing renders 1 Timothy 4:16 erroneously as “Take heede unto thy selfe, and unto \textit{thy} doctrine” in place of “and unto \textit{the} doctrine.” This error was perpetuated numerous times in later editions, implying that defining doctrine is the prerogative of each individual rather than of Deity.
The Wicked Bible

This 1631 edition resulted from an error incorrectly citing the seventh commandment. Rather than “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” it read “Thou shalt commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Peter Heylyn, in his 1668 book, Cyprianus Anglicus, states the following: “His Majesties Printers, at or about this time [1632], had committed a scandalous mistake in our English Bibles, by leaving out the word Not in the Seventh Commandment. His Majesty being made acquainted with it by the Bishop of London, Order was given for calling the Printers into the High-Commission where upon the Evidence of the Fact, the whole Impression was called in, and the Printers deeply fined, as they justly merited.” Tradition holds that the printers were fined three hundred pounds by the king himself.

Some have theorized that the mistake was purposeful. A 1958 publication in the Times House Journal suggested that the printing error was a deliberate attempt on the part of an unidentified party to discredit the publisher. At the very least, one might admit that this kind of error is a little humorous, since thousands of years of experience have shown that some people hardly need any suggestion to violate the seventh commandment. Very few copies of this Bible have survived.

The Fools Bible

The year 1631 also saw the printing of a King James edition referred to as “The Fools Bible.” The text of Psalm 14 read, “The fool hath said in his heart there is a God,” rather than “The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.” The missing “no” cost the printers three thousand pounds.

The Forgotten Bible

This 1638 edition of the English Bible has several interesting typographical errors. One of the most famous is found in 2 Samuel 23:20 and reads: “He slew two lions like men” rather than “lion-like men.” Another printing oversight, from which this edition received its nickname, “The Forgotten Bible,” comes from the text of Luke 7:47, which states, “Her sins which are many, are forgotten,” rather than Jesus’s statement, “Her sins which are many are forgiven.”

The Unrighteous Bible

This Bible was published by John Fields at London in 1653. It is known for numerous printing mistakes. Nearly twenty thousand copies
were printed and distributed with such errors as the phrase from John 9:21, “Or who hath opened his eyes, we know not,” being completely omitted. Romans 6:13 was printed as, “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of righteousness unto sin,” rather than, “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” The most serious mistake, from which its nickname is derived, was made in 1 Corinthians 6:9, which reads, “the unrighteous shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

The Printers Bible

With all of the printing mishaps in the early English Bible, it is only appropriate that one of the editions was called “The Printers Bible.” This text, published in about 1702, takes its name from a typesetting error found in Psalm 119, which should have read “Princes have persecuted me without a cause” but was mistakenly printed as “Printers have persecuted me.”

The Vinegar Bible

John Baskett, an Oxford printer, published a beautifully designed edition of the Bible in 1717, which included a table of lessons, a calendar, and the Apocrypha. The text was set in large type and had a number of engraved metal plates designed by several artists. Baskett’s work, however, was sadly overshadowed by a host of printing errors, which earned the Bible the nickname of “A Baskett-ful of Errors.” One of the misprints in the heading of Luke 20 reads “The Parable of the Vinegar” instead of “The Parable of the Vineyard.” Consequently, this edition also became known as the “Vinegar Bible.” A copy of the 1717 Vinegar Bible is on display in the Museum of the Old North Church in Boston, where the famous signal was given for Paul Revere’s midnight ride to warn that the British were coming.

The Murderers Bible

Three editions share the distinction of being called the “Murderers Bible.” One typographical error changed “murmurers” in Jude to
“murderers.” Another made Numbers 35:18 read, “the murderer shall surely be put together” instead of “to death.” In the third, a 1795 Bible, the phrase in Mark 7:27, “Let the children first be filled,” became shockingly, “Let them be killed.”

**Archaisms and Peculiar Expressions**

In addition to typographical errors, peculiar word usage has also led to some unique editions of the Bible. A few examples are provided below.

**The Bugges Bible**

The “Bugges Bible” was first printed in 1535. Miles Coverdale (1488/89–1569) studied philosophy and theology at Cambridge. Because he was a Latinist, knowing little Hebrew or Greek, the “Bugges Bible” was based on other translations, including the Swiss-German translation, Luther’s German translation, the Latin version of Sanctes Pagninus, the Latin Vulgate, and William Tyndale’s translation. The King James Version of Psalm 91:5 reads, “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day,” but the 1535 Coverdale translation reads, “So yt thou shalt not nede to be afrayed for eny bugges by night.” The word *bugge* is Middle English but possibly comes from Welsh *bwg*, which means “a ghost” and denotes objects of terror, usually those that are imaginary. When the word *bug* became associated with insects, the other meaning fell into disuse, being preserved only in compound forms such as bugbear or bugaboo (a source of dread; bogey). The use of *bugges* and its different spellings persisted in multiple Bible translations for many years.

**The Wife-Beater Bible**

Some Bibles became famous because of the marginal notes or commentary added by the translator or editor. Perhaps the best known of these is the “Wife-Beater Bible,” published in 1549. This Bible, edited by Edmund Becke,
was a reprint of the 1537 Matthews Bible containing a number of revised and added notes. After reading Peter’s counsel that wives “be in subjection to your own husbands. . . . Even as Sara obeyed Abraham” (see 1 Peter 3:1, 6), the zealous editor attached a note to male readers at the end of the chapter, “And if she be not obedient and helpful unto him, endeavoreth to beat the fear of God into her head.” Such an egregious note has forever tainted this 1537 Bible with the deplorable moniker “Wife-Beater Bible.”

The Breeches Bible

When Queen Mary (called by some “Bloody Mary”) began to persecute, imprison, and burn Protestants at the stake, English Protestant scholars fled to the European continent for safety. While in Geneva, Switzerland, they translated what came to be known as the Geneva Bible. Published in 1560, the smaller size and less-expensive price of this Bible (compared to the larger-sized versions that were being printed) contributed to its quick rise in popularity. “A number of novel features [also] contributed to the usefulness and popularity of this Bible. Instead of heavy, black-letter type, roman type was used for the first time. It was the first English Bible with numbered verses, which became the basis of all versification in later English Bibles. The practice of italicizing English words not represented in the original text was introduced . . . , a practice that was to continue down through” numerous other versions.

The Geneva Bible was the Bible of Shakespeare and the Pilgrims who sailed on the Mayflower. Excerpts were also issued in the Soldier’s Pocket Bible for Oliver Cromwell’s army in 1643. The very next year, the last edition of the Geneva Bible was printed. A unique feature of the Geneva Bible was the voluminous marginal notes written from the Protestant perspective. Roman Catholics objected to their identifying the pope as the “angel of the bottomless pit” (see the note to Revelation 9:11), and royalty were disturbed by certain interpretations that approved of civil disobedience to the crown (see the note to Exodus 1:19, which approves of the midwives’ lying to Pharaoh). “One of the reasons that led King James in 1604, to agree readily to a new translation of the Scriptures was his dislike of the politics preached in the margins of the Geneva Bible.”

The Geneva Bible is referred to as the “Breeches Bible” because of its translation of Genesis 3:7, which states that Adam and Eve “sewed figge-tree leaves together and made themselves breeches [meaning short trousers]” rather than the famous “aprons” of the King James Version.
The word “breeches” in this verse had already appeared in Wycliffe’s Bibles as “brechis” and was included in various Bible plays produced in the 1400s, but because of the popularity of the Geneva Bible, the appellation “Breeches Bible” remains associated with it.

**The Treacle Bible**

The first edition of the Bishops Bible was printed in 1568 and is sometimes called the Treacle Bible. This unusual name came from the translator’s decision to use the word *triacle* rather than *balm*. Thus, in this edition of the Bible, Jeremiah 8:22 reads, “Is there not triacle at Gilead?” rather than the later rendition, “Is there no balm in Gilead?” *Triacle* and its variant form *triacle* were used from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries to refer to a medicinal compound. Originally, it was a salve repudiated to heal venomous bites, poisons, and malignant diseases. In Latter-day Saint theology, the term “balm of Gilead” has been used symbolically to refer to the healing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion**

We owe a debt of gratitude to those who dedicated their lives to bring forth this inspired volume of scripture. To the credit of early Bible printers, as quickly as these errors were discovered, they were corrected. Great care and effort have always attended Bible printing. Despite the occasional textual problems, the Bible is still recognized as scripture—words recorded by holy men of God when moved upon by the Holy Ghost (see D&C 68:4). As such, the Bible must never be undervalued, as President J. Reuben Clark Jr. has indicated: “Notwithstanding the corruptions themselves, the Good Old Book stands as a record of God’s dealings with and commandments and promises to his children, in their days of righteousness and in their generations of sin. It still, though corrupted, points out the way of righteousness to the man of faith seeking to serve God.” Readers would do well to study the Bible in light of Mormon’s plea about his own scriptural record: “And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these. . . . Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither . . . them who have written . . .; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may
learn to be more wise than we have been” (Mormon 8:12; 9:31).

Despite the overwhelming obstacles and difficulties encountered in printing the word of God, the labors of those who struggled with these challenges have not gone unappreciated. The Bible is a literary masterpiece containing powerful prose and edifying teachings that enliven the mind, turning thoughts both inward and heavenward. Rather than treat printing or translating errors as evidence that invalidates the text, we should honor and use the Bible to lift our lives, strengthen our souls, and enlarge our spirituality. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie testified:

The Bible should become an open book—a book that is read and believed and understood by all men on earth. . . .

It is a volume of holy scripture; . . . it contains the mind and will and voice of the Lord to all men on earth; and . . . it has had a greater effect on the civilization of the world, up to this time, than any other book ever written. . . .

 Providentially the Bible is so written that all men, however slight their spiritual endowment may be, can gain truth and enlightenment from it. . . .

Read the book itself. “Search the scriptures” (John 5:39). Treasure up the Lord’s word. Go to the source. The words are sacred. Insofar as they have come down to us as originally penned, they were inspired by the Holy Ghost. They are to be read over and over again as long as we live.44 RE

Notes


7. N. F. Blake, Caxton: England’s First Publisher (London: Osprey, 1976), 73.


9. Bobrick, Wide as the Waters, 83; see also Alister E. McGrath, In the Beginning—The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a
11. Blake, Caxton, 89.
15. Bobrick, Wide as the Waters, 251.
16. Bobrick, Wide as the Waters, 251.
17. Bobrick, Wide as the Waters, 251–52.
20. Peter Heylyn, Cyprianus Anglicus; or, The History of the Life and Death of The Most Reverend and Renowned Prelate William (London: A. Seile, 1668), 228; emphasis in original.
21. See Herbert, Historical Catalogue, 162.
22. See Herbert, Historical Catalogue, 178.
23. See Herbert, Historical Catalogue, 200; emphasis added.
25. See Herbert, Historical Catalogue, 244.
28. See Herbert, Historical Catalogue, 41.
29. Metzger, Bible in Translation, 65.
30. Metzger, Bible in Translation, 65.
31. See Metzger, Bible in Translation, 65.
32. See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “treacle.”
Some of the many Church leaders who have taught about setting priorities are (clockwise) Ezra Taft Benson, Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, Marlin K. Jensen, Hartman Rector Jr., Russell M. Nelson, Neal A. Maxwell, Jeffrey R. Holland, Richard G. Scott, and M. Russell Ballard.
“Seek Ye First”:
Prophetic Counsel for Establishing Priorities in Our Lives

C. Robert Line

C. Robert Line is a CES coordinator in northern Indiana and institute director at Purdue University.

What is our most important priority in life? Is it our Church callings? Is it our spouse or children? Is it our occupation? Is it possible or even wise to rank these priorities? Frequently, our choices in life consist of simple distinctions between good and evil. At other times, they do not. Often, we find that decision making is actually fraught with perplexing choices between good and better, important and vital, or needful and essential. Perhaps such dilemmas are one of the very reasons we come to this mortal sphere—to experience the interplay among time, talents, and agency. Fortunately, latter-day prophets and seers give us ample guidance with these matters and even teach in clear terms not only what our specific priorities should be but also how we can establish and balance them in our lives.

After a Church Educational System (CES) fireside on February 5, 1999, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland gave additional counsel to CES faculty and guests who remained in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square. Among other things, he gave the following ranking of priorities we should seek to establish in our lives: (1) our physical and spiritual selves, (2) our spouses, (3) our children, (4) our Church callings, (5) our professional lives, and (6) our civic responsibilities. Elder Holland assured those assembled that this list is nothing new and that prior prophets have taught the same. In 1972, President Harold B. Lee counseled: “Most men do not set priorities to guide them in allocating their time and most men forget that the first priority should be to maintain their own spiritual and physical strength; then comes their family, then the Church and then their professions, and all need time.”
Our Spiritual Selves

Some might be perplexed to hear that our first priority is ourselves. How can this be, especially when we have been counseled about the importance of family, not to mention when the scriptures admonish us to “lose ourselves” for others? In 1994, President Howard W. Hunter gave this counsel: “Your first obligation is to get your own spiritual life in order through regular scripture study and daily prayer. . . . [You should also] secure and honor your priesthood and temple covenants.”2 Similarly, President Ezra Taft Benson has counseled: “To be successful, we must have the Spirit of the Lord. We have been taught that the Spirit will not dwell in unclean tabernacles. Therefore, one of our first priorities is to make sure our own personal lives are in order.”3 As President Benson’s and President Hunter’s teachings imply, putting ourselves first is, in reality, placing God first, or at least our relationship to Him through regular scripture study, daily prayer, and so forth. Putting ourselves first is invoking our agency through obedience and inviting the companionship, guidance, and cleansing effects of the Holy Ghost, thus assuring that the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ is operative in our lives.

We often say that family is our number one priority, which is true, in a manner of speaking. “Family first!” is more than a motto—it is a doctrinal declaration of one of our most sublime values. Yet, as Elder Holland and President Lee suggest, one thing actually is more important—our relationship with and obedience to God. Elder Russell M. Nelson puts into perspective the relationship between this first priority and the next two—namely, our spouse and children: “As we go through life, even through very rough waters, a father’s instinctive impulse to cling tightly to his wife or to his children may not be the best way to accomplish his objective. Instead, if he will lovingly cling to the Savior and the iron rod of the gospel, his family will want to cling to him and to the Savior.”4

This principle, properly applied, not only allows our loved ones to cling to and love us but also allows us to more fully love them. “Only when we love God above all others,” taught Elder Marlin K. Jensen, “will we be capable of offering pure, Christlike love to our companions for all eternity.”5

This placement of priorities should not be seen as a self-centered approach to living. Indeed, it is not. On the other hand, the Savior’s admonition that we lose ourselves for others must be properly understood: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take
up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:24–25). The Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 16:26 gives us this clarifying detail: “And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments.” To deny ourselves does not mean we do not take appropriate care of our spiritual and physical selves. The appropriate placing of these things first is, as was said before, putting God first. Losing ourselves is, in reality, relinquishing selfishness and becoming what God would have us be. Elder Neal A. Maxwell gives these clarifying insights:

Losing oneself means losing concern over getting credit; by knowing our true identity we need not be concerned about seeming anonymity. . . . Losing oneself means yielding the substance of one’s own agenda if it does not match the agenda of the Lord. . . . Losing oneself means keeping ourselves more spiritually intact . . . so that we are able to help more. . . . Losing ourselves means being willing to go to Nineveh when we would much prefer to go to Tarshish. . . . Losing oneself means losing one’s impulsiveness. . . . Losing ourselves means dropping our resistance to feedback so that we can grow faster, just as did meek and receptive Moses, the brother of Jared, Peter, and Joseph Smith.  

Furthermore, we are not to lose ourselves in the sense that we give no care at all to our physical needs. Proponents of this thinking, especially those who would discredit and diminish physical exercise, might zealously quote 1 Timothy 4:8, where Paul counsels, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things” (emphasis added). Lest we misunderstand this scripture, the footnote in the Latter-day Saint edition of the scriptures points out the Greek translation that renders the sentence this way: “Bodily exercise profiteth a little while” (emphasis added). This clarification bears out the principle that physical exercise is worthwhile, yet someday we will all be hindered by the aging process. If we can exercise, we should do so.  

**The Physical and Spiritual Self: A Divine Intermingling**

To say that our spiritual self is our first priority is perhaps understandable, especially when we consider it as a function of placing God and His commandments first. Yet to some it might appear odd to elevate one’s physical well-being to the same level. Nevertheless, latter-day revelation declares unequivocally the importance “of things both temporal and spiritual” (1 Nephi 15:32) as regards the mortal soul. “The spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15; emphasis
added), and “spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy; and when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy” (D&C 93:33–34; emphasis added; see also D&C 45:17; 138:50). Both body and spirit blend together. One who is strong spiritually understands the importance of keeping the body as strong and as healthy as possible in order to best serve God and man. It is difficult to give to others and serve them when we lack the health and vigor to do so. We are commanded to serve God not only with all our heart and mind but also with might and strength (see D&C 4:2; Moroni 10:32).

Physical discipline is a sign of being mentally clean. A person who would control and expand the spiritual self knows the importance of controlling the physical self as well. Latter-day prophets and leaders have attested to this doctrine. President Spencer W. Kimball declared, “The highest achievement of spirituality comes as we conquer the flesh.” President Harold B. Lee similarly taught that “except [a man or a woman] learns to sacrifice of his appetites and desires in obedience to the laws of the gospel [he or she] cannot be sanctified and made holy before the Lord.” Spiritual attainment is thus a function, in part, of physical mastery. Elder Hartman Rector Jr. offered this insight as to the relationship between body and spirit:

It is primarily the spirit that sees, hears, feels, knows passion and desire; it is the spirit that becomes addicted to drugs, bad habits, and evil desires. It is not just the physical body that is addicted, but the spirit also, which, of course, is the real you and me. We are spirits just as God is a spirit.

Sometimes we make excuses for ourselves, when we do what we should not do or fall short of what we should have done. We use such expressions as, “Oh! the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” With such rationalizations we insinuate that it is completely our physical body’s fault that we sin. In my opinion, this is not true. I believe the physical body is a very strong part of us and is of great benefit to us. Among other reasons, it was given to us to help us overcome our addictions, bad habits, and evil desires. The body is very obedient; generally speaking, it will do exactly what the spirit tells it to do. So it is not the physical body that we are struggling with; it is the spirit we must bring into subjection.

The Dual Dimension of Discipleship

Obviously, we must be careful not to become too consumed with ourselves as we stress this first priority. We can focus so much on ourselves that we forget other important priorities. Personal conversion is an end in itself, but it is also a means to an end. In fact, ultimate con-
version and sanctification will not occur unless we realize the sobering fact that fully coming to Christ is dependent on helping others come to Him as well. This dual dimension of discipleship was eloquently taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith in his epistle on work for the deceased: “Their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation; . . . they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect” (D&C 128:15). The celestial kingdom will not be a place of spiritual seclusion where a person finally escapes the mortal burden of caring for others. “Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom,” said President Marion G. Romney. “Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made.”

In essence, the twofold design of the gospel is to come unto Christ ourselves and to help others come unto Him. Doing so includes helping Church members, members of other faiths, and those who have died without having the opportunity to receive the fulness of the gospel. To Peter, the Lord tenderly but firmly taught the principle thus: “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32; emphasis added). This dual dimension of our discipleship cannot be otherwise. The Psalmist declared: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee” (Psalm 51:10–13; emphasis added; see also D&C 11:21; Joshua 1:11–15).

We have been commanded to share the gospel and to be a leaven to the world. We are to serve others and to teach them the verities of eternity. To teach spiritual things effectively, we must first be spiritually effective ourselves. “Very little love can come from one who is not at peace with himself or herself and God,” said Elder Jensen. “No one can be concerned about the welfare of someone else and give love to another until he or she has taken care of his or her own soul.” Once we are converted, once we are grounded spiritually, we can and should help others do the same.

A Word of Caution

We must be careful, though, not to adopt the false notion that we can let our spiritual lives deteriorate while we still maintain the ability to help others spiritually or that we can help others gain and develop testimonies of the truth while not having done so ourselves. President
Marion G. Romney taught that “spiritual guidance cannot come from the spiritually weak.” The Apostle Paul warned, “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?” (Romans 2:21). To assume that we can seek the salvation of others while disregarding our own and that we will somehow receive an eternal reward for doing so is to err. The Book of Mormon chronicles the sad account of the seemingly helpful and promising Jaredite king Morianton, who nobly helped others but did not help himself: “And after that he had established himself king he did ease the burden of the people, by which he did gain favor in the eyes of the people, and they did anoint him to be their king. And he did do justice unto the people, but not unto himself because of his many whoredoms; wherefore he was cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Ether 10:10–11; emphasis added; see also Omni 1:1–2).

Interestingly, the converse is also true. Thus, focusing on our salvation while disregarding that of others will not be of any benefit. In fact, the two are so intricately interwoven that it is difficult to separate them. In other words, our devotions to God, to family, and to others are not mutually exclusive categories but are reinforcing and complementary duties. Elder John A. Widtsoe declared, “The Church is composed of homes. Church and home cannot be separated. Neither one comes first. They are one.”

**Proper Balance**

Elder M. Russell Ballard has counseled, “If you . . . search your hearts and courageously assess the priorities in your life, you may discover, as I did, that you need a better balance among your priorities.” We must be careful not to make a mechanical and sequentially rigid list of personal priorities. To do so could be hazardous. “As always there must be balance,” said Elder Neal A. Maxwell. “The inordinate reading of the living scriptures that crowded out one’s family, one’s neighbors, and Christian service would be an error. One could become monastic though scholastic. Christian service to mankind could crowd out the living scriptures and become so consuming that one could forget his duties to family and to God, being a do-gooder almost as an escape from the family framework.”

It is true that our families, although extremely important, are not our absolute highest priority. But this fact does not give us license to neglect or abuse them. Likewise, to nonchalantly say, “Well, my Church callings are priority number four, so I guess I can skip home teaching this month,” is not in the spirit of what the prophets have taught either, since our priorities all need time. Certain things do need to get done.
at certain times in our lives. Additionally, we cannot simply force into our lives everything and anything that will possibly fit. Elder Holland captured this principle beautifully with the following analogy:

As a youth in England, Samuel Plimsoll was fascinated with watching ships load and unload their cargoes. He soon observed that, regardless of the cargo space available, each ship had its maximum capacity. If a ship exceeded its limit, it would likely sink at sea. In 1868 Plimsoll entered Parliament and passed a merchant shipping act that, among other things, called for making calculations of how much a ship could carry. As a result, lines were drawn on the hull of each ship in England. As the cargo was loaded, the freighter would sink lower and lower into the water. When the water level on the side of the ship reached the Plimsoll mark, the ship was considered loaded to capacity, regardless of how much space remained. As a result, British deaths at sea were greatly reduced.

Like ships, people have differing capacities at different times and even different days in their lives. In our relationships we need to establish our own Plimsoll marks and help identify them in the lives of those we love. Together we need to monitor the load levels and be helpful in shedding or at least readjusting some cargo if we see our sweetheart is sinking. Then, when the ship of love is stabilized, we can evaluate long-term what has to continue, what can be put off until another time, and what can be put off permanently. Friends, sweethearts, and spouses need to be able to monitor each other’s stress and recognize the different tides and seasons of life. We owe it to each other to declare some limits and then help jettison some things if emotional health and the strength of loving relationships are at risk.

Finding proper balance with our most important priorities is indeed challenging, especially when there are so many positive and worthwhile things we can do. Even vigorous pursuit of what we consider worthwhile objectives can be fraught with danger. “Perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business, is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things,” said Robert Louis Stevenson. “And it is not by any means certain that a man’s business is the most important thing he has to do.” Just because we are doing good things, we should not automatically assume we have our priorities straight. “Ironically, inordinate attention, even to good things, can diminish our devotion to God,” counseled Elder Maxwell. “For instance, one can be too caught up in sports and the forms of body worship we see among us. One can reverence nature and yet neglect nature’s God. One can have an exclusionary regard for good music and similarly with a worthy profession. In such circumstances, the ‘weightier matters’ are often omitted (Matthew 23:23; see also 1 Corinthians 2:16). Only the
Highest One can fully guide us as to the highest good which you and I can do.”

Similarly, Elder Richard G. Scott warned: “Are there so many fascinating, exciting things to do or so many challenges pressing down upon you that it is hard to keep focused on that which is essential? When things of the world crowd in, all too often the wrong things take highest priority. Then it is easy to forget the fundamental purpose of life. Satan has a powerful tool to use against good people. It is distraction. He would have good people fill life with ‘good things’ so there is no room for the essential ones. Have you unconscientiously been caught in that trap?”

There might even be times in life when we innocently or naively mistake less-important issues and activities as actually being vital. C. S. Lewis portrayed the dilemma thus: “There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing for God Himself . . . as if the good Lord had nothing to do but exist! There have been some who were so occupied in spreading Christianity that they never gave a thought to Christ. Man! Ye see it in small matters. Did ye never know a lover of books that with all his first editions and signed copies had lost the power to read them? Or an organiser of charities that had lost all love for the poor? It is the subtlest of all the snares.” Illustratively, we can get so consumed with how we present the gospel that the content—the message itself—is blurred. Appearance and aesthetics, no matter how wonderful and appealing, must never be substituted for nor be mistaken with substance and significance.

Conclusion

As stated before, placing our spiritual and physical selves first is, in reality, placing God first. President Benson wisely counseled that “when we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives.” He also stated that “our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities.” What a promise! If we are struggling to prioritize, we should just put our first priority first! All the other priorities in our life will fall into place as they should. It is really that simple.

Yet at times we can unconsciously or even knowingly insist on making our pursuit for spirituality a complex and arduous undertaking. To some the thought of putting God first can appear burdensome. Occasionally, we hear this statement, supposedly made by the Savior and even regarded as scripture to some: “I never said it would be easy; I
only said it would be worth it.” Perhaps many comprehend the essence of this statement and even go so far as to mount it on their wall. However, two things are of note. First, the Savior, at least in scripture, never did say this. Second, as nice and as motivational as it might sound, this statement is not necessarily true. In fact, the opposite proves to be the scriptural declaration: “Take my yoke upon you. . . . My yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” said the Master (Matthew 11:29–30; emphasis added). Alma reminded his son Helaman that it is “easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss” (Alma 37:44; emphasis added). Similarly, John extols that God’s “commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

These thoughts do not mitigate the fact that many people are striving with all their hearts to live the gospel and still might have deep pains and heavy burdens from life. Yet it is nonetheless true that putting God first in our lives is actually easier than anything we would do otherwise. Elder A. Theodore Tuttle reminded us of this principle when he explained that God’s commandments “are for our good, and when we violate them, we suffer spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Remember . . . it’s not nearly so hard to live the commandments as not to live them. The burden of keeping the commandments of the Lord is light compared to the burden of sin which we carry when we violate the commandments of God.”

We should all strive to do the will of the Lord and to feed ourselves spiritually, thus activating the power of the Atonement in our lives. Then, to the best of our ability, we should help our spouses, children, friends, and neighbors to do likewise. “The most important principle I can share,” Elder Scott declared, is to “anchor your life in Jesus Christ, your Redeemer. Make your Eternal Father and his Beloved Son the most important priority in your life—more important than a beloved companion or children or anyone on earth. Make their will your central desire. Then all that you need for happiness will come to you.”

Notes

7. Spencer W. Kimball, “And the Lord Called His People Zion,” Ensign, August 1984, 4.
Teachers should eagerly anticipate the lesson when their students will learn about the Fall of Adam and Eve. This doctrine is one of three great doctrinal topics that all Latter-day Saints should understand. According to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “These three are the very pillars of eternity itself. They are the most important events that ever have or will occur in all eternity. They are the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement.”

Many successful approaches to teaching the doctrine of the Fall have been presented in the manuals of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This article focuses on the concepts of moral agency and accountability, the commandments given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the roles of the participants in the Fall: God the Father, Satan, Eve, and Adam. No matter which teaching approach is used, a good review of the principles will help teachers and students enjoy learning how the Fall occurred and how it was a necessary part of God’s plan.

I use a classroom discussion as the setting for this article. In this context, I suggest a series of questions and student answers that explore the scriptures and the teachings of modern-day prophets. I also provide a chalkboard summary of the main ideas of the lesson. Although this teaching approach is not for all teaching situations, the concepts presented here may be valuable for a personal study of the Fall or for use in other teaching settings. Student interest, maturity, and the
ability to discuss doctrinal concepts make this approach possible in an upper-level university course.

**Foundational Concepts**

Several key concepts provide an essential foundation for a discussion about the Fall.

*More truth will be given.* For various reasons, God has not revealed a fulness of gospel truths. Consequently, some truths about the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are unavailable. We will receive more truth later, either as we progress in our own spiritual development (when a person is endowed) or as the Lord sees fit according to His timetable. With the Second Coming, many things will be revealed. “Yea, verily I say unto you, in that day when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things—things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof” (D&C 101:32–33). Waiting in faith for future revelation and believing that God “will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9) are important concepts to understand in a discussion about the Fall.

*A good foundation should be laid.* When teaching about the Godhead, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “If we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, we may go wrong, and it [will] be a hard matter to get right.” The same guideline is important when we teach about the Fall. For this reason, it is always good to begin a discussion about the Fall with a review of the doctrines as taught in the scriptures and in the Church curriculum. Students could be encouraged to begin their study of this doctrine by reading and studying such a doctrinal source in their preparation before the lesson. A short true-false quiz might be helpful in determining if the students are starting right in their understanding of the Fall.

For example, the following statements could be used for the quiz:

**True or False:** Regarding conditions in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, Adam and Eve were in a spiritual state, meaning they existed as spirits in spirit bodies like the ones they had in the premortal life.

*False.* They both had physical bodies of flesh and bones, but we can say that they were spiritual since their bodies were quickened by spirit and not by blood.

**True or False:** Adam and Eve would have had no children if they had remained in the garden.
Teaching the Fall of Adam and Eve

*True.* As stated in 2 Nephi 2:23, “And they would have had no children.”

**True or False:** Because of their limited experiences in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve knew no opposites like good and evil, joy or sorrow, and pleasure or pain because they had not been exposed to them.

*True.* See 2 Nephi 2:23 and Moses 5:11.

**True or False:** The Fall was brought to pass by sexual sin.

*False.* President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “The transgression of Adam did not involve sex sin as some falsely believe and teach. Adam and Eve were married by the Lord while they were yet immortal beings in the Garden of Eden and before death entered the world.”

**True or False:** In regard to the consequences of the Fall, Adam, his family, and all other living things on earth became subject to physical death.


**True or False:** Because of the Fall, all of Adam’s future posterity would be born with his sin on their heads and would therefore need to be baptized to be free from this original sin.

*False.* This is an apostate teaching of a modern church. The second article of faith states that “men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2).

**True or False:** If Adam and Eve had not transgressed and brought about the Fall, they would have lived forever in a state of innocence, without children, and the plan of God would have been hindered.


**True or False:** Even though the Fall brought death, decay, and opposition into the world, it was a necessary part of the plan.


**True or False:** An understanding of the Fall is necessary to more fully understand the plan of salvation.

*True.* “If we correctly understand the role of Adam and Eve, we will realize that those who have long labeled them sinners responsible for the universal depravity of the human family are completely misguided.
The truth is that Adam and Eve opened the door for us to come into mortality, a step essential to our eternal progress."

When a good doctrinal foundation about the Fall has been established, the class can discuss additional insights that are available in the scriptures and the sermons of the latter-day prophets. To help the students discover these insights, you can use the following topics as the basis for the class discussion.

Commandments were given. In most classes, students will already know what two of these commandments were and can readily find them in the scriptures. The two commandments and scriptural references are, first, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Moses 2:28) and, second, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it” (Moses 3:17).

What were some other commandments given to Adam and Eve in the garden? To prompt the class, teachers can have the students first read Moses 4:18: “And the man said: 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.” The commandment was to be together as husband and wife.

Why were Adam and Eve commanded to stay together? To put this commandment into perspective, the students should read the last phrase in the chapter heading in Genesis 2, “Adam and Eve are married by the Lord.” Adam and Eve were commanded to stay together because they were husband and wife.

To help the students identify another commandment, you can direct them to read Doctrine and Covenants 20:18–19: “And that he created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness, created he them; and gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship.” The commandment could be expressed this way: “Hearken only to God.” These commandments could be summarized on the chalkboard.

Commandments Given:
1. Multiply and replenish
2. Do not partake of the tree
3. Be together as husband and wife
4. Hearken only to God
Agency and accountability were critical. This discussion begins an introduction to the concept of moral agency and accountability. It causes the students to think of their own experiences with justice—situations where they were either fairly or unfairly punished for their actions. In the scriptures, we read that God carefully established conditions in the Garden of Eden so that Adam and Eve would have complete moral agency and be accountable for their actions in terms of one of the commandments: not to partake of the fruit of the tree. These conditions were set in place so that the consequences and punishments involved in the Fall would be just and fair.

To help the students discover these conditions, read Moses 3:9 with the students: “And I, the Lord God, planted the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and also the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” The condition necessary for complete moral agency and accountability was the opportunity of choice.

Now read Moses 3:16–17, looking for a second condition that God established in the garden so that Adam and Eve would have complete moral agency and accountability: “And I, the Lord God, commanded the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest
freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.” The condition of opposites is given to govern a choice. To reinforce this insight, remind the students that God does not hold individuals or nations accountable for their decisions until they have been given the law. “Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation” (2 Nephi 9:25). Jacob does not mean that people will not receive the natural consequences of their decisions just because they are ignorant of God’s law. Smoking causes health problems regardless of whether a person has been taught the Word of Wisdom. Rather, Jacob means that God will not condemn a person or nation of people with spiritual consequences until they have first received His laws and have had the chance to obey or disobey them.

Next, continue reading verse 17 in Moses 3: “Nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee.” The third condition is freedom of choice. This concept is confirmed in 2 Nephi 2:27: “Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil.”

The fourth condition necessary for complete moral agency and accountability is at the end of verse 17: “But, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” This fourth condition is knowledge of the true consequences of the choice. The chalkboard summary should look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency and Accountability:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Opportunity for choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opposition in the choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Freedom of choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Knowledge of the true consequences of the choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A valuable discussion could be held at this point to ask the students for examples of how Satan still attempts to destroy agency by jeopardizing any of these conditions. The students might share answers similar to these:
• He takes away the opportunity of choice by raising up tyrants in nations to establish dictatorial governments where the people have no access to God’s truths.

• He keeps people ignorant of God’s laws by hindering the development of culture and technology in nations so they are held back from receiving the gospel.

• He causes individuals to lose the freedom of choice by drawing them into physical addiction with alcohol, tobacco, and other substances.

• He distorts the true consequences of sinful choices through media advertising and twisted story plots.

Adam and Eve had full moral agency and accountability in regard to the commandment not to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see Moses 3:16–17). However, in regard to the commandment to multiply and replenish the earth, Adam and Eve were not yet in a mortal state where they could keep this commandment. Therefore, the opportunity to act upon this commandment was not available. For Adam and Eve and the rest of the living creatures, multiplying and replenishing the earth was a commandment “they could not then keep, but they soon would be able to do so [after the Fall].”*

**The Participants in the Events of the Fall**

For this part of the discussion, write on the chalkboard the names of the participants in the events associated with the Fall:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. God the Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Satan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Eve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The role of God. Ask the students to consider the following questions:*

**Q:** From what we understand, did God want the Fall of Adam and Eve to occur?  
**A:** Yes, it was necessary for the plan.

**Q:** Could God have caused Adam and Eve to fall?  
**A:** Yes, He could have, but He would not do it because it would...
have robbed them of their agency—that is, it would have removed the freedom of choice condition of moral agency and accountability.

**Q:** What insight does the following quote by Robert J. Matthews teach about God’s role in the Fall? “If God had created man mortal, then death, sin, and all the circumstances of mortality would be God’s doing and would be eternal and permanent in their nature; whereas if man brings the Fall upon himself, he is the responsible moral agent, and God is able to rescue and redeem him from his fallen state. . . . Adam and Eve had the privilege of getting things under way by their own actions. This is far better than their being created mortal and sinful.”

**A:** The Fall and the introduction of mankind into mortality had to come by the choices of Adam and Eve so the consequences could be overcome by God.

**Q:** What conditions did God establish so that Adam and Eve could make a choice with full moral agency and accountability?

**A:** He placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the Garden of Eden, gave them the commandment not to partake of its fruit, gave them their freedom of choice, and taught them about the true consequences if they did partake.

**The role of Satan.** When discussing Satan’s role in the Fall, ask the students to listen to the following scriptural passage about his background and nature. Have a student read Moses 4:1–4. Invite them to identify, in their opinion, some of the major truths about Satan.

And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.

But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice. (Moses 4:1–4)
Teaching the Fall of Adam and Eve

We know that Satan (1) attempts to destroy agency, (2) is the father of all lies and deceives mankind, and (3) leads those who hearken to his voice into captivity.

The students should then read about Satan’s role in the events of the Fall. “And Satan . . . sought also to beguile Eve, for he knew not the mind of God, wherefore he sought to destroy the world” (Moses 4:6–7). To discuss Satan’s role, consider the following questions:

Q: What was he trying to do in the garden?
A: Get Adam and Eve to disobey God and hearken unto Satan instead of God.

Q: What do we know about Satan’s understanding of the plan?
A: The scripture says he “knew not the mind of God.” But according to Moses 4:1–2, Satan apparently knew about the plan of salvation from his participation in the premortal Council in Heaven. Satan did not have a veil of forgetfulness drawn across his mind like the other spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Father who had kept their first estate. What could it mean that he “knew not the mind of God”? One possibility is that Satan did not have the same goals or motives as God because he wanted to “destroy the world” and “lead captive at his will” rather than bring about “the immortality and eternal life of man” (see Moses 1:39).

Q: As Lehi taught Jacob, why did God allow Satan into the Garden of Eden? Read 2 Nephi 2:15–18:

And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents . . . it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.

Wherefore the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.

And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.
A: God allowed Satan into the garden to provide opposition to Adam and Eve and to entice them to partake of the forbidden fruit.

Q: What was Satan’s method of enticement?
A: Since he is the father of lies, he tried to deceive or beguile through false teachings and half-truths.

To help the students understand Satan’s manner of enticement in the garden, have them read Moses 4:10–11: “And the serpent said unto the woman: Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (see also 2 Nephi 2:18). Ask the students:

Q: What part of Satan’s proposition was false and what part was truthful?
A: Satan falsely said that they would not die; but, to entice them to partake, he added the truth that they would have their eyes opened and gain knowledge to eventually become as God.

The role of Eve. The discussion about Eve’s role in the Fall is one of the most important parts of the lesson. We read of her actions in Moses 4:7–12:

And he [Satan] said unto the woman: Yea, hath God said—Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (And he spake by the mouth of the serpent.)

And the woman said unto the serpent: We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;

But of the fruit of the tree which thou beholdest in the midst of the garden, God hath said—Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

And the serpent said unto the woman: Ye shall not surely die;

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it became pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make her wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and also gave unto her husband with her.

Q: Why did Eve yield to Satan’s deceptive proposition?
A: The most obvious answer to this question comes from the scriptures, which state that Eve was beguiled or deceived by Satan’s
proposition. After the Fall, Eve explained why she partook of the fruit: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Moses 4:19). In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul referred to the events of the Fall to warn the early Saints of Satan’s subtle lies: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” Paul also taught Timothy, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14).

To help students understand Eve’s action, share the following statement from Elder James E. Talmage. As the students read this quote, ask them to identify significant insights that pertain to Eve’s choice.

Eve answered that they were forbidden even to touch the fruit of that tree, under penalty of death. Satan then sought to beguile the woman, contradicting the Lord’s statement and declaring that death would not follow a violation of the divine injunction; but that, on the other hand, by doing that which the Lord had forbidden she and her husband would become like unto the gods, knowing good and evil for themselves. The woman was captivated by these representations; and, being eager to possess the advantages pictured by Satan, she disobeyed the command of the Lord, and partook of the fruit forbidden. She feared no evil, for she knew it not.10

This quote suggests that (1) Eve did not know that Satan’s proposition was deceptive, since she did not know that Satan was evil, and (2) Eve desired the progression that would come from partaking of the fruit, not expecting that there would be adverse consequences based on what Satan had said.

From the scriptural explanation that Eve was beguiled in the garden, age-old prejudices against women have been falsely perpetuated in many cultures and religions.11 Even though the scriptures are clear that Eve was beguiled, these false prejudices against women are in error. Modern-day prophets, seers, and revelators defend and honor Eve’s decision to partake of the forbidden fruit. Ask the students to ponder Eve’s motive for partaking of the forbidden fruit as they listen to the following statements.

In October 1993 general conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks said: “Her act, whatever its nature, was formally a transgression but eternally a glorious necessity to open the doorway toward eternal life. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same. . . . Some Christians condemn Eve for her act, concluding that she and her daughters are somehow flawed by it. Not the Latter-day Saints! Informed by revelation, we celebrate Eve’s act and honor her wisdom and courage in the great episode called the Fall.”12
In this same conference, Elder Russell M. Nelson taught, “We and all mankind are forever blessed because of Eve’s great courage and wisdom. By partaking of the fruit first, she did what needed to be done. Adam was wise enough to do likewise.”

President Joseph Fielding Smith also wrote, “I am very, very grateful for Mother Eve. If I ever get to see her, I want to thank her for what she did and she did the most wonderful thing that ever happened in this world and that was to place herself where Adam had to do the same thing that she did or they would have been separated forever.”

Q: When we remember that Eve was beguiled and did not know the true consequences of her choice, what could have been a possible motive for Eve to partake of the fruit?
A: Remind the students that God has not revealed a full knowledge of Eve’s thoughts before the Fall. However, some truths have been made available through the scriptures and words of latter-day prophets. These sources teach that Eve, even though deceived by Satan, was motivated by her desire to move forward in her progression.

After the Fall, both Adam and Eve acknowledged the wisdom of their choices: “And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:10–11). Before leaving the role that Eve played in the Fall, ask the students why the Fall should not be more appropriately called the “The Fall of Eve” since Eve was the first to partake. Ask them to consider the following questions:

Q: How does God use the word Adam in Moses 6:9? “In the image of his own body, male and female, created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created and became living souls in the land upon the footstool of God.”
A: As a title for both Adam and Eve.

Q: Because Eve had partaken, she would receive the consequences of her choice. But since Eve had been deceived in the process of mak-
ing this significant and important decision, would it be fair for God to hold her fully accountable for her decision and to usher in mortality on the basis of a trick or deception?

A: No, one of the four conditions necessary for full moral agency and accountability, knowledge of the true consequences of choice, was not fulfilled. She did not know the true consequences of her choice because Satan had deceived her into believing that she would not die.

Q: Why is the fact that Eve partook of the fruit first crucial to the role that Adam would play in his part of the Fall?

A: Now that Eve had partaken of the fruit, Adam could not avoid transgressing one or more of the commandments given to him in the garden.

The role of Adam. Consider asking the following questions about Adam’s role:

Q: Now that Eve had partaken of the fruit, what was Adam’s situation?

A: He could not keep all the commandments of God. If he wanted to stay with Eve so they could eventually multiply and replenish the earth, he would have to hearken to his wife, rather than God, and partake of the forbidden fruit.

Q: What important perspective does the following quote by Joseph Fielding Smith give to Adam’s choice?

“It is not always a sin to transgress a law. . . . Before partaking of the fruit Adam could have lived forever; therefore, his status was one of immortality. When he ate, he became subject to death, and therefore he became mortal. This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin in the strict sense, for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do! . . . We can hardly look upon anything resulting in such benefits as being a sin, in the sense in which we consider sin.”

A: Adam made the correct choice; he was obedient to the higher law when he had to choose between two right things.

Q: Why are we thankful for both Adam and Eve and the roles they played in the Fall?

A: Eve partook of the fruit to continue her progress. Adam, knowing that he would surely suffer death and the additional effects of mortality if he partook of the fruit, voluntarily accepted the adverse
effects of the Fall so he could stay with Eve and thereby make the plan of salvation possible for mankind. Thus, with moral agency and accountability in effect, the Fall came about because both Adam and Eve played their appropriate roles so the plan of salvation could move forward.

The final chalkboard summary could include:

Participants:

1. God the Father: Did not cause the Fall but prepared the conditions so that the Fall could occur.

2. Satan: Was allowed into the garden to entice Adam and Eve to partake. Sought to deceive them by telling a half-truth about the consequences of partaking of the fruit.

3. Eve: Even though beguiled, she was motivated to progress and partook of the fruit first.

4. Adam: In full agency and accountability, he partook of the forbidden fruit so “man might be” and so the plan could move forward.

This is an appropriate time to close the lesson. Tell the students that a future lesson will cover the consequences of the Fall that came upon mankind and nature.

Summary

This article is intended to provide some understanding into how the Fall occurred in the Garden of Eden. It explores the concept of moral agency and accountability, the commandments given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the roles of Heavenly Father, Satan, Eve, and Adam in the Fall. From these perspectives, several important truths are evident. Eve was beguiled by Satan and partook of the forbidden fruit. Latter-day prophets proclaim that she was motivated by the desire to progress toward godliness and fulfill her future role of bearing and nurturing children. After learning that Eve had partaken, Adam, in full moral agency and accountability, hearkened unto his wife and also partook so that man might be.

The words of one sacred hymn could be as applicable to the events of the Fall as they are to the Atonement of Christ: “How great the wisdom and the love, that filled [the Garden of Eden].”16 This wisdom and love was demonstrated in the roles performed by the Father, Eve, and Adam.
Teaching the Fall of Adam and Eve

There is still much unavailable truth about the Fall. However, the available truths of latter-day scriptures and prophets have made this event one of the most wonderful doctrines of the gospel. No wonder every teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ can find joy in teaching about the Fall!

Notes

3. An excellent outline of the doctrine of the Fall is in the course manual *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual*. See note 6 below.
Revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith opens a view to Old Testament doctrines and practices.

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An Everlasting Covenant: The Old Testament through the Lenses of the Restoration

Robert L. Millet

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The Old Testament is a vital part of our scriptural canon. It chronicles the dealings of God with men and women from the time of the Fall through the ministry of Malachi, a period of approximately thirty-five hundred years. The events, personalities, prophecies, and teachings of the Old Testament are foundational for any serious study of the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and modern revelation. Such concepts as the Fall; the coming of a Messiah to atone for the sins of the world; the establishment of covenants; the scattering, gathering, and destiny of the house of Israel; the Ten Commandments and the laws of equity and justice upon which our Judeo-Christian ethic is built; the infinite mercy, patience, and constancy of God; and the unique role of temples—these are but a few of the matters introduced in the Old Testament, matters that constitute central features of our worship and way of life today.

Our Challenge

When God called Joseph Smith to restore the fulness of the gospel to the earth, He did not confine Himself to the teachings and practices of the New Testament; rather, the Restoration entailed a bringing together of knowledge and power that date to the days of Eden. Thus, when we speak of “the primitive church” (Articles of Faith 1:6) and look beyond its organization, we speak of those Christian doctrines, covenants, and ordinances that came before the mortal days of Jesus the Messiah and that existed from the beginning of time.
If, then, the Old Testament is so important, so fundamental to our faith, why is it the least understood of all our scriptural records? Why is it quoted the least? Why do we limit ourselves to a selected group of “Bible stories” and fail to expand our understanding of the history, culture, languages, and challenges of a people who are, in fact, our own ancestors? For one thing, many of the most important teachings of the Old Testament are surrounded by cultures and customs that are almost completely foreign to people in the twenty-first century. Because few of us grasp the language, literary patterns, cultural values, and ideals of men and women in the days of Abraham, for example, we find some of the events and practices to be primitive, crude, harsh, distasteful, and thus awkward to contemplate.

In addition, we work under another disadvantage: many plain and precious truths, including many covenants of the Lord, have been “taken away” or “kept back” by designing persons through the ages who sought to “blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men,” thus causing “an exceedingly great many [to] stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them” (1 Nephi 13:20–32; see also Moses 1:40–41). And so the challenge of comprehending the message of the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, is not just a lack of education in ancient Near Eastern things but also the confusion and faulty contextualization that come when significant truths are removed from sacred records: we not only miss out on the truths that are removed but also struggle to make sense of what remains.

Our Charge

Many years ago while serving as a bishop, I sat at the back of a gospel doctrine class. The instructor, a very capable and inspiring teacher, was leading a discussion on the life and work of Father Abraham. The information dispensed was excellent, the doctrine solid, and the class members very much involved. A number of questions were raised during the class period, some of which were answered while others were not. When class was over, I walked to the front of the room and commended the instructor for an outstanding lesson. I then observed that several of the questions that had gone unanswered could have been handled quite easily by turning to the book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. The teacher’s response startled me: “I know that, and I was aware of what the book of Abraham has to say on the matter. But, Bishop, we’re studying the Old Testament, not the Pearl of Great Price.” I answered that, in fact, we were studying the gospel of Jesus Christ, using the Old Testament as our guide that particular year. I
pointed out further that it is incumbent upon us as gospel teachers to turn to other books of scripture or prophetic commentary whenever they can supplement or clarify a given scriptural passage. In doing so, we follow the pattern of the Master Teacher, who “expounded all the scriptures in one” (3 Nephi 23:14; see also Luke 24:27)—that is, He demonstrated how all of holy writ bears a united witness of Him.

Not long after joining the religion faculty at BYU, I attended an Old Testament in-service meeting. The topic of the day was the place of temples among the ancient Israelites. For about forty-five minutes, we talked about animal sacrifice and purification rites. Just before the meeting ended, my colleague, Joseph McConkie, spoke up and suggested that many of the same covenants and ordinances associated with temple work in our day were available anciently and that we would be wise to study modern scripture to better understand ancient scripture. “How do you know that?” the discussion leader inquired. “Because the scriptures say so,” Brother McConkie responded. He then turned to verses in section 124 of the Doctrine and Covenants and to an explanation of facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham. The group leader then said; “I think we need to be careful in this approach to the Old Testament. Aren’t you reading the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price into the Old Testament?” Brother McConkie replied, “I certainly am! Isn’t that what we are supposed to do?”

Perhaps there is some value in reading the Old Testament on its own, without scriptural or prophetic support or clarification, to “let the text speak for itself,” as some folks say. That’s just fine, as long as the text does, in fact, have something to say. There are those, for example, who refuse to read into the biblical record what we know from modern revelation, who feel that to do so is to compromise the integrity or unique contribution of the Bible itself. Let me suggest an analogy. If you were eager to locate a valuable site, should you utilize a map that is deficient in detail or inaccurate in layout simply because the map has been in the family for generations and is highly prized? Should you choose to ignore the precious information to be had on a more reliable or complete map if such were made available? Of course the whole matter is related to the question of whether the traveler is sincerely desirous of reaching a particular destination: maps have real value only to the degree that they do, in fact, guide us to a desired location. To change analogies, would a scholar in any discipline choose to maintain a position or defend a point of view when subsequent but available research had shed further (and perhaps clarifying) information on the subject? To do so would represent at best naïveté and at worst shoddy and
irresponsible scholarship. So it is with the Bible and modern scripture; the latter is a supplementary doctrinal guide and witness.

I am prone to take seriously the following divine directives given through the head of our dispensation:

“This generation shall have my word through you” (D&C 5:10).

“Lift up your heart and rejoice, for the hour of your mission [Thomas B. Marsh] is come; and your tongue shall be loosed, and you shall declare glad tidings of great joy unto this generation.

“You shall declare the things which have been revealed to my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun.” (D&C 31:3–4; emphasis added).

“Again I say, hearken ye elders of my church, whom I have appointed: Ye are not sent forth to be taught, but to teach the children of men the things which I have put into your hands by the power of my Spirit” (D&C 43:15; emphasis added).

“And my servant Leman [Copley] shall be ordained to this work [to carry the message of the Restoration to the Shakers], that he may reason with them [the Shakers], not according to that which he has received of them, but according to that which shall be taught him by you my servants [Sidney Rigdon and Parley P. Pratt]; and by so doing I will bless him, otherwise he shall not prosper” (D&C 49:4; emphasis added).

As gospel teachers, we should be sobered by the fact—a fact that President Ezra Taft Benson reminded us of frequently—that the whole Church will remain under condemnation, scourge, and judgment unless and until we repent of our shortsightedness, ingratitude, and vanity and utilize the Book of Mormon and modern revelation in our study and teaching: “For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you” (D&C 84:61; emphasis added; see also 84:54–60).

**Principles to Guide Our Study**

Let us turn our attention now to a few of those principles, doctrines, and eternal concepts that ought to direct and empower our study of the Old Testament. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation, the study of how we come to understanding. Let us construct a hermeneutic, what we might call a Restoration hermeneutic, based upon what we learn from the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and doctrinal teachings of Joseph Smith and his successors. The following are but a few of
those principles that allow us to make sense of the events and message of the Old Testament. We will, of necessity, be brief.

1. God has revealed Himself—the nature and kind of being He is—since the beginning of time. Earth’s first inhabitants came to know “that there is a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth, and all things which are in them; and that he created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness, created he them; and gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship” (D&C 20:17–19). More specifically, “In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; in the image of his own body, male and female, created he them” (Moses 6:8–9).

2. As a part of the revelation of God to man, it was known, from the beginning, that there is a Godhead composed of three personages and, more specifically, that the Father and the Son are separate and distinct. This knowledge, as you know, is absent from the Old Testament, no doubt one of the plain and precious truths taken away or kept back before the Bible was compiled. In the prayer of Zenos, quoted by Alma, we find these words: “And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son” (Alma 33:11; emphasis added). Now note the prayer of Zenock, another brass-plates prophet: “Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son” (Alma 33:16; emphasis added). In the first chapter of the book of Moses, which is the beginning of the Prophet Joseph’s inspired translation of the Bible, we find Moses’s first effort to cast out Satan. “Get thee hence, Satan,” the lawgiver stated; “deceive me not; for God said unto me: Thou art after the similitude of mine Only Begotten. And he also gave me commandments when he called unto me out of the burning bush, saying: Call upon God in the name of mine Only Begotten, and worship me” (Moses 1:16–17; emphasis added). The ancients were instructed plainly to worship the Father in the name of the Son (see 2 Nephi 25:16; Jacob 4:5; 7:11). In addition, they were taught that salvation was in Christ, the promised Messiah, and that His atoning blood and Resurrection would bring to pass the redemption of those who choose to come unto Him (see Moses 6:51–68; 7:45–47; 8:19, 23–24).
3. The Father’s plan of salvation, the plan of redemption, the great plan of happiness, was first revealed on this earth to Adam and Eve. Joseph Smith explained to the School of the Prophets that “after man was created, he was not left without intelligence or understanding, to wander in darkness and spend an existence in ignorance and doubt (on the great and important point which effected his happiness) as to the real fact by whom he was created, or unto whom he was amenable for his conduct. God conversed with him face to face. In his presence he was permitted to stand, and from his own mouth he was permitted to receive instruction. He heard his voice, walked before him and gazed upon his glory, while intelligence burst upon his understanding, and enabled him to give names to the vast assemblage of his Maker’s works.”

4. Adam, Eve, and their posterity learned the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ from God and angels and by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Moses 5:58). Christian prophets have taught Christian doctrines and administered Christian ordinances from the very beginning (see Moses 6:51–68). Those ordinances or sacraments of salvation have been and are and will be forever the same. Again, the Prophet Joseph Smith explained:

   It is said that Abel himself obtained witness that he was righteous [Hebrews 11:4]. Then certainly God spoke to him: indeed, it is said that God talked with him; and if He did, would He not, seeing that Abel was righteous, deliver to him the whole plan of the Gospel? And is not the Gospel the news of the redemption? How could Abel offer a sacrifice and look forward with faith on the Son of God for a remission of his sins, and not understand the Gospel? . . . And if Abel was taught of the coming of the Son of God, was he not taught also of His ordinances? We all admit that the Gospel has ordinances, and if so, had it not always ordinances, and were not its ordinances always the same?

The Prophet went on to say: “It will be noticed that according to Paul, (see Galatians 3:8) the Gospel was preached to Abraham. We would like to be informed in what name the Gospel was then preached, whether it was in the name of Christ or some other name. If in any other name, was it the Gospel? And if it was the Gospel, and that preached in the name of Christ, had it any ordinances? If not, was it the Gospel?” Further: “Now taking it for granted that the scriptures say what they mean, and mean what they say, we have sufficient grounds to go on and prove from the Bible that the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfill its requirements, the same, and the officers to officiate, the same; and the signs and fruits resulting from the promises, the same; therefore, as Noah was a preacher of righteousness
he must have been baptized and ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of the hands, etc.” In short, “ordainances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles.” All of the ordinances are necessary for anyone to receive a fulness of salvation.

5. The Church of Jesus Christ has been on the earth from the beginning of time. We are told that the higher priesthood was known early on as the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God. “But out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name, they, the church, in ancient days, called that priesthood after Melchizedek, or the Melchizedek Priesthood” (D&C 107:4). In a 1984 address, Elder Bruce R. McConkie asked: “Was there a Church anciently, and, if so, how was it organized and regulated? There was not so much as the twinkling of an eye during the whole so-called pre-Christian Era when the Church of Jesus Christ was not on the earth, organized basically in the same way it now is. Melchizedek belonged to the Church; Laban was a member; so also was Lehi, long before he left Jerusalem.”

6. Despite periods of apostasy or falling away, the holy priesthood has always been on the earth. Again from Elder McConkie: “Did they have the fulness of the everlasting gospel at all times? Yes. There was not a period of ten minutes from the days of Adam to the appearing of the Lord Jesus in the land Bountiful when the gospel—as we have it, in its eternal fulness—was not on earth. Do not let the fact that the performances of the Mosaic law were administered by the Aaronic Priesthood confuse you on this matter. Where the Melchizedek Priesthood is, there is the fulness of the gospel; and all the prophets held the Melchizedek Priesthood.” More specifically, President Joseph Fielding Smith noted that the Lord “has kept authorized servants on the earth bearing the priesthood from the days of Adam to the present time; in fact, there has never been a moment from the beginning that there were not men on the earth holding the Holy Priesthood. Even in the days of apostasy, and apostasy has occurred several times, the Lord never surrendered this earth and permitted Satan to have complete control. Even when the great apostasy occurred following the death of the Savior’s apostles, our Father in Heaven held control and had duly authorized servants on the earth to direct his work and to check, to some extent at least, the ravages and corruption of the evil powers. These servants were not permitted to organize the Church nor to officiate in the ordinances of
the gospel, but they did check the advances of evil as far as the Lord deemed it necessary.”

7. The kingdom of God is “a house of order,” not “a house of confusion” (D&C 132:8). Thus, knowing what we know about what it takes to build up and establish that kingdom on earth, we would conclude the following: (a) all of those former-day Saints who were a part of the Church of Jesus Christ entered the covenant gospel through the exercise of faith in the Lord, repentance of sin, baptism by immersion by one holding proper authority, and the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands; (b) those who functioned in the priestly or prophetic office were properly ordained to the priesthood and called by a legal administrator; and (c) whenever the kingdom was here and prophets walked the earth, the keys of the kingdom—the directing power, the right of presidency—were held by someone on earth. Otherwise, there would be chaos—no way of overseeing the performance of ordinances and the proper proclamation of the gospel. Thus, in Lehi’s day, we would suppose that there was a Church organization of some sort and that his prophetic contemporaries worked together under the direction of one holding the fulness of the keys of the priesthood. In the words of a modern Apostle:

There was always apostolic power. The Melchizedek Priesthood always directed the course of the Aaronic Priesthood. All of the prophets held a position in the hierarchy of the day. Celestial marriage has always existed. Indeed, such is the heart and core of the Abrahamic covenant. Elias and Elijah came [to the Kirtland Temple in April 1836] to restore this ancient order and to give the sealing power, which gives it eternal efficacy.

People ask: Did they have the gift of the Holy Ghost before the day of Pentecost? As the Lord lives they were so endowed; such is part of the gospel; and those so gifted wrought miracles and sought and obtained a city whose builder and maker is God.

8. The fulness of the blessings of the everlasting gospel, including eternal marriage, were available in temples built anciently. In the words of the choice seer, “The order of the house of God has been, and ever will be, the same, even after Christ comes; and after the termination of the thousand years it will be the same; and we shall finally enter into the celestial kingdom of God, and enjoy it forever.”

From our present Old Testament, all we really know about the ordinances of the temple is that the priests and Levites officiated in sacrificial offerings. It is to modern revelation that we turn to learn otherwise. From the Doctrine and Covenants, we learn that the keys
associated with eternal marriage and the sealing of families were held by ancient prophets (see D&C 132:39). At the time the early Saints of this dispensation were commanded to construct a temple in Nauvoo, the Lord asked: “How shall your washings be acceptable unto me, except ye perform them in a house which you have built to my name? For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was.” The Savior went on to speak of washings, anointings, baptisms for the dead, and other oracles and conversations within His holy house, “which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name” (D&C 124:37–39; emphasis added). In a similar vein, the explanation of figure 3 in facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham speaks of “God, sitting upon his throne, clothed with power and authority; with a crown of eternal light upon his head; representing also the grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood, as revealed to Adam in the Garden of Eden, as also to Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and all to whom the Priesthood was revealed.”

At the time that Joseph Smith first introduced the temple endowment in Nauvoo in May 1842, he spoke of “instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood, attending to washings, anointings, endowments and the communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, and all those plans and principles by which any one is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the Firstborn, and come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds.” In short, “in this council was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days.”

9. From the days of Adam, the Melchizedek Priesthood was administered under the patriarchal order. Elder McConkie wrote:

Adam, our father, the first man, is the presiding high priest over the earth for all ages. The government the Lord gave him was patriarchal, and from the expulsion from Eden to the cleansing of the earth by water in the day of Noah, the righteous portion of mankind were blessed and governed by a patriarchal theocracy.

This theocratic system, patterned after the order and system that prevailed in heaven, was the government of God. He himself though dwelling in heaven, was the Lawgiver, Judge, and King. He gave direction in all things both civil and ecclesiastical; there was no separation of church and state as we know it. All governmental affairs were directed,
controlled, and regulated from on high. The Lord’s legal administrators on earth served by virtue of their callings and ordinances in the Holy Priesthood and as they were guided by the power of the Holy Ghost.\textsuperscript{14}

And so it was that Seth, Enos, Cainaan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah presided over the kingdom of God during their respective times on earth. From Noah to Abraham, an additional ten generations, righteous men were called upon to officiate in the Lord’s theocratic system. They were high priests. They were presiding patriarchs. Others held the priesthood, but these men held the keys, the directing power over the affairs of God on earth.\textsuperscript{15} It was a family order, an order of family government presided over by a father and a mother. Yes, in the ultimate sense, the father was responsible and accountable for the family. “Of necessity,” the revelations affirm, “there are presidents, or presiding officers” within God’s program (D&C 107:21). Knowing what we know, however, about the Lord’s system of priesthood government, we must assume that in ancient times husbands and wives counseled together on the government of the family.

Few details are given in the Bible or the Book of Mormon concerning the lives or contributions of the great matriarchs. The scriptural records were kept by men and focused on certain fundamental doctrinal messages or precepts. But it is important for us to know that both Adam and Eve called on the name of the Lord, heard the voice of the Lord, received commandments to offer animal sacrifices, and obeyed the will of the Almighty (see Moses 5:1–8). “Adam held the priesthood,” Elder Russell M. Nelson observed, “and Eve served in matriarchal partnership with the patriarchal priesthood.”\textsuperscript{16} Adam did not receive the fullness of the blessings of the priesthood alone, nor will any man; Eve was by his side as an intelligent, contributing, and equal partner. We enter the patriarchal order through marriage in the house of the Lord, the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (see D&C 131:1–4). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob may have qualified for exaltation in the highest heaven, but they did not so achieve on their own; they stand now, with their eternal companions, not as angels but as gods and goddesses (see D&C 132:37). The patriarchal order is a partnership.

Elder McConkie said, “It is an eternal principle—the man and the woman are not alone: neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord. Women are appointed, Rebekah-like, to be guides and lights in righteousness in the family unit, and to engineer and arrange so that things are done in the way that will result in the salvation of more of our Father’s children.”\textsuperscript{17}
10. The patriarchal order continued in the Old World until the days of Moses, when the children of Israel proved unworthy of the higher priesthood and unwilling to receive its highest privilege—entering the presence of Jehovah (see Exodus 20:19; D&C 84:19–27). When Moses was translated and taken from the midst of ancient Israel, the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood, including the right to pass that divine authority from father to son, were taken also. The fulness of the everlasting gospel was taken from the generality of the people. The preparatory gospel, with its governing priesthood, the Aaronic Priesthood, was then given to the people (see Joseph Smith Translation, Exodus 34:1–2; Joseph Smith Translation, Deuteronomy 10:1–2). There were, of course, people living on the earth after this time who held the Melchizedek Priesthood—including the sons of Aaron, the seventy elders of Israel, and the prophets who were called thereafter—but the keys, the right of presidency, including the right to confer the higher priesthood, were taken from the generality of the people. It was not until the mortal ministry of Christ that the keys of the higher priesthood were once again delivered to men on earth.18

11. The Abrahamic covenant is no more or less than the gospel covenant, the new and everlasting covenant. It is the very same covenant that God initiated with Adam and Enoch and Noah and all the antediluvians. It is a two-way promise between God and His chosen people. On our part, we agree to come unto Christ, receive the covenants and ordinances of salvation, and separate ourselves from worldliness. “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant,” Jehovah declared, “then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:5–6). A millennium and a half later, the Apostle Peter reminded the Saints scattered abroad that “as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [conduct]; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15–16; see also Leviticus 11:44). To do this, it has always been necessary for those who aspired after holiness to “put [a] difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean” (Leviticus 10:10).

On His part, God promises the faithful lineal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—as well as all who enter the same covenant in the same manner (see 2 Nephi 30:1–2)—to make available the gospel, the priesthood, eternal life (including the promise that our posterity will be as innumerable as the stars of the heavens or the sands upon the seashore), and a land of inheritance (see Genesis 13, 15, 17; Abraham
2:8–11, 19). These are known as the “promises made to the fathers” (D&C 2:2). The chosen seed is scattered whenever they reject the true Messiah and His gospel, scattered as much to their identity as they are to their geography. On the other hand, they are gathered whenever they “come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14; see also 2 Nephi 6:10–11; 10:3–7). They are “restored to the true church and fold of God”; thereafter, they are “gathered home to the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 9:2). Thus, the people of Israel are gathered first spiritually; they are gathered to a person, Jesus Christ. Second, they are gathered temporally, either to certain lands of inheritance or to the congregations of the faithful in the nations where they reside.

12. Because we know that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (see Revelation 19:10), we also realize that the principal duty of every prophet is to stand as a living oracle, a covenant spokesman, a dynamic witness of Jehovah, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophets who remained faithful to their supernal charge (see Mosiah 15:13) bore witness of the coming of the Messiah, for in the words of Peter, “to him give all the prophets witness” (Acts 10:43; see also Jacob 7:11). The prophets all rejoiced to see His day; they saw it and were glad (see John 8:56; Helaman 8:17; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 15:11–12). They knew and understood that He who would leave His divine throne and condescend was indeed the same Being known in Old Testament times as “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, [who should] come down from heaven among the children of men, and . . . dwell in a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5).

The God of justice and the God of mercy were one and the same. The God of the Old Testament came to earth as the Suffering Servant of the New Testament. “And the God of our fathers,” wrote Nephi, “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up . . . and to be crucified . . . and to be buried in a sepulchre” (1 Nephi 19:10).

Conclusion

Enoch “beheld the spirits that God had created; and he beheld also things which were not visible to the natural eye; and from thenceforth came the saying abroad in the land: A seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people” (Moses 6:36). Ammon explained to King Limhi that “a
seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come” (Mosiah 8:17). It just may be, for example, that Joseph Smith the seer revealed more to us concerning the past than he did concerning the future.

The priceless gems that he delivered to us concerning the ancients, including the fact that they “knew of Christ, and . . . had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming” (Jacob 4:4), links us to the ancients, the former-day Saints. We have the gospel. So did they. We have the holy priesthood, and so did they. We enjoy the gift and gifts of the Holy Ghost, and so did they. We forge forever families through the ordinances of the temple, and so did they. If we exercise a lively hope in Christ and endure faithfully to the end, we shall enjoy the sweet fruits of exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, and so shall they. Truly, the gospel of God is a new and an everlasting covenant; its teachings and principles are timely, and its reach and transcendent blessings are timeless.

Notes

4. Smith, Teachings, 60.
5. Smith, Teachings, 264; see also 98, 168–69.
7. See Smith, Teachings, 309, 331, 362.
11. McConkie, Doctrines of the Restoration, 293.
Youth and young adults are in a season of life with an urgent need to receive and understand personal revelation.

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As an educator, I have noticed that an experience common to Latter-day Saints, both students and teachers alike, is the lifelong task of learning how to receive and understand personal revelation. Elder S. Dilworth Young of the Seventy said: “I can testify to you that . . . none of you [will] have any adventure greater, more thrilling, and more joyful than finding out how to interpret the Spirit which comes into you. . . . Young folks have to learn how; so do we older folks. We have to find out the technique by which the Spirit whispers in our hearts. We have to learn to hear it and to understand it and to know when we have it, and that sometimes takes a long time.”

In the Church Educational System, we work primarily with students between ages fourteen and thirty, a group in those seasons of life where there seems to be an especially urgent need to learn to receive and understand personal revelation. These youth and young adults must make an extraordinary number of eternity-altering decisions at a relatively young age, and we as teachers and leaders can help parents and priesthood leaders prepare them for this great adventure. And they are ready for it! President J. Reuben Clark Jr. of the First Presidency testified that they are eager and capable of learning about the things of the Spirit despite their youth and inexperience: “The youth of the Church are hungry for the things of the Spirit. . . . [They] are prepared to understand and to believe that there is a natural world and there is a spiritual world . . . [and] that the things of the spiritual world cannot be understood
or comprehended by the things of the natural world. . . . [They] hunger and thirst . . . for a testimony of the things of the Spirit.”

The revelations contained in Doctrine and Covenants in sections 6 through 11 provide a handbook of sorts, identifying a number of principles and conditions relative to personal revelation. This paper will outline and analyze some of these principles and conditions in an effort to help students and teachers gain a better understanding of how the Lord taught His children to receive and recognize personal revelation.

**Principle 1: Ask and you shall receive according to the conditions prescribed by the Lord.**

The Lord gave Oliver Cowdery a principle of truth that applies to all of us as well: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, blessed art thou for what thou hast done; for thou hast inquired of me, and behold, as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit” (D&C 6:14). This scripture highlights the importance of the first principle of revelation I will discuss—ask and ye shall receive.

President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphasizes the importance of our asking so we can receive personal revelation. He said:

- You have your agency, and inspiration does not—perhaps cannot—flow unless you ask for it, or someone asks for you.

- No message in scripture is repeated more often than the invitation, even the command, to pray—to ask.

- Prayer is so essential a part of revelation that without it the veil may remain closed to you. Learn to pray. Pray often. Pray in your mind, in your heart. Pray on your knees.

- You must begin where you are. Pray, even if you are like the prophet Alma when he was young and wayward, or if you are like Amulek, of the closed mind, who “knew concerning these things, yet . . . would not know.”

- Prayer is your personal key to heaven. The lock is on your side of the veil.

For us to *receive*, however, the Lord outlines several conditions upon which this principle is based.

**Condition 1: Ask for the right things.** To receive personal revelation, we must ask according to the Lord’s will. The Bible Dictionary entry for “Prayer” states: “Prayer is the act by which the will of the Father and the will of the child are brought into correspondence with each
other. The object of prayer is not to change the will of God, but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant, but that are made conditional on our asking for them.” The ancient Nephite disciples exemplified this principle: “They did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire” (3 Nephi 19:24). They knew what to pray for (the Lord’s will) because it “was given unto them” by the Holy Ghost. In other words, we have to be in tune with the spirit of revelation to receive personal revelation, and we will thereby know what the Lord’s will is and then pray for it. Doctrine and Covenants 46:30 confirms this truth: “He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh.”

In Doctrine and Covenants 6:5–9, the Lord carefully instructs Oliver Cowdery on what to ask for:

Therefore, if you will ask of me you shall receive; if you will knock it shall be opened unto you.

Now, as you have asked, behold, I say unto you, keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion;

Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, even as you desire of me so it shall be unto you; and if you desire, you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation.

Say nothing but repentance unto this generation; keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work, according to my commandments, and you shall be blessed.

The Lord gave a similar message to Hyrum Smith about asking for the right things: “And then shall ye know, or by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me, which are pertaining unto things of righteousness” (D&C 11:14; emphasis added). Since so much of our receiving depends on our asking, it is critical that we ask for the right things if we are to receive.

**Condition 2: Have the right desires.** Closely related to asking for the right things is having the right desires. Doctrine and Covenants 7 is an excellent example of two brethren who received because of their right desires. Peter and John received what they asked of the Lord, even though they asked for very different things. Peter asked to return speedily to the Savior in heaven upon completion of his mission in this
life; John asked to “have power over death, that I may live and bring souls” to the Savior beyond the time normally allotted in this life. Because both had what the Savior considered “a good desire” (D&C 7:5), He told them that both would receive according to their desires and have joy in that (see D&C 7:8).

The Lord’s promise to Oliver Cowdery in this regard applies to us today. “If you have good desires” (D&C 6:27), the Lord will bless you to be able to be a part of bringing forth His will and kingdom on earth. Not only can we pray to ask for the right things but also we can ask the Lord to fill our hearts with the right desires (see 3 Nephi 19:24).

Condition 3: Believe that you will receive. Once you have obtained knowledge regarding the Lord’s will for you and your heart is filled with the right desires, the next step is to proceed with faith, believing that you will receive that thing, if you ask for it, according to the promises of the Lord. Again, to Oliver Cowdery, the Lord said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, . . . believing that you shall receive” (D&C 8:1).

The ancient prophets of the Book of Mormon provide an excellent example of this principle. The Lord explained that those prophets were receiving according to their righteous desires because they had asked Him, believing they would receive: “The remainder of this work does contain all those parts of my gospel which my holy prophets, yea, and also my disciples, desired in their prayers should come forth unto this people. And I said unto them, that it should be granted unto them according to their faith in their prayers” (D&C 10:46–47).

President Packer explained how “believing that you will receive” works: “The flow of revelation depends on your faith. You exercise faith by causing, or by making, your mind accept or believe as truth that which you cannot, by reason alone, prove for certainty. . . . As you test gospel principles by believing without knowing, the Spirit will begin to teach you. Gradually your faith will be replaced with knowledge.”

Principle 2: While seeking and receiving, trifle not with sacred things.

As we obtain the will of the Lord, have righteous desires, and ask in faith, we must not “trifle with [the] sacred things” we receive. To Oliver, the Lord said: “Behold thou hast a gift, and blessed art thou because of thy gift. Remember it is sacred and cometh from above. . . . Make not thy gift known unto any save it be those who are of
thy faith. Trifle not with sacred things” (D&C 6:10, 12). The Lord has
given each of us gifts, including the gift of the Holy Ghost and access
to gifts of the Spirit. These things are sacred and are not to be treated
lightly. Several conditions are mentioned in relation to this principle in
Doctrine and Covenants 6–11.

**Condition 1: Do not ask for what you should not.** In relation to ask-
ing for the right things and with the right desires, the Lord simply
told Oliver Cowdery, “Trifle not with these things; do not ask for that
which you ought not” (D&C 8:10).

**Condition 2: You must study it out in your mind.** Having already
begun his labors as Joseph Smith’s scribe, a somewhat discontented
Oliver Cowdery also “desired to be endowed with the gift of transla-
tion” (heading to D&C 8). The Lord responded with these words of
encouragement: “Ask . . . that you may translate . . . those ancient
records which have been hid up, that are sacred; and according to your
faith shall it be done unto you” (D&C 8:11). When Oliver attempted
to translate, however, he failed. One of the reasons he did not succeed
was given to him in this explanation from the Lord: “Behold, you
have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto
you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, I
say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must
ask me if it be right, and if it is right . . . you shall feel that it is right”
(D&C 9:7–8). Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve
Apostles said this regarding these verses: “Being taught by the Spirit is
not a passive thing. Often the Lord’s communication does not come
until we have studied matters out in our own minds. Then we receive
a confirmation.” Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles added: “We are to solve our own problems and then
to counsel with the Lord in prayer and receive a spiritual confirmation
that our decisions are correct.” We might wonder how many prayers
could have been answered and revelations received over the ages if the
children of men had been willing to pay the price to personally search
out in their own minds the will of the Lord and then ask, having stud-
ied their questions out in their minds.

**Condition 3: Keep sacred things sacred.** Once we are able to receive
revelation from the Lord, we need to work as hard to keep those things
sacred as we did to receive the revelation. After Joseph lost the manu-
script containing the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon, the Lord
chastened and warned him:

Therefore, you have delivered them up, yea, that which was sacred,
unto wickedness. . . .
But behold, here is wisdom, and because I show unto you wisdom, and give you commandments concerning these things, what you shall do, show it not unto the world until you have accomplished the work of translation.

Marvel not that I said unto you: Here is wisdom, show it not unto the world—for I said, show it not unto the world, that you may be preserved.

Behold, I do not say that you shall not show it unto the righteous;

But as you cannot always judge the righteous, or as you cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous, therefore I say unto you, hold your peace until I shall see fit to make all things known unto the world concerning the matter. (D&C 10:9, 34–37)

Because of this experience, Joseph Smith learned a painful but powerful lesson about keeping sacred things sacred.

In connection with sacred communication from the Holy Ghost that we might receive, President Packer taught: “I have come to believe also that it is not wise to continually talk of unusual spiritual experiences. They are to be guarded with care and shared only when the Spirit itself prompts you to use them to the blessing of others. . . . We are, I believe, to keep these things and ponder them in our hearts.”

**Condition 4: Once is enough.** Both Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith learned for themselves that in the economy of God, His children do not need to receive the same revelation more than once. Even though he had already received a witness of the truthfulness of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s testimony regarding the plates, Oliver sought an additional witness from the Lord. The Lord patiently responded to Oliver’s query by reminding him of the revelation he had already received: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? And now, behold, you have received a witness; for if I have told you things which no man knoweth [Joseph Smith was unaware of Oliver’s experience when he inquired of the Lord in his behalf], have you not received a witness?” (D&C 6:22–24). He learned that if the Lord has already revealed something, then he should trifle not with sacred things by asking for the same revelation again.

Joseph Smith had already learned this painful lesson in connection with the lost manuscript of the book of Lehi. He recorded:
Some time after Mr. Harris had begun to write for me, he began to importune me to give him liberty to carry the writings home and show them; and desired of me that I would inquire of the Lord, through the Urim and Thummim, if he might not do so. I did inquire, and the answer was that he must not. However, he was not satisfied with this answer, and desired that I should inquire again. I did so, and the answer was as before. Still he could not be contented, but insisted that I should inquire once more. After much solicitation I again inquired of the Lord, and permission was granted him to have the writings on certain conditions. . . . In accordance with this last answer, I required of him that he should bind himself in a covenant to me in a most solemn manner that he would not do otherwise than had been directed. He did so. He bound himself as I required of him, took the writings, and went his way. Notwithstanding, however, the great restrictions which he had been laid under, and the solemnity of the covenant which he had made with me, he did show them to others, and by stratagem they got them away from him, and they never have been recovered unto this day.8

**Condition 5: Continue as you commenced.** When Oliver attempted to translate the ancient record, he failed. Rather than continue to try to learn how to translate by the gift and power of God, he returned to his position as scribe. Shortly thereafter, Joseph Smith received the following in Oliver’s behalf: “Behold, I say unto you, my son, that because you did not translate according to that which you desired of me, and did commence again to write for my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., even so I would that ye should continue until you have finished this record, which I have entrusted unto him. . . . And, behold, it is because that you did not continue as you commenced, when you began to translate, that I have taken away this privilege from you” (D&C 9:1, 5).

Relating this experience to our lives and to the receipt of personal revelation, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught: “In the process of revelation and making important decisions, fear plays a destructive, sometimes paralyzing role. To Oliver Cowdery, who missed the opportunity of a lifetime because he didn’t seize it in the lifetime of the opportunity, the Lord said, ‘You did not continue as you commenced.’ . . . After you have gotten the message, after you have paid the price to feel His love and hear the word of the Lord, go forward. Don’t fear, don’t vacillate, don’t quibble, don’t whine. . . . Dismiss your fears and wade in with both feet.”

In my assignment as a teacher, I believe I have seen more opportunities lost in this way than in any other. I have seen students—faithful students—lose opportunities for love, missions, marriage, education, and so forth because they did not “continue as they commenced.” A true principle that I believe operates in this regard is what I call the
Sacred Grove principle. Joseph Smith did not receive a vision of the Father and the Son without some serious opposition from the adversary first. In Joseph’s own words, he writes that as he attempted to pray, according to his previous determination, “immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, . . . I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head” (Joseph Smith—History 1:15–16).

Moses had a similar experience with the adversary (see Moses 1:12–22). I believe that most, if not all, of us have our own encounters with the opposition of the adversary immediately after we receive an impression or even a confirmation to do something good and right and true. It happens because Satan does not want what follows—to continue as we commenced—to happen to us. It is important, then, that we remember this principle: If you receive a revelation from the Lord, pursue it until He stops you. You might run into discouragement, despair, and opposition along the way. But that does not mean that you did not receive a revelation or that the revelation wasn’t right. It might mean, and perhaps will always mean, that the Lord wants something very meaningful and wonderful for you that the adversary does not want.

**Condition 6: You need to obtain all that has been revealed before more can be added.** Hyrum Smith, ever eager to help his younger brother and the Lord build up the cause of Zion, received this revelation in response to his desire to proclaim the word: “Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men. But now hold your peace; study my word which hath gone forth among the children of men, and also study my word which shall come forth among the children of men, or that which is now translating, yea, until you have obtained all which I shall grant unto the children of men in this generation, and then shall all things be added thereto” (D&C 11:21–22).

Elder Oaks taught that studying the scriptures is a key to receiving revelation: “Just as continuing revelation enlarges and illuminates the scriptures, so also a study of the scriptures enables men and women to receive revelations. . . . This happens because scripture reading puts us in tune with the Spirit of the Lord. . . . We do not overstate the point
when we say that the scriptures can be a Urim and Thummim to assist each of us to receive personal revelation.”

Elder Oaks added: “The best way to have the spirit of revelation is to listen to and study words spoken under the influence of the Holy Ghost. In other words, we obtain the Spirit by reading the scriptures or reading or listening to the talks of inspired leaders.”

A student of mine complained at one point that she hated the scriptures. After she began reading again, however, she found the answer she had wanted, and I discovered the reason she had felt she hated them. A former teacher had promised her, and rightly so, that she could find the answer to any question in the scriptures. However, when my student looked in the Topical Guide and Index for references that might answer her question, there were no relevant entries; and in despair she gave up and quit reading. It was only when she gave the scriptures one more try that she found her answer, not from the scriptures but from the whisperings of the Spirit that came to her while she was reading. Excitedly, she shared with me her answer: Jacob 5:25 from the allegory of the olive tree. Her question dealt with what to do with a boyfriend who was knowingly rebelling against the teachings and guidelines of the Church. Her answer—*from the Spirit*: Cut off the wild-fruit-producing branch or your whole tree could wither and die. She received that answer while prayerfully reading from Jacob 5, one of the most difficult-to-understand chapters in any book of scripture. I learned from that experience that when seekers of truth—regardless of age or experience—read the way Elder Oaks suggests, they put themselves in tune with the Spirit and can receive the answer to any question, whether or not it is specifically mentioned in the text.

**Principle 3: We must know how to recognize the voice of the Spirit when it comes.**

This might be the most difficult part of receiving revelation—knowing whether it is from the Lord or just our own mind or even Satan. Doctrine and Covenants 6–11 has some excellent guidelines that can help us determine what is being communicated by the Spirit and whether it is from the Lord. We also learn from these sections that the Lord’s voice does not come in just one way but can be manifest in different ways at different times. One day when we were discussing the different ways the Spirit communicates to our soul in class, an excited student stood up and exclaimed, “I’ve had that experience before!” As she explained her excitement, it became obvious at once that she had grown up believing that communication from the Spirit came in only
one certain way. As we discussed the scriptural teachings regarding communication with the Spirit, she discovered not only that revelations come in different ways but that she had actually experienced some of them. The light that was shed on her heart and mind that day was liberating and edifying; she realized that she really had received communication from the Holy Ghost and that she was not spiritually dead, as she had before supposed.

My experience as a teacher and servant in the Church is that many members misunderstand the different ways the Spirit communicates with us—with the result that many are often led to believe that they are either receiving less communication than they really are or that what they had thought was the spirit of revelation really isn’t. Knowing how to recognize the Spirit when it comes has several conditions.

**Condition 1: The Lord will tell you in your mind and in your heart.** The Lord told Oliver Cowdery that He would speak “in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart” (D&C 8:2). Of this process, Elder L. Lionel Kendrick of the Seventy said: “The means by which the Spirit speaks to both the mind and the heart is through the still, small voice spoken of in the scriptures. This voice is often called the ‘voice of the Spirit’ (1 Nephi 4:18). Sometimes that voice is heard within, but more often it is felt. It may prompt us with both a thought and a feeling concerning a matter.”12 President Packer elaborated on the process: “The Holy Ghost speaks with a voice that you feel more than you hear. It is described as a ‘still small voice.’ And while we speak of ‘listening’ to the whisperings of the Spirit, most often many of us describe a spiritual prompting by saying, ‘I had a feeling.’ . . . Revelation comes as words we feel more than hear. Nephi told his wayward brothers, who were visited by an angel, ‘Ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words.’”13

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve explained in detail how this process works:

It is through the repeated process of feeling impressions, recording them, and obeying them that one learns to depend on the direction of the Spirit more than on communication through the five senses. An impression to the mind is very specific. Detailed words can be heard or felt and written as though the instruction were being dictated. A communication to the heart is a more general impression. The Lord often begins by giving impressions. Where there is a recognition of their importance and they are obeyed, one gains more capacity to receive more detailed instruction to the mind. An impression to the heart, if followed is fortified by a more specific instruction to the mind. . . . We often leave the most precious personal direction of the Spirit unheard.
because we do not record and respond to the first promptings that come to us when the Lord chooses to direct us or when impressions come in response to urgent prayer.  

**Condition 2: You will either feel that it is right or that it is not.**

Many questions have arisen regarding recognizing personal revelation because of the Lord’s words to Oliver Cowdery: “You must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong” (D&C 9:8–9). Many have misunderstood the meaning and intent of this passage or have supposed this is the only way the Spirit communicates revelation to us. Of this passage, Elder Oaks said:

This may be one of the most important and misunderstood teachings in all the Doctrine and Covenants. The teachings of the Spirit often come as feelings. That fact is of the utmost importance, yet some misunderstand what it means. I have met persons who told me they have never had a witness from the Holy Ghost because they have never felt their bosom “burn within” them. What does a “burning in the bosom” mean? Does it need to be a feeling of caloric heat, like the burning produced by combustion? If that is the meaning, I have never had a burning in the bosom. Surely, the word “burning” in this scripture signifies a feeling of comfort and serenity. That is the witness many receive. That is the way revelation works. Truly, the still, small voice is just that, “still” and “small.”

In addition, President Packer said: “This burning in the bosom is not purely a physical sensation. It is more like a warm light shining within your being. . . . If ever you receive a prompting to do something that makes you feel uneasy, something you know in your mind to be wrong and contrary to the principles of righteousness, do not respond to it!”

**Condition 3: The Spirit will speak peace to your mind.** In an attempt to help Oliver Cowdery recognize the spirit of revelation, the Lord said: “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:23). This counsel teaches two very valuable principles regarding the recognition of personal revelation: (1) the voice of God is a voice of peace and (2) this is one of the greatest witnesses we can receive from Him. Elder Kendrick said: “The most frequent confirmation of the Spirit comes to us as peaceful feelings. . . . President Brigham Young quoted these words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: ‘They can tell the Spirit of the
Lord from all other spirits—it will whisper peace and joy to their souls.’ Feelings of peace are promptings and proof that the Spirit is bearing witness to us in response to our petitions.”

**Condition 4: Revelation will enlighten your mind.** Through his brother Joseph, Hyrum learned: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind” (D&C 11:13). In relation to this verse, Elder Kendrick taught:

Prophets, seers, and revelators have described this process of receiving personal revelation through the enlightenment of the mind: “When you feel pure intelligence flowing into you,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith, “it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus.” . . . President Harold B. Lee further taught, “When there come to you things that your mind does not know, when you have a sudden thought that comes to your mind, if you will learn to give heed to these things that come from the Lord, you will learn to walk by the spirit of revelation.”

**Condition 5: Revelation will lead you to do what is right.** The Lord gave a final condition for learning to recognize the Spirit: “And now, verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit” (D&C 11:12).

One time as I was walking home from the office, I saw an elderly woman chasing her garbage can down the road in a terrible windstorm. Feeling prompted to assist her, I felt self-conscious and talked myself out of it because I was afraid I might frighten her. In my mind, I said, “She doesn’t know you—she might be afraid of strangers.” Yet I knew it was the right thing to do. One of the best ways to determine if an impression is from the Spirit is simply that it will lead you to do that which you know is right, just, and true.

As we continue to learn for ourselves and help our students better understand the principles of personal revelation, together we will be able to “receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that [we may] know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal” (D&C 42:61).
Notes

4. Packer, “Personal Revelation,” 60; emphasis in original.
13. Packer, “Personal Revelation,” 60; emphasis in original.
Stone box with gold and silver plates of Darius (516–151 BC) found at Persepolis (in modern Iran); viewed at this angle, the inscription is upside down.

Courtesy Harold B. Lee Library
The Book of Mormon Reference Companion

Dennis L. Largey

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[Editors’ note: Because the Book of Mormon Reference Companion is one of the most useful teaching reference books in recent years, we asked the general editor of this volume to describe the purpose of this book as well as some things he learned while compiling it.]

The idea for the Book of Mormon Reference Companion originated in spring 1996. For some time, biblical scholars have produced encyclopedic dictionaries of the Bible. The Harpercollins Bible Dictionary, Holman Bible Dictionary, The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, and The Oxford Companion to the Bible are just a few. Where was the dictionary-encyclopedia for the Book of Mormon? There was not one!

My intention, therefore, was to create a Book of Mormon reference book similar to the encyclopedic Bible dictionaries biblical scholars have published for many years. The “stick of Joseph,” one of the most published and influential books in the world, should have a reference book comparable to its scriptural companion, the “stick of Judah.”

I started by making a list of topics I thought should be included. I began with the index in the Book of Mormon and listed every Book of Mormon person and place, and I then compared my list with lists others had made so that my final list could be considered comprehensive. I then added a list of doctrines I thought should be included and cross-checked it with subject titles in the Bible’s Topical Guide and Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s Mormon Doctrine. With such projects, it often happens that ideas come in the process. By 1996, I had taught Book of Mormon classes at BYU—Hawaii and at BYU for seventeen
years. Based on my teaching experience, I selected Book of Mormon words and phrases where a concise explanation would be helpful to readers. My excitement grew as I contemplated adding more and more topics, listed alphabetically, under one cover. Thus came the inclusion of articles dealing with themes and purposes of the Book of Mormon, historical background of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, Isaiah commentary on each Book of Mormon Isaiah chapter, and articles of general interest such as “archaeology,” “olive trees,” “tree of life in ancient cultures,” “Stela 5,” and “Quetzalcoatl.”

A colleague of mine at BYU—Hawaii had maintained that university students should take a class in the Old Testament before taking classes in the Book of Mormon. He reasoned that an Old Testament background (for example, the history of the house of Israel) was essential in understanding the Book of Mormon, a book whose authors presuppose such understanding. Agreeing with my colleague, I added articles to the *Reference Companion* that dealt with Old Testament background relating to the Book of Mormon. These entries act as prerequisite reading to reading the Book of Mormon. They provide a short course in relevant Old Testament matters.

Essentially, then, the *Reference Companion* could be seen as books within a book—a book on Isaiah, a book on people and places, a book on doctrines of the Book of Mormon, a book on the historical background of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, a book on literary elements of the Book of Mormon, and so forth.

All in all, the *Reference Companion*, written and edited to serve a general English-speaking Church audience from new convert to seasoned member, contains 924 articles covering over fifteen hundred topics, a three-section appendix, as well as tables, outlines, illustrations, and photographs. The *Reference Companion* has 850 pages, with a two-column, reference-style format and subject headings and with color graphics throughout the book.

A key to completion of the *Reference Companion* was the work of associate editors Marilyn Arnold, Terry B. Ball, Larry E. Dahl, Donald Parry, David R. Seely, and Clyde J. Williams. In addition to helping shoulder the large workload, each editor brought a unique background that enabled quality review of articles. This team of editors—all professors or former professors at Brigham Young University—came from the departments of English, Ancient Scripture, Church History and Doctrine, and Asian and Near Eastern Languages.

Professor Arnold’s background in English was particularly valuable as she worked with character articles, books of the Book of Mormon,
and articles that dealt with the Book of Mormon as literature.

Professor Ball’s extensive experience in teaching the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament, as well as the knowledge gained from earning degrees in ancient Near Eastern studies and botany, enabled critical assistance in many areas, including the Isaiah chapter reviews, doctrinal entries, and scientifically oriented articles such as “Agriculture in the Book of Mormon” and “Gems, Stones, and Rocks.”

Professor Dahl’s expertise in Church history, as well as his ten-year period of service on the Church Correlation Committee, was especially helpful in his reviewing of historical articles that dealt with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the many doctrinal topics addressed in the Reference Companion.

Professor Parry’s extensive research and writing on Isaiah were invaluable, as was his language background in Hebrew.

Professor Seely’s training in biblical studies assisted greatly with Old Testament background articles, Isaiah chapter reviews, and the chronology entries.

Professor Williams’s breadth of knowledge gained in many years of teaching Book of Mormon classes at BYU helped with doctrine, history, and application of the text to modern life.

Additionally, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, BYU associate professor of Church history and doctrine, served as graphics editor; he helped find and gain permission for the use of the graphic images in the book. Professor Holzapfel’s wide experience was most helpful.

One hundred eleven authors made contributions to the volume. It was truly a team effort that combined the expertise of scholars from Brigham Young University, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, and the Church Educational System. Authors with significant expertise in particular areas were obviously asked to write on those subjects. Therefore, one contribution of the Reference Companion is in having these scholars distill decades of their research for a general Church audience. For example, Richard L. Anderson wrote on the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, Garth V. Norman on Stela 5, Larry C. Porter on the printing and publication of the Book of Mormon, Royal Skousen on Book of Mormon editions and manuscripts, John W. Welch on chiasmus, and H. Curtis Wright on ancient writing on metal plates. Additionally, trusted and experienced authors such as Robert J. Matthews, Robert L. Millet, and Joseph F. McConkie wrote on vital doctrinal subjects, including the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Fall of Adam and Eve, and the priesthood.
One challenge of multiauthored books is the inevitability of unevenness in style and variation in content contribution from author to author. Desiring to limit this unevenness, we gave each author an “instructions to contributors” document outlining our intention for each article type—person, place, doctrine, word, books of the Book of Mormon, and so forth. This guiding document put authors and editors on the same page and provided a measure to judge whether incoming articles met the stated standard of research and completeness.

Authors were challenged to be comprehensive as to what the Book of Mormon says about their assigned topics. As a teacher at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, I took students on field trips throughout the Holy Land. Standing at biblical sites, I tried to tell my students about all that had occurred at a particular location, including the biblical characters who either lived, fought, visited, died, performed a miracle, or were in some way associated with that place. The Reference Companion articles that deal with people and places were written to accomplish a similar goal: to tell all that we know from the text of the Book of Mormon about its people and its places. Similarly, doctrinal articles were designed to represent all that the Book of Mormon teaches about that particular subject. The service of the contributor, then, was to look up every reference concerning his or her assigned doctrinal topic and write a comprehensive, yet concise, explanation of that doctrine—not what the author thought but what the Book of Mormon prophets actually taught about that subject. Articles on words or phrases were also written to give this same comprehensive view.

Each article was reviewed by two to five members of the editorial team. A lead editor was then assigned to work with the author to incorporate necessary changes. Selected articles received additional review by noted scholars who were outside the Reference Companion editorial board and who possessed expertise in particular subject areas. For example, Larry C. Porter, emeritus professor of Church history and doctrine, and Calvin Stevens of the Church Educational System were employed to review all Church history–oriented articles that dealt with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Similarly, other scholars, such as Bruce Warren, BYU emeritus professor of anthropology, and Dana Griffen, BYU professor of geology, reviewed articles that contained material within their specialized fields of study. These procedures added another tier of review for accuracy beyond the Reference Companion editors and Church history professors who wrote the original articles.

Editors gave attention to the comprehensiveness and the soundness of doctrine. Caution was given to avoid speculation and not to
set in concrete what we do not know for certain. Consequently, the
prudent use of such words as “perhaps,” “likely,” and “apparently” was
utilized to weight judgments of certainty or the lack thereof. All refer-
ences were double or triple checked.

The *Reference Companion* contains several unique features, such as
the comprehensive yet concise treatment of Book of Mormon doctrines,
words, and phrases; the Isaiah place-name maps that contain every place
name mentioned in the Book of Mormon Isaiah chapters; outlines
of each book of the Book of Mormon as well as the Isaiah chapters,
Malachi quotations, and Nephi’s vision; tables comparing differences
between the Book of Mormon Isaiah and the King James Version of
Isaiah; and an appendix containing selected excerpts of definitions from
Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, featur-
ing 169 words or phases that may have changed in meaning or usage
since the original publication of the Book of Mormon or that may
be unfamiliar to readers of the twenty-first century. In 1892, George
Reynolds published *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*, which was lim-
ited to entries on people and places in the Book of Mormon. Margaret
Bingman of the Community of Christ (formerly the RLDS Church) did
essentially the same thing with her *Encyclopedia of the Book of Mormon*,
published in 1978. The *Reference Companion*, however, is unique in
that it contains just about anything a reader would want to know about
the Book of Mormon under one cover. The “all-under-one-cover”
feature makes the book a convenient, time-saving resource. Thus, the
scope of the *Reference Companion* is unique.

Because so much was put into the volume that we thought would
be helpful to students of the Book of Mormon, there is much diversity
in articles. For example, a reader can read an entry on the Atonement,
then turn to an article dealing with pre-Columbian oceanic voyages,
then turn to an entry that compares Christ’s sermon at the temple in
Bountiful with the Sermon on the Mount in the Holy Land, and then
turn to a detailed article on Moroni’s visits to Joseph Smith. In this
example, the reader has traversed from doctrine to anthropology, to
textual comparison, and to Church history.

Church members can use the *Reference Companion* in several ways.
As a typical dictionary-encyclopedia reference work, the *Reference
Companion* can be used to simply assist readers as they read the Book
of Mormon. We use the Bible Dictionary in a similar manner—some-
times we use the dictionary to answer questions and other times to
learn more of the historical background and so forth. Another way
to use the book is to study by subject. A reader could pick a topic of
interest and read the article plus all the scriptural references included. A large number of scriptural references are added, not merely to validate statements made but for study purposes. The Reference Companion also contains scriptures from other standard works that readers can look up and compare with Book of Mormon references. Additionally, an extensive cross-referencing system links related articles, further assisting readers in studying a particular topic.

Gospel Doctrine teachers, seminary and institute teachers, and parents can use the volume as an information source for their lessons. Obviously, as readers’ content mastery of a subject increases, their abilities to help those they teach increases. The volume is filled with information that can help answer important questions. Additionally, appendix A gives a suggested study guide for combining Book of Mormon sequential reading with Reference Companion use. For example, the study guide suggests a reading block such as 1 Nephi 1–7 and then lists Reference Companion articles that augment these chapters. Both teacher and student can benefit from this approach. Those preparing for missionary service can learn more about the primary book they will be using in their proselyting. Still another way to benefit from the Reference Companion is just to pick it up and read it according to any particular interest.

I learned a great many things over the seven years it took to create the Reference Companion. Readers would have a difficult time studying a topic and reading every reference without having their understanding enlarged in some way. I experienced a tremendous learning experience by being pushed so deeply in studying so many varied subjects—subjects that dealt with the text of the Book of Mormon as well as matters that relate to it.

The process of creating the book was also enlightening. As editors, we were always asking the question, “Is this what the text really says?” Writing about the scriptures in a book that others will read and study creates a healthy fear of errors. Sometime near the beginning of the Reference Companion project, Robert J. Matthews, former dean of Religious Education at BYU, told me of a lesson he was taught by William E. Berrett, who for many years was the head of the Church Educational System. Brother Berrett gave the assignment for his teachers to write down everything a particular scriptural passage said and then to write down what the passage did not say. Brother Matthews said the lesson was valuable in learning to critically analyze what any particular verse is really saying. This thought was helpful in our editing of the Reference Companion. Even the seemingly simple task of retelling a scriptural
story can become inaccurate unless the necessary time is taken to think deeply about all the words used in both the scriptures and in the retelling of the scriptures. This was an editorial challenge for us.

A writing pitfall is to teach beyond the given verses being used to back up statements or to use words that overstate or understate the situation. For example, in retelling a story when the original text says the character was *angry*, the writer could retell the story, noting that she or he was furious. Another example occurs when the text says the people were killed and the writer records that they were *slaughtered*. Although the words *angry* and *furious* or *killed* and *slaughtered* may be nearly synonymous, the adjectives used to retell the story do not necessarily represent with 100 percent accuracy what was really felt or what really happened. Though such examples may seem to be a matter of minute detail, the process does pose a concern when accuracy is paramount. Since many *Reference Companion* articles contain a retelling of events, we tried to give critical attention to correct word choice. Similar errors can occur in anyone’s writing about Church historical matters. Errors can be perpetuated when authors fail to consult original sources in favor of quoting other more accessible works. This procedure can be acceptable if the author of the secondary source was correct; however, scholarly authorship still requires authors to check the primary source.

Many decisions had to be made over the course of our work that also added to our ongoing education in writing about scripture, such as trying to be inclusive instead of exclusive in viewing the prophecies of Isaiah (for example, 2 Nephi 15 is a judgment prophecy as well as a prophecy of restoration); not taking a position when something is unclear (for example, the perpetuation or removal of the so-called Lamanite mark among Lamanites throughout Book of Mormon history or whether the Words of Mormon were written on space remaining on the small plates of Nephi or on an additional plate or plates added by Mormon); being careful to have an academically balanced approach referencing differing views (for example, the plausibility of Stela 5 or views concerning Jaredite chronology); and making certain that readers are not left with a fragmented view of any particular doctrine when the Book of Mormon does not give the complete picture (for example, Book of Mormon teachings concerning the spirit world or the Resurrection).

The *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* was created by a family of faithful people from varying backgrounds who love the Book of Mormon and believe it is the word of God. The pages bespeak faith and testimony of Jesus Christ and an absolute belief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon account. The *Reference Companion* was designed to
help increase Book of Mormon literacy among Latter-day Saints. But knowing more facts about the Book of Mormon or information on how it was translated can never be an end in itself. The purpose of the Book of Mormon is to persuade readers to come unto Christ. So our efforts to offer enlightenment on the Book of Mormon were done with that ultimate goal in mind. If answering questions about the Book of Mormon or clarifying concepts helps members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to more fully appreciate the Book of Mormon, the “keystone of our religion,” and therefore draw closer to the Savior Jesus Christ, our hope and our purpose have been accomplished.
The present debate over the war in Iraq and the events of September 11, 2001, are tragic reminders of the prophecies concerning “wars and rumors of wars” found throughout scripture (see Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; 1 Nephi 12:2, 21; 14:15–16; 2 Nephi 25:12; D&C 45:26; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:28). The many conflicts in which the world is now engaged remind us of the sobering reality that the future will not be free from terror, destruction, and war. The words of prophets in all ages indicate that such conflicts will continue until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and will also be experienced one last time at the close of the Millennium (see D&C 63:33–36; 88:111–16; Revelation 20:7–8). Although we as Latter-day Saints have been commanded by the Lord to “renounce war and proclaim peace” (D&C 98:16), prophets have instructed us that “peace has departed from the world.”

The Bible provides prophetic descriptions of the events of the last days, and important counsel concerning the roles of the individual and government during time of war, but it does not contain definitive direction concerning when war is justified, when it is not, and how peace can be established. While the Bible may at one time have contained such information and direction (see 1 Nephi 13:26–29), in its present form it is often confusing to novices and biblical scholars alike concerning the many questions associated with warfare.

Although decisions about war have been and will always be difficult, as Latter-day Saints we have the advantage of additional scripture, particularly the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the
Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and the words of living prophets, to assist us as we try to understand the complicated issues related to war. More important, in addition to helping us understand the many questions associated with war, prophets have instructed us on how to obtain peace.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, in the general conference following the terrorist attacks of September 11, promised that “God our Eternal Father will watch over this nation and all of the civilized world who look to Him. He has declared, ‘Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord’ (Psalm 33:12). Our safety lies in repentance. Our strength comes of obedience to the commandments of God.” President Hinckley’s words remind us that, as important as prudent preparations are, the ultimate answer to the question of war and the anxiety that accompanies it is not found in military might, complex negotiations, increased economic aid, or a United Nations resolution, but is found in reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even before Adam and Eve entered Eden, war troubled mankind’s existence. Satan rebelled against the plan of God, and a premortal battle ensued among the spirit children of God (see Revelation 12:7; D&C 29:36–37; Moses 4:1–4). Lucifer and his followers were cast out of God’s presence, and those who chose to follow God were given the opportunity to come to earth as mortals. Mortal beings, though each had initially chosen to support God’s plan, were once again enmeshed in conflict. In the fourth chapter of Genesis, we read the tragic account of Cain killing his brother Abel (see Genesis 4:8), and soon thereafter “the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11). Few who come to earth can avoid the effects of war’s devastation.

The Book of Mormon provides similar and even more detailed descriptions of the tragedy of war. Despite Nephi’s efforts to promote peace with his brothers, he was not able to reconcile the serious differences that existed among them, and the Lord commanded him to “depart from them [Laman and Lemuel] and flee into the wilderness” (2 Nephi 5:5). The Lord then directed Nephi to craft swords for the protection of his people because their lives were in jeopardy (see 2 Nephi 5:14). Wars and contentions between the Nephites and Lamanites continued almost constantly until the coming of the Savior to America (see Enos; Omni; Mosiah 19–23; Alma 2–3, 16, 24–25, 28, 43–62; Helaman 1–4, 6, 10–11; 3 Nephi 1–4, 6–7). Even the recorded culmination of the Jaredites’ history did not divert Lehi’s descendants from their own march to destruction (see Ether 7–11, 13–15). Peace prevailed among the people for some two hundred years following the
Savior’s ministry, but thereafter the scriptural record is rife with tension and repeated violence between and among the Nephites and the Lamanites (see Mormon 1–6; Moroni 9). In fact, chapters that speak about conflict or warfare comprise nearly one quarter (61 of the 249 chapters) of the entire Book of Mormon. Recognizing that this book of scripture was prepared and reserved for our day, we should not take lightly the symbolism of the age-old battle between good and evil or the practical lessons that it teaches about human conflict and its avoidance.

The greatest problem we face in trying to justify or condemn war is that the scriptures contain diverse teachings about the morality of conflict. That being the case, it is a simple matter to fall into partisan scholarship and to write with an agenda, quoting this and that verse of scripture or this and that authority as having declared the final word on the subject. The task becomes more difficult as we try to bring all the sources together under the same roof. To quote one authoritative source and consider the matter closed is not enough. We must struggle through both sides. We must seek to understand teachings that seem to contradict our fundamental convictions and then attempt to reconcile the two.

Another key, perhaps even more important than providing a balanced view of the various arguments for and against war, is to correctly understand the context in which the various statements on war have been given. Modern and ancient prophets often write to their times, to their people, and to their particular situations. They have had to speak specifically during times of justifiable conflict, times of questionable conflict, and times of clearly immoral conflict. At other times, the Lord has meant for their words to apply universally. Unless we read the prophets within appropriate contexts, they might seem to be contradictory.

Consequently, one concern for correctly combining all the information is the need to identify when prophets attempted to write categorically of war and when they did not. Many of the popular references about war are parenthetical or secondary to the main theme of the discourse. At other times, prophets have given pointed counsel about one aspect of war while intentionally leaving out a number of others. With these considerations in mind, then, we find the most valuable references where the prophet’s intent has clearly been to comment generally on war.

This article will treat four distinct themes from scripture and from latter-day prophets. While focusing on several broad themes cannot do the issue justice, such categorization will provide the reader with information to synthesize, taking perspective from each theme and
reconciling the views for the most appropriate response to instances of war. Coupled with the Lord’s own statements on the matter and with the Spirit’s influence, we can choose to act in informed and congruent ways. Also, by understanding these different aspects of the Lord’s discourse on war, we will better comprehend the various contexts in which the restored gospel serves as a critique of war. The four themes we propose are (1) the origins of war, (2) God’s condemnation of war, (3) God’s limited justification for war, and (4) overcoming war and pronouncing peace in God’s way.

The Origins of War

President David O. McKay echoed the Apostle James (see James 4:1–2) when he stated, “The seeds of war lie in man’s nature. These seeds germinate at the first natural urge for self-preservation, self-perpetuation or a desire for conquest.” Mankind’s tendency has often been to accuse God for the suffering occasioned by war, when war is actually a ruinous extension of the natural man. In fact, King Benjamin’s
description of one who “becometh a saint,” the opposite of “the natural
man” (Mosiah 3:19), includes characteristics that, if practiced by all,
would put a definitive end to human conflict. It is difficult to imagine a
man or woman who fully embodies being “submissive, meek, humble,
patient, [and being] full of love” (Mosiah 3:19), harming or even quar-
reling with a neighbor. Elder Russell M. Nelson explained that “peace
can prevail only when that natural inclination to fight is superseded by
self-determination to live on a loftier level.”

One of Satan’s most subtle influences is to manipulate mankind,
including members of the Church, to blame God for evils that are, in
fact, the adversary’s handiwork. Many use the existence of war and its
accompanying evils to challenge the existence of God. Any loving God,
they claim, would have both the power and the inclination to intervene
on behalf of the innocent. To these Elder Neal A. Maxwell answers,
“Can we presume to lecture the Lord on war? Or dare to use war as an
argument against His existence or His Lordship? Do we need to warn
Him about how the earth can be destroyed by fire?”

Others falsely reason that the Lord should interfere with our moral
agency during times of conflict. They consider the avoidance of suffer-
ing to take precedence over God-given choice. Surely the Lord is not
pleased with nor indifferent to man’s suffering, but even needless suffer-
ing cannot jeopardize man’s moral agency. Enoch bears record of the
Lord’s weeping over “the residue of the people,” an event that appar-
ently surprised him enough that he asked, “How is it that thou canst
weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?” (Moses
7:28–29). The Lord’s plaintive answer speaks volumes about the human
situation: “Unto thy brethren have I said, and also given command-
ment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose
me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate
their own blood” (Moses 7:33). Clearly, natural man’s disobedience and
malice lie at the heart of the age-old problem of war.

On the other side, many use the Lord’s “man of war” title (Exo-
dus 15:3) to erroneously conclude that the Lord has brought about or
encouraged those wars. It is true that the Lord has, as President Ezra Taft
Benson said, “turned disasters—war, occupation, and revolution—into
blessings,” but that is not to say He is the source of such evils. We may
say, more accurately, that the Lord works to turn evil situations to our
good without violating individual agency. When men hate their brothers
and act accordingly, God allows their choices to occur while eternally
promising eventual relief for the righteous. Though such promises may
seem shallow or facile without eternal perspective, they can provide
much needed hope to those who are in the midst of conflict.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said of the time to precede the Second Coming: “Truly, in the last days men ‘shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine.’ (Isaiah 49:26) All these things have begun; they are now underway, and they shall increase in intensity and in horror until that dreadful day when the God of battles himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the trump of the archangel.”7 Tempting as it may be for some to dismiss such language, the scriptures do not equivocate about the reality of armed conflict to precede the Second Coming. A few lines later, Elder McConkie outlines a basic truth: “It seems clear that we are here in mortality to gain experiences that could not be gained in any other way.”8 The need for opposition, earthly experience, and the opportunity to exercise our moral agency does not necessarily explain all the perplexities of war, but it does provide perspective as to why God may allow conflict even when He does not desire it.

Elder B. H. Roberts writes similarly about the origins of war and further explains an exception to the rule, recognizing times when the Lord allows war and other evil to exist as a response to the collective misuse of agency:

I know there is one passage that, perhaps, might be quoted against my contention, that God does not create evil. It occurs in the writings of Isaiah, it is said—and it is the only place in Scripture where it is said, so far as I have been able to learn—“I [God] make peace,” and “I create evil.” “I create”—what? “Evil,” such as the opposite of peace, such as war, famine, and the like. But to what end does God cause war, or famine? For corrective purposes only, to chastise men, to bring them to a realization of wrong-doing, or national transgression. For these ends God has, sometimes, brought to pass these conditions that we recognize as evil. But that class of evils is quite a distinct thing from moral [individual] evil.9

Apparently, Elder Roberts wants us to understand that while God may occasionally allow a war for corrective purposes, He does so only because the people have sinned, calling God’s punishment upon themselves. An historical example of this shows in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. God had given ample opportunity for mercy, sending Jesus Christ Himself to preach repentance to the Jews; but they did not listen, so the Lord allowed the Romans to conquer them. King Nebuchadnezzar and other pagan rulers from the time of the Old Testament served as the instruments of the Lord, waging war to humble Israel for its unrighteousness (see 1 Kings 11:14; 1 Chronicles 6:15; 2 Chronicles 36:14–17). Consider Mormon’s commentary on the
ebb and flow of the Nephites’ interaction with the Gadianton robbers: “Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror . . . they will not remember him” (Helaman 12:3). Understanding such instances invites us to carefully consider the origins of our modern conflicts and what part the Lord may be playing in each.

As we recognize this exception, clearly most wars do result from human misuse of moral agency. Elder James E. Talmage wrote these comments about the First World War: “I cannot look upon the frightful carnage and inhuman atrocities of the world war as a manifestation of the direct will of God. This dreadful conflict was brought on through lust of power and greed of gain. It sprang from an unholy determination to rob mankind of God-given rights, and to subject the race to autocratic domination. It is a repetition of the issue at stake in the primeval struggle, when Michael, the champion of free agency, led his hosts against Lucifer’s myrmidons [unscrupulously devoted followers], who sought to rule by might.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and subsequent military action, stated, “Now, all of us know that war, contention, hatred, suffering of the worst kind are not new. The conflict we see today is but another expression of the conflict that began with the War in Heaven.” He repeated the counsel during the American invasion of Iraq in April 2003: “War, of course, is not new. The weapons change. The ability to kill and destroy is constantly refined. But there has been conflict throughout the ages over essentially the same issues.”

Considering war in this light—as a fundamental misuse of agency and an affair inspired by the devil—leads us to see why the Lord condemns war so strongly and why we, accordingly, should consider it with the same sorrow as our Heavenly Father.

God’s Condemnation of War

President Spencer W. Kimball sharply rebuked those with mean-spirited attitudes that run contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ when he said: “Warlike people pervert patriotism. We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner
of Satan’s counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior’s teaching.”

We accept that the Lord allows war to happen and even uses war occasionally for His purposes, but our reactions to the enemy often lead to serious sin. President James E. Faust once counseled, “Your criticism may be worse than the conduct you are trying to correct.”

By understanding first that the Lord abhors war and its attendant evils, we will be much less accepting of hateful behavior, especially from ourselves. Men such as Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni are important examples of men who were willing to “defend [their] families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:47), but who did not “delight in bloodshed” (Alma 48:11). These were men who fought for right causes but who also fought reluctantly, saddened by the necessity of martial defense.

A First Presidency message issued in October 1939—following the German invasion of Poland that marked the beginning of World War II—states, “We condemn all war’s foul brood—avarice, greed, misery, want, disease, cruelty, hate, inhumanity, savagery, death.”

The list leaves no room for any misplaced admiration of war, and it supports the notion that the Lord Himself condemns war and all its subordinate evils. He may regretfully allow war, but He absolutely prefers peaceful means. Another First Presidency message issued in April 1942—following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States’ subsequent entry into World War II—states unequivocally, “The Church is and must be against war. The Church itself cannot wage war, unless and until the Lord shall issue new commands. It cannot regard war as a righteous means of settling international disputes; these should and could be settled—the nations agreeing—by peaceful negotiation and adjustment.”

It is easy to glorify war, the groups that wage it, and the motives that drive it. But the Lord has condemned it consistently, especially in the latter days as it has increased in intensity and scope. The twentieth century saw more than ninety-eight million people killed as a result of war, “a number which is more than six times that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries combined!” Never has the world seen so many killed and affected by war as in the last century, when not a single generation escaped its ravages.

As a part of our responsibility to “[count] the cost” (see Luke 14:28), the Lord would have us remember the real cost of what happens when “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (see Matthew 24:7). With each bomb that falls or each city that is taken, do we consider the innocent lives that are affected? Do we see them as the Lord sees them, many of them innocent of any serious offense? Elder McConkie has characterized war as “the crowning evil
on earth,”¹⁸ for of the many evils and sins that we find close to home, war makes use of them all, amplifying and extending them throughout its sphere.

**God’s Limited Justification for War**

Despite the Lord’s constant counsel against war and the similarly constant call for peace, times arise when waging war becomes necessary. Speaking to the Saints in general conference in April 2003, President Hinckley said, “There are times and circumstances when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty, and against tyranny, threat, and oppression.”¹⁹ Captain Moroni said similar things to a similar audience (see Alma 46:12–14). Appropriate justification is the most difficult part of any gospel study of war. The Lord has revealed criteria, admonishing that the guidelines be carefully followed. After stating that “war is incompatible with Christ’s teachings,” and that “it is vain to attempt to reconcile war with true Christianity,” President David O. McKay went on to outline the Lord’s requirements for engaging in war:

> Notwithstanding all this, I still say that there are conditions when entrance into war is justifiable, and when a Christian nation may, without violation of principles, take up arms against an opposing force. . . .

> There [is no] justifiable cause found in a desire or even a need for territorial expansion. . . .

> Nor is war justified in an attempt to enforce a new order of government . . . however better the government . . . may be. . . .

> There are, however, two conditions which may justify a truly Christian man to enter—mind you, I say enter, not begin—a war: (1) An attempt to dominate and to deprive another of his free agency, and (2) Loyalty to his country. Possibly there is a third—defense of a weak nation that is being unjustly crushed by a strong, ruthless one.²⁰

President McKay is simply restating principles that Restoration scriptures clearly set forth. Because the Book of Mormon was written for our day, the clarification it provides on the morality of war is invaluable. Book of Mormon prophets practiced and preached correct principles for Latter-day Saints. Their examples define when the Lord allows His people to fight “as if with the strength of God” (see Alma 56:56). Likewise, the Doctrine and Covenants, given specifically for the instruction of the Latter-day Saints, provides specific counsel about when the Lord will “justify them in going out to battle” (D&C 98:36).

The principle of justified war is repeated throughout the Book of
Mormon, but one of the most striking examples comes from Mormon’s description of the battle between Captain Moroni’s forces and the Lamanites led by Zerahemnah: “The Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion” (Alma 43:46–47).

This Book of Mormon passage and the teachings of President McKay go hand in hand. Both teach that defense against unrighteous domination is acceptable and even necessary in the Lord’s plan. Similarly, Elder B. H. Roberts taught that while peace is desirable, some things are more important than peace. Justice is one of these, for without justice there can be no enduring peace. The deprivation of the God-given rights of life and liberty is worse than war with its attendant evils.21

In any discussion about war, it is imperative to recognize the different motives of those who engage in conflict. Elder Orson F. Whitney said, “Some wars are righteous and just; others wrong and unjust. All depends upon the purpose for which they are waged, and whether or not the Lord sanctions them.”22 Again, this position does not serve to excuse all wars but shows a legitimate distinction between the two types: righteous and unrighteous (see Alma 43:30; Alma 46). Elder Whitney goes on to say that many were engaged righteously in the premortal war against the dragon and that “the conduct of those who make such wars necessary, is not to be compared with the acts of those who rise up to vindicate right and vanquish wrong.”23 This is not to suggest that every war has a righteous and an unrighteous side. It is entirely possible, and even common, to find conflicts where neither side can rightfully claim justifications for involvement.

Almost as important as understanding the motives behind war is acknowledging that nations, not individuals, must declare, prosecute, and end wars. The scriptures, and the writings of our latter-day prophets, clearly speak of nations—not their respective constituents—as the only legitimate actors in the martial sphere. The New Testament teaches that we are to “submit [ourselves] to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:13–14; emphasis added). According to the Lord’s criteria, sovereign nations exist and
act as permitted by God, and individual citizens are obliged by their very citizenship to obey their rulers (see Articles of Faith 1:12). President Hinckley declared emphatically, “I believe that God will not hold men and women in uniform responsible as agents of their government in carrying forward that which they are legally obligated to do.”24 In the end, governments are responsible for waging war, and individuals are responsible for their own conduct within those wars.

Scripture also contains prophecies and descriptions of many of the wars in which the world has been engaged. In 1 Nephi 13, more than two thousand years before the Founding Fathers gathered in Philadelphia, the Lord described these patriots to the ancient prophet Nephi: “The power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle. . . . [They] were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:18–19). President Brigham Young also said of the American Revolution, “[The Almighty] moved upon the signers of the Declaration of Independence; and he moved upon Washington to fight and conquer.”25 President Hinckley, in the October 2001 general conference, said of the then-beginning Afghanistan conflict, “Those of us who are American citizens stand solidly with the president of our nation. The terrible forces of evil must be confronted and held accountable for their actions. . . . It is the terrorist organizations that must be ferreted out and brought down.”26

We cannot imply that the Lord uses war as a first option. Indeed, it is a last resort when His purposes require the final, unfortunate recourse. The Lord condones armed conflict when the cause is just, for, as Elder John A. Widtsoe said, “When human rights and freedom, the plan of salvation itself, are the issues, the raging battle becomes the battle of the Lord.”27 It always has been and always will be the priority of the Lord to protect human agency, and as a last resort, He will use warfare to bring about His purposes.

Most dangerous in this matter of justifying war is the potential for misuse of even the appropriate criteria outlined earlier by President McKay. Few armies in any century, and especially the twentieth, have gone to war without the conviction that their cause was somehow justifiable and even righteous. Wehrmacht soldiers of Hitler’s conquering Third Reich wore the motto “Gott mit uns,” or “God with us,” emblazoned on their belt buckles.28 Meanwhile, their American opponents had in their pockets coins bearing the motto “In God We Trust.” This comparison serves as an important reminder that good people can be deceived, and that Latter-day Saints in positions of authority along
with the general Church body should rely much more on the Lord’s counsel through His prophets than on human or “official” reasoning about the ethics of any given conflict.

Many argue that the Lord never justifies war. They cite New Testament teachings, often saying that going to war flagrantly defies the Savior’s commandment to turn the other cheek (see Matthew 5:39). Elder Widtsoe said of this: “Contrary as it may be to righteous feeling, in the fight for the right, cannon must often be used to meet cannon. Certainly, every means must be used to protect truth from the domination of untruth. The injunction of the Savior to turn ‘the other cheek,’ does not mean surrender to untruth, but patience, long suffering, before entering into controversy with one’s fellow man.”

Elder Widtsoe continues by quoting section 98 of the Doctrine and Covenants, perhaps the most detailed scriptural treatment on the subject of war. In that section, the Lord says that we should “renounce war and proclaim peace” (v. 16); that we must bear patiently when enemies smite us the first, second, and third times (see vv. 23–26); that if we will spare our enemies, it will be rewarded as righteousness (see v. 30); that we “should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save . . . the Lord commanded” (v. 33; emphasis added); and that we should “first lift a standard of peace” (v. 34). If, after all these requirements are met, the other side does not accept the offering of peace, “then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people” (v. 36). Even such a brief look at section 98 is enough to convince everyone that though the Lord does justify battle, He does not do so lightly. War is the opposite of peace, and Elder Ezra Taft Benson said that “the only real peace—the one most of us think about when we use the term—is a peace with freedom. A nation that is not willing, if necessary, to face the rigors of war to defend its real peace-in-freedom is doomed to lose both its freedom and its peace! These are the hard facts of life. We may not like them, but until we live in a far better world than exists today, we must face up to them squarely and courageously.”

The Lord weeps at our conflicts and loves His children on both sides, but until that “far better world” comes, war is occasionally necessary. For those wars that currently rage, we could pray with President Hinckley for “an end that will result in a better life for all concerned.”

Overcoming War and Pronouncing Peace in God’s Way

In the end, the simple but correct way to banish the specter of war is to live the gospel fully and to proclaim peace. In this section, we will
look at some specific principles that will promote peace in the world.

The usual response to war is summed up in President Spencer W. Kimball’s words from before: “When threatened, we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan’s counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior’s teaching.” Humans often make the fundamental mistake of becoming anti-enemy first, a natural-man reaction. It is man’s survival instinct that values one’s own life above anything else. The fastest, surest way to preserve life is to eliminate the threatening party. Simple? Yes. Righteous? No.

The Lord’s answer to the problem is also simple, but we need to move beyond the natural man to find its merit. Being “pro-kingdom of God” is what the Anti-Nephi-Lehies did in response to Lamanite aggression—with startling results. Having repented of their lust for blood, they feared to jeopardize their standing before the Lord by taking up arms against their fellow Lamanites, even when their lives were threatened. “And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin” (Alma 24:19). After the attacking Lamanites saw this peaceful resolve in their Anti-Nephi-Lehi brothers, a remarkable thing happened—they were converted. “The people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain” (Alma 24:26; emphasis added). In other words, peace proved more powerful than war in the lives of the Lamanites, more compelling than their thirst for revenge. The meek reaction of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies pricked the collective conscience of their Lamanite brothers. Lives were lost, it is true; but souls were gained because of these simple Saints who saw more than an immediate defensive necessity. They saw that some things were more important than their own lives. It is a difficult jump for the natural man, but the Savior required it when He taught, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

The world suggests many solutions to the problem of war: mutual deterrence, economic initiatives, and pacifism are a few. Mutual deterrence, which maintains itself because two technologically matched forces are afraid to attack and destroy each other, rests on tension that is unsustainable over long periods. Economic initiatives are certainly positive, but they do not eliminate the “lusts that war” in mankind’s members (see James 4:1). Even pacifism, seemingly the most promising solution to war, proves ultimately ineffective. Elder Neal A. Maxwell teaches that mere pacifism, will ultimately fail for “any people...
who are not otherwise righteous and therefore unable to rely on the Lord to bless them.”

The world’s solutions prove ultimately ineffective because they are not ambitious enough to invade the heart, the only place where war can finally be quelled.

President Benson taught that “only true repentance [could] stay the destructive forces of war and calamity.” That answer seems too simplistic to many. Most consider repentance an impossibly idealistic and eventually ineffective goal. Even members of the Church are tempted to say, “Yes, of course, repentance is the way; however . . .” The “however” clause that we are so quick to add shows where our outlook differs from the Lord’s. He recognizes that the whole world will not be converted soon, but His injunction since the time of the New Testament has been, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. . . . Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20; see also Luke 24:47; D&C 18:28; 58:64; and 133:37). He, of course, encourages us to preach His gospel because He knows that “the preaching of the word . . . [has a] more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them” (Alma 31:5).

The Lord is eager to see all His children hear the gospel and live by its principles (see Acts 10:34–35). In both Christ’s dispensation and this final dispensation, the Church has held preaching the gospel to all as a primary goal that thereby the Lord’s peace might fill the world. President Benson completes his thought by saying, “I fervently hope and pray that a spirit and influence will come into the lives of the Latter-day Saints which will enable them to be a leaven, as it were, to raise the spirituality and faith of the people amongst whom they live.”

Elder Russell M. Nelson expresses an almost identical sentiment: “We should be personal peacemakers. We should live peacefully—as couples, families, and neighbors. . . . We should bring divine love and revealed doctrines of restored religion to our neighbors and friends.” Peace spreads not only through proselytizing and conversion but also by the Saints’ righteous political and social influence on their neighbors.

President Spencer W. Kimball asked the specific question, “How can war be eliminated from the earth?” His reply was the same as President Benson’s and Elder Nelson’s: “The answer is simple but hard to realize. Let the people of this world live the gospel. Before peace can come to the world around us, it must come into our hearts.” We will not escape the reality of war in our time, but in every instance we can promote the gospel, allowing the Spirit to work first in us and then on the rest of the world. Now that Latter-day Saints are in nearly every nation, the
Lord’s charge to “renounce war” (D&C 98:16) in order to bring peace to the whole earth is much more immediate than it would have been to the small body of American Saints of 1833. Ultimately, as we “cleanse first” that which is inside by coming to a correct understanding of the Lord’s will concerning war, the outside world will gradually “be clean also” (Matthew 23:26, see also Alma 60:23).

President George Q. Cannon was perhaps most concise when he said, “War is one of the scourges which man, by his sinfulness, has brought upon himself. There is one way—and but one way—to avert it and that is for the people to obey God’s commands, through whose power alone can this and other threatened evils be stayed. This is too simple for the great men of the earth to believe. Like their class in every preceding generation, they view such a proposition as ridiculous and treat it with contempt, practically asserting by their actions that they consider their wisdom and plans as being infinitely superior to the Lord’s.”

The Latter-day Saints, of all people, should practice the faith in God’s promises that is necessary to sustain and protect them in their righteousness. The problem we confront is that most of us have spent so much time worrying about the world’s problems in the world’s terms that we forget the higher covenants of God, dismissing them as “unrealistic” or “impractical.” The human tendency is to assume that humans alone must solve the world’s problems. While it is true that we must solve these problems, we are anything but alone in the endeavor.

Notes:

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, April 1937, 59; see also D&C 1:35.
8. McConkie, Millennial Messiah, 374.
New Publications

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facilitate excellence in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ; second, encourage research and publication that contribute to the mission of the university and its sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and third, promote study and understanding of other cultures and religions.

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One of the primary aspects of the RSC’s mission is to promote the search for new truths and the quest to better understand well-known truths. The ultimate interpretation of doctrinal matters rests with the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; therefore, we seek to discover historical background, provide cultural and linguistic details, and explore new avenues of understanding into our faith, history, and way of life. Thus, research into scripture, Church history, and religious matters in general is an important part of what the full-time Religious Education faculty do. Because BYU is primarily a teaching institution, we recognize as our major thrust the classroom experience. We seek, however, to expand our classroom through the writing and publication of our research.

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Growing Old Graciously: Lessons from a Centenarian
Elder Stephen Berg Oveson and Mary Louise Oveson Stoddard

“Mal Berg Oveson is the epitome of a person who has grown old graciously by reflecting courtesy and consideration to everyone.”