The Foolishness of Teaching

Elder Bruce R. McConkie

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Elder Bruce R. McConkie

ON THE COVER:
Greek columns, symbolizing the wisdom of the world, cannot prevent the light of truth from shining through.
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Editors’ Introduction

Latter-day Saints revere the New Testament witness of Christ and message of the Apostles. Unfortunately, some of the language of the King James Version is difficult to understand for modern readers. In this issue, we offer articles to help teachers and students better understand and communicate the beautiful teachings of the New Testament.

First we offer a classic article by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who discusses “the foolishness of teaching.” While many of the worldly-wise may think teaching is beneath them, the Apostle Paul testified of its importance: “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:27). Elder McConkie reenthrones the importance of teaching in the kingdom of God.

A natural follow-up to this article is an interview with Elder McConkie’s son Joseph, a professor of ancient scripture at BYU and author of his father’s biography. With warmth and incisiveness, Joseph McConkie offers a glimpse into the source of his father’s masterful teaching style and insights into his gospel study habits.

What does “anon” mean in King James English? How about “divers”? In “A King James Vocabulary Lesson,” authors John W. Welch, editor-in-chief of BYU Studies, and Kelsey Draper, a BYU senior in humanities, provide useful definitions and practical tips that will help teachers untangle linguistic knots in the King James Bible English.

Next, Professors Paul Y. Hoskisson and Thomas A. Wayment offer thought-provoking studies on textual issues in the Bible: first, use of the word Abba in the New Testament; second, the relationship between the Joseph Smith Translation and the use of italic text by King James translators.

How can writing be used to stimulate students to search the scriptures? Institute director Larry W. Tippetts and BYU professor Eric D. Huntman suggest ways to create questions and explore the word of God in more meaningful ways.

Finally, we include well-written articles on the Apostasy, the body as a temple, President David O. McKay, and Elder Neal A. Maxwell. Enough said—start reading!

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Editor-in-Chief
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Elder Bruce R. McConkie after April conference of 1984.

Courtesy of Joseph Fielding McConkie, Orem, Utah.
I desire to be guided by the Spirit, and I shall take as my subject “the foolishness of teaching.” I do not say “the foolishness of teachers.” There may be some of that, but I am not aware of any. I take this expression “the foolishness of teaching” from a similar statement made by the Apostle Paul. But first, I think we ought to set forth the dignity and preeminence of gospel teaching and the eternal worth and everlasting value that come because of those who teach the gospel in the way the Lord intended it should be taught.

Yours is a high, a holy, and a glorious work. It was of you, as some of the chief gospel teachers in the Church, that President J. Reuben Clark said:

You teachers have a great mission. As teachers you stand upon the highest peak in education, for what teaching can compare in priceless value and in far-reaching effect with that which deals with man as he was in the eternity of yesterday, as he is in the mortality of today, and as he will be in the forever of tomorrow. Not only time but eternity is your field. Salvation of yourself not only, but of those who come within the purlieus of your temple, is the blessing you seek, and which, doing your duty, you will gain. How brilliant will be your crown of glory, with each soul saved an encrusted jewel thereon.¹

Now with that statement setting the tone and conveying the spirit for what, if I am properly guided, I hope to say, I shall turn to that wondrous verse in the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians in which Paul speaks of the kind of teachers who are involved in proclaiming the message of
salvation to the world. He is identifying the true church. He is giving some of the essential identifying characteristics of the kingdom that has the power to save men. He says, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

That verse tells you some of the proofs or evidences or witnesses that the work is true. It names some of the essential identifying characteristics of the true Church. Where there are apostles and prophets and teachers of the sort and kind of whom Paul is speaking, there will be found the true church and kingdom of God on earth. And where any of these are not found, there the Church and kingdom of God is not. That makes our living prophet an evidence and a witness that this work is true. The fact we are guided by a prophet shows we have the true Church. That makes all of the apostles who have been called in this dispensation witnesses and evidences and proofs to the world that the work is true. True apostles are always found in the true Church. I think this order of priority is perfect: apostles, prophets, teachers. And that places you, because you are the kind of teachers that Paul is talking about, that makes you the third great group whose very existence establishes the truth and divinity of the work. This means that if you learn how to present the message of salvation, and in fact do it in the way that the Lord intends that it be presented, you stand to all the world as an evidence that this is God’s kingdom. As we go forward in this presentation, I think it will be evident to all that no one is or can be a teacher in the divine sense, in the eternal sense of which President Clark is speaking, except a legal administrator in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—except someone who is so living that he is endowed with the gift and power of the Holy Ghost.

We are not talking about worldly teachers. We do not concern ourselves a great deal about those in the various academic or scientific disciplines. What they do is meritorious and appropriate so long as it conforms to the standards of truth and integrity and virtue. Their work is in no sense to be demeaned. But the kind of teaching that is involved where the Church and kingdom of God on earth is concerned—the kind of teaching you do, is as the heavens above the earth when compared to the intellectual type of teaching and learning that is to be had out in the world.

All of us are agents of the Lord. We are the servants of the Lord. In the law, there is a branch that is called the law of agency. And in the law of agency, there are principals and there are agents. These are something akin to master and servant. An agent represents a principal,
and the acts of the agent bind the principal, provided they are performed within the proper scope and authorization, within the authority delegated to the agent. Now, the Lord said to us, “Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord’s errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord’s business” (D&C 64:29).

We are engaged in our Father’s business. Our Father’s business is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. We do not have anything to do with bringing to pass immortality. That comes as a free gift to all men because of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. But we have a very great deal to do with bringing to pass eternal life for ourselves and for our brethren and sisters and in offering it to our Father’s other children. Eternal life is the kind of life that God our Father lives. It is the name of the life He lives. It is to have exaltation and glory and honor and dominion in His presence eternally. And it comes by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. It is full and complete salvation. And so we bring to pass, in a sense, the eternal life of men by persuading them to conform to the standards that the Lord has set.

Eternal life and immortality both come by the grace of God. They are made available through the Atonement, but in the case of the great gift of eternal life, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God, it comes by conformity, and obedience, and sacrifice—by doing all of the things that are counseled and required in the inspired word.

Now let me point to the source of my text and my title, “The Foolishness of Teaching.” It is a paraphrase of Paul’s words. “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17). And I will use preaching and teaching, for our purposes, as synonyms. Preaching is teaching, and teaching, in many respects, is a perfected form of preaching.

[He] sent me . . . to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:17–21)

Now I turn to the teaching aspect: “It pleased God by the foolishness of teaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach meaning we teach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the
Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 1:21–25).

Now think of yourselves as I read this next scripture. Think of Presidents Wilford Woodruff and Lorenzo Snow. Think of the men who have presided over this dispensation. Think of them as they have been viewed by the worldly wise and the aristocrats and the highly intellectual and by those with great mental capacities. Paul says: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

We are the weak and the simple and the unlearned as far as the intellectual giants of the world are concerned, but our teaching is not in the intellectual field. It is pleasing if we have some intellectual attainments. But basically and fundamentally, as teachers, we are dealing with the things of the Spirit.

At general conference in April, I was doing what we are pretty much required to do now. I was reading the expressions that I was making. And then at the end I said a few sentences extemporaneously. As I said them, I had in mind the document that had recently come to light purporting to be an account of a prophetic utterance or a blessing given by the Prophet Joseph to one of his sons. And so I felt impressed, after my formal remarks were concluded, to bear a witness of what was involved in succession in the presidency. And I named all of the Presidents from Joseph Smith to Spencer W. Kimball and said that down that line the power and authority and keys of the kingdom had come. Then, I said something that highly offended all the intellectuals: “What I am saying is what the Lord would say if he were here.” Now the only way you can say a thing like that is to be guided and prompted by the power of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is a revelator and places in your mind the thoughts that the Lord wants expressed.

Well, our intellectual friends reading that in the account went into a great explosive tizzy, whatever that is. And in decrying the stand I had taken, one of the chief among them said, “Well, what can you expect when they have incompetents like Bruce R. McConkie running
loose?” I read about it in one of the semi-anti-Mormon publications. And when I read it, it gave me a great feeling of personal satisfaction. I thought, “This is marvelous. It is just as important to know who your enemies are as your friends.” And of course, the intellectuals in the world view our teachings as foolishness, or as Paul calls it, “the foolishness of God” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Well, there is worldly teaching and there is Church teaching. There is teaching by the power of the intellect alone, and there is teaching by the power of the intellect when quickened and enlightened by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“O that cunning plan of the evil one! [Jacob is speaking.] O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness or men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:28–29).

That is our stand in the Church and kingdom.

The Teacher’s Divine Commission

If I may now, I shall take the heading “The Teacher’s Divine Commission” and make it a subtext or a subheading to this matter of the foolishness of teaching. I shall suggest to you five things that compose and comprise the teacher’s divine commission. We are talking about divine, inspired, heavenly, Church teaching, the type and kind in which we are, or should be, involved.

1. We are commanded to teach the principles of the gospel. Our revelation says: “And again, the elders, priests and teachers of this church [this language is mandatory] shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in which is the fulness of the gospel. And they shall observe the covenants and church articles to do them, and these shall be their teachings, as they shall be directed by the Spirit” (D&C 42:12–13).

We are to teach the principles of the gospel. We are to teach the doctrines of salvation. We have some passing interest in ethical principles but not a great deal as far as emphasis in teaching is concerned. If we teach the doctrines of salvation, the ethical concepts automatically follow. We do not need to spend long periods of time or make elaborate presentations in teaching honesty or integrity or unselfishness or some other ethical principle. Any Presbyterian can do that. Any Methodist can do that. But if we teach the doctrines of salvation, which
are basic and fundamental, the ethical concepts automatically follow. It is the testimony and knowledge of the truth that causes people to reach high ethical standards in any event. And so our revelation says: “And I give unto you a commandment [again we are using mandatory language; the Lord is talking] that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand” (D&C 88:77–78).

That last modifying phrase indicates that we are to leave the mysteries alone. There are some things that are not given us in clarity and, as of now, do not need to be fully comprehended in order to work out our salvation. We stay away from these; we stay with the basic concepts. Now President Clark’s words:

These students are prepared to believe and understand that all these things are matters of faith, not to be explained or understood by any process of human reason, and probably not by any experiment of known physical science.

These students (to put the matter shortly) are prepared to understand and to believe that there is a natural world and there is a spiritual world; that the things of the natural world will not explain the things of the spiritual world; that the things of the spiritual world cannot be understood or comprehended by the things of the natural world; that you cannot rationalize the things of the spirit, because first, the things of the spirit are not sufficiently known and comprehended, and secondly, because finite mind and reason cannot comprehend or explain infinite wisdom and ultimate truth.

These students already know that they must be honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and do good to all men, and that “if there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things”—these things they have been taught from very birth. They should be encouraged in all proper ways to do these things which they know to be true, but they do not need to have a year’s course of instruction to make them believe and know them.

These students fully sense the hollowness of teachings which would make the gospel plan a mere system of ethics, they know that Christ’s teachings are in the highest degree ethical, but they also know they are more than this. They will see that ethics relate primarily to the doings of this life, and that to make of the gospel a mere system of ethics is to confess a lack of faith, if not a disbelief, in the hereafter. They know that the gospel teachings not only touch this life, but the life that is to come, with its salvation and exaltation as the final goal.
These students hunger and thirst, as did their fathers before them, for a testimony of the things of the spirit and of the hereafter, and knowing that you cannot rationalize eternity, they seek faith, and the knowledge which follows faith. They sense by the spirit they have, that the testimony they seek is engendered and nurtured by the testimony of others, and that to gain this testimony which they seek for.  

Now notice this. I never heard this better expressed by anyone than President Clark gives it:

[They know that] one living, burning, honest testimony of a righteous God-fearing man that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph was God’s prophet is worth a thousand books and lectures aimed at debasing the Gospel to a system of ethics or seeking to rationalize infinity. Conversion comes through testimony. We must teach in that way, as I will subsequently, with some particularity, point out.

There is neither reason nor is there excuse for our Church religious teaching and training facilities and institutions, unless the youth are to be taught and trained in the principles of the Gospel, embracing therein the two great elements that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph was God’s prophet. The teaching of a system of ethics to the students is not a sufficient reason for running our seminaries and institutes. The great public school system teaches ethics. The students of seminaries and institutes should of course be taught the ordinary canons of good and righteous living, for these are part, and an essential part, of the Gospel. But there are the great principles involved in eternal life, the Priesthood, the resurrection, and many like other things, that go way beyond these canons of good living. These great fundamental principles also must be taught to the youth; they are the things the youth wish first to know about.

From all this I conclude that we should do as Jesus did. We should teach the gospel. We should teach the gospel only. We should teach nothing but the gospel. Ethics are a part of the gospel, but they will take care of themselves if we preach the gospel. Teach doctrine. Teach sound doctrine. Teach the doctrines of the kingdom. You say, “What did Jesus teach?” Well, of course we have the great accounts of His teachings about ethical principles, but notice this: “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14–15).

Now what did Jesus teach? Jesus taught the gospel. Unfortunately, from our standpoint, there is not very much preserved in the New Testament account of what He taught. I say from our standpoint because we as a people, having the Restoration and the light of heaven, would be able to recognize and glory in the gospel truths He taught had they been recorded and preserved for us. But obviously, in the wisdom
of Him who knoweth all things and doeth all things right, it was the intent and design that only the portion of His teachings that are found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John should have been preserved for men in this day.

But with our background and understanding, when the revelation says that Jesus preached the gospel, we know thereby what He preached. And we know it simply by answering the questions. What is the gospel? What is the eternal plan of salvation? What truths has God given us that we must believe and understand and obey to gain peace in this life and glory and honor and dignity in the life to come?

The gospel can be defined from two perspectives. We can talk about it in the eternal sense as it was in the mind of God when He ordained and established all things. And we can talk about it in a more restricted sense as it is involved in the lives of people here.

Now in the eternal and unlimited sense, the gospel that Jesus taught was itself infinite and eternal. It included the creation of all things, the nature of this probationary estate, and the great and eternal plan of redemption. He taught that God was the creator of all things, that He created this earth and all things that on it are. He taught that there was the Fall of Adam—that Adam and all forms of life fell, or changed, from their original paradisiacal state to the mortal state that now prevails—and that as a consequence of that Fall, which brought temporal and spiritual death into the world, an atonement of a divine being was required. Someone had to come and ransom men from the effects of the Fall and bring to pass a continuation of temporal life, which is immortality, and make available spiritual life again, which is eternal life.

The great and eternal plan of salvation, from God’s viewpoint, is the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. If there had been no creation, there would be nothing. If things had not been created in the manner and form and way they were, there could have been no Fall—and, as a consequence, no procreation and no mortality and no death. And if there had been no Fall of Adam, which brought temporal and spiritual death into the world, there would be no need for the redemption of the Lord Jesus.

The plan of salvation, to us, is the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus by which immortality and eternal life come. When you talk about the gospel from the standpoint of men, you are talking about the things men must do to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling before the Lord. And what is involved there is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; repentance from sin; baptism by immersion under
the hands of a legal administrator for the remission of sins; the receipt of the gift of the Holy Ghost, which gift is the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead; and then, finally, enduring in righteousness and integrity and devotion and obedience all of one’s days. That is the plan of salvation as far as acts on our part are concerned. But that plan of salvation rests on the greater eternal concept of the atoning sacrifice, which grew out of the Fall, which Fall grew out of the Creation.

Jesus preached the gospel. Jesus was a theologian. There has never been a theologian on earth to compare with Him. In this field, as in all others, no man ever spake as He did. In His providences, He let Paul and Peter and some of the others present to us the theological concepts that had to be known in order for people to gain salvation. But Jesus preached the gospel. That, of course, is what we are expected to do; that is the first great concept. Here is the second:

2. We are to teach the principles of the gospel as they are found in the standard works. “And let them [the elders of the kingdom] journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith” (D&C 52:9).

We have a multitude of passages that talk about searching the scriptures, about searching “these commandments.” We have counsel to “ponder” the things of the Lord, to “treasure up” the words of truth. He told the Nephites, “Great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). He said to them, “Search the prophets” (3 Nephi 23:5).

These and other passages show we should study the standard works of the Church. The scriptures themselves present the gospel in the way the Lord wants it presented to us in our day. I do not say that it is always presented to men in the same way. There have been civilizations of a higher spiritual standing than ours. I think He did some different kind of teaching among the people in Enoch’s day and in that golden Nephite era when for two hundred years everyone was conforming to principles of light and truth and had the Holy Spirit for a guide. We know perfectly well that during the millennium, the teaching processes will change. One of the revelations says of that day: “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:34).

But for our day and our time and our hour, the time of our mortal probation, we are to teach in the way things are recorded in the standard works that we have. And if you want to know what empha-
sis should be given to gospel principles, you simply teach the whole standard works; and, automatically, in the process, you will have given the Lord’s emphasis to every doctrine and every principle. As far as learning the gospel and teaching the gospel are concerned, the Book of Mormon, by all odds, is the most important of the standard works—because in simplicity and in plainness, it sets forth in a definitive manner the doctrines of the gospel. If you would like to test that sort of thing, just arbitrarily choose a hundred or so gospel subjects and then put in parallel columns what the Bible says about them and what the Book of Mormon says about them. In about 95 percent of the cases, the clarity and perfection and superlative nature of the Book of Mormon teaching will be so evident that it will be perfectly clear that that is the place to learn the gospel.

I think, in many respects, that the literature and the language and the power of expression in Paul’s writings and in Isaiah’s writings are superior to what is in the Book of Mormon. But we understand the Bible because we have the knowledge gained out of the Book of Mormon. The epistles of Paul, for instance, were written to members of the Church. I do not think he has any epistles that are intended to be definitive explanations of gospel doctrines. He was writing the portion of the Lord’s word that the Corinthians or the Hebrews or the Romans needed—while being aware of the problems and questions and difficulties that confronted them. In effect, he was writing to people who already had the knowledge that is in the Book of Mormon. That means, obviously, that there are no people on earth who can understand the epistles of Paul and the other brethren in the New Testament until they first get the knowledge that we as Latter-day Saints have.

The Book of Mormon is a definitive, all-embracing, comprehensive account. Our scripture says it contains the fulness of the everlasting gospel. What that means is that it is a record of God’s dealings with a people who had the fulness of the gospel. It means that in it are recorded the basic principles men must believe to work out their salvation. After we accept and believe and comprehend the principles therein recorded, we are qualified and prepared to take another step and to begin to acquire a knowledge of the mysteries of godliness.

After somebody gets the basic understanding that is in the Book of Mormon—about salvation, for instance—then he is in a position to envision and comprehend what section 76 is all about. When that section was first given in our dispensation, the Prophet forbade the missionaries to talk about it when they went out into the world and told them that if they did they would heap persecution upon their
heads because it was something that was beyond the spiritual capacity of those to whom they were sent. We do not have that type of religious climate today, but it was one that prevailed in that day.

I think this language in the Psalms is about as good as anything that has been written about the scriptures: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7–11).

I love these words also that Paul wrote to Timothy: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

President Clark said on this point:

You do have an interest in matters purely cultural and in matters of purely secular knowledge; but, I repeat again for emphasis, your chief interest, your essential and all but sole duty, is to teach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as that has been revealed in these latter days. You are to teach this Gospel using as your sources and authorities the Standard Works of the Church, and the words of those whom God has called to lead His people in these last days. You are not, whether high or low, to intrude into your work your own peculiar philosophy, no matter what its source or how pleasing or rational it seems to you to be. To do so would be to have as many different churches as we have seminaries—and that is chaos.

3. We are to teach by the power of the Holy Ghost. There are some passages on this matter of teaching by the power of the Holy Ghost that are so strong and so blunt and so plain that unless we understand what is involved, it almost makes us fear ever to teach. And a couple of them I shall read: “And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith: and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:14). That is a mandatory thing, a prohibition. “And all this ye shall observe to do as I have commanded concerning your teaching, until the fulness of my scriptures is given. And as ye shall lift up your voices
by the Comforter, ye shall speak and prophesy as seemeth me good; For, behold, the Comforter knoweth all things, and beareth record of the Father and of the Son” (D&C 42:15–17).

We are talking about Church teaching, gospel teaching, teaching spiritual things, teaching by the power of the Holy Ghost. And if you teach by the power of the Holy Ghost, you say the things that the Lord wants said, or you say the things the Lord would say if He Himself were here. The Holy Ghost is a revelator, and you are speaking words of revelation. And that kind of preacher or teacher, as we have seen, is the third great essential identifying officer of God’s kingdom.

“First apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

“And now come, saith the Lord, by the Spirit, unto the elders of his church, and let us reason together, that ye may understand; Let us reason even as a man reasoneth one with another face to face. Now, when a man reasoneth he is understood of man, because he reasoneth as a man; even so will I, the Lord, reason with you that you may under-

Have in mind as we consider these matters from section 50 the law pertaining to principals and agents, to masters and servants. Consider how these apply to a divine being who gives direction to someone else, letting him know what he should teach and what he should say.

Have in mind also that it really does not make a particle of difference to any of you what we teach. I often think as I go around the Church and preach in various meetings that it just does not make a snap of the fingers difference to me what I am talking about. I do not care what I talk about. All I am concerned with is getting in tune with the Spirit and expressing the thoughts, in the best language and way that I can, that are implanted there by the power of the Spirit. The Lord knows what a congregation needs to hear, and He has provided a means to give that revelation to every preacher and every teacher.

We do not create the doctrines of the gospel. People who ask questions about the gospel, a good portion of the time, are looking for an answer that sustains a view they have expressed. They want to justify a conclusion that they have reached instead of looking for the ultimate truth in the field. Once again, it does not make one snap of the fingers difference to me what the doctrines of the Church are. I cannot create a doctrine. I cannot originate a concept of eternal truth. The only thing I ought to be concerned with is learning what the Lord thinks about a doctrine. If I ask a question of someone to learn something, I ought not to be seeking for a confirmation of a view that I have expressed. I
ought to be seeking knowledge and wisdom. It should not make any difference to me whether the doctrine is on the right hand or on the left. My sole interest and my sole concern would be to find out what the Lord thinks on the subject.

And we have the power to do that. I suppose that is part, at least, of what Paul had in mind when he said of the Saints, “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

If we have the mind of Christ, we think what Christ thinks and we say what Christ says; and out of those two things come our acts, and so we do what Christ would have done in an equivalent situation. Well, back to section 50 in which the Lord is reasoning with us: “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?” (D&C 50:13). That is, “What agency did I give you? What commission have I conferred upon you? What authorization is yours? What divine commandment came from me to you?” And then He answers, and His answer tells us what we are ordained to do: “To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth. And then received ye spirits which ye could not understand, and received them to be of God; and in this are ye justified?” (D&C 50:14–15).

I’d like to try that again. “And then received ye spirits [doctrines, tenets, views, theories] which ye could not understand” (D&C 50:15). Then you received something that you could not understand and thought it came from God. And are you justified? “Behold ye shall answer this question yourselves; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto you; he that is weak among you hereafter shall be made strong” (D&C 50:16).

Now here is some very strong language. If you can italicize words in your mind, as it were, when they are read, do it with these words: “Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter [that is our commission], in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? And if it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:17–18).

Now let me pick up that last again and give you the antecedent of the pronoun. It said, “If it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:18).

What is the antecedent of “it”? It is the “word of truth.” That is to say, if you teach the word of truth—now note, you’re saying what is true; everything you say is accurate and right—by some other way than the Spirit, it is not of God. Now what is the other way to teach than by the Spirit? Well, obviously, it is by the power of the intellect.

Suppose I came here tonight and delivered a great message on teaching and did it by the power of the intellect without any of the
Spirit of God attending. Suppose that every word that I said was true, no error whatever, but it was an intellectual presentation. This revelation says, “If it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:18).

That is, God did not present the message through me because I used the power of the intellect instead of the power of the Spirit. Intellectual things—reason and logic—can do some good, and they can prepare the way, and they can get the mind ready to receive the Spirit under certain circumstances. But conversion comes and the truth sinks into the hearts of people only when it is taught by the power of the Spirit.

“And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?” (D&C 50:19).

And the answer is: “If it be some other way it is not of God. Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth? Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:20–22).

That is how you worship. Real, true, genuine, Spirit-born worship, in a sacrament meeting for instance, comes when a speaker speaks by the power of the Holy Ghost and when a congregation hears by the power of the Holy Ghost. So the speaker gives the word of the Lord, and the congregation receives the word of the Lord. Now that is not the norm, I think, in our sacrament meetings. At least it does not happen anywhere nearly as often as it ought to happen. What happens is this: the congregation comes together in fasting and prayer, pondering the things of the Spirit, desiring to be fed. They bring a gallon jug. The speaker comes in his worldly wisdom, and he brings a little pint bottle, and he pours his pint bottle out, and what he pours rattles around in the gallon jug. Or else, as sometimes happens, the preacher gets his errand from the Lord and gets in tune with the Spirit and comes with a gallon jug to deliver a message, and there is not anybody in the congregation who brought anything bigger than a cup. And he pours out the gallon of eternal truth, and people get just a little sample, enough to quench a moment’s eternal thirst, instead of getting the real message that is involved. It takes teacher and student, it takes preacher and congregation, both of them uniting in faith to have a proper preaching or teaching situation.

I suspect that many of you sometime or other, probably in high school, took a course in physics and had laboratory experiments and used a tuning fork. You remember an occasion when two tuning forks were
selected that were calibrated to the same wavelength, and one of them was set up in one part of the room and the other thirty or forty feet away. Someone struck the first tuning fork, and people put their ear to the second, and it vibrated and made the same sound that came from the first one. This is an illustration. It is what is involved in speaking by the Spirit. Somebody who is in tune with the Spirit speaks words that are heard by the power of the Spirit, where righteous people are concerned.

4. **We are to apply the gospel principles taught to the needs and circumstances of our hearers.** The principles are eternal. They never vary. World conditions and personal problems vary. We apply the divine teachings to the present need. Nephi said, “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23).

What he did was quote Isaiah who was talking about the whole house of Israel. And he, Nephi, applied it to the Nephite portion of Israel. Now President Clark says:

> Our youth are not children spiritually; they are well on towards the normal spiritual maturity of the world. To treat them as children spiritually, as the world might treat the same age group, is therefore and likewise an anachronism. I say once more there is scarcely a youth that comes through your seminary or institute door who has not been the conscious beneficiary of spiritual blessings, or who has not seen the efficacy of prayer, or who has not witnessed the power of faith to heal the sick, or who has not beheld spiritual outpourings, of which the world at large is today ignorant.

Now, this next expression pleases me to no end.

You do not have to sneak up behind this spiritually experienced youth and whisper religion in his ears; you can come right out, face to face, and talk with him. You do not need to disguise religious truths with a cloak of worldly things; you can bring these truths to him openly, in their natural guise. Youth may prove to be not more fearful of them than you are. There is no need for gradual approaches, for bed-time stories, for coddling, for patronizing, or for any of the other childish devices used in efforts to reach those spiritually inexperienced and all but spiritually dead.

I suppose that has some bearing on games and parties and entertainments and gimmicks that, really, brethren, are poor substitutes for teaching the doctrines of salvation to the students that you have.

5. **We must testify that what we teach is true.**

We are a testimony-bearing people. Everlastingly, we are bearing testimony. You pay particular attention to the testimonies that are
borne in sacrament meeting. A lot of them will just be expressions of thanksgiving or of appreciation for parents or this or that. Sometimes there will be a testimony that says in words that the work is true and that Jesus is the Lord and Joseph Smith is a prophet. And that raises the level. Now I am going to talk about something different from that.

There are two fields in which we are expected to bear testimony, if we perfect our testimony bearing. Of course, we are to bear testimony of the truth and divinity of the work. We are to say that we know by the power of the Holy Spirit that the work is the Lord’s, that the kingdom is His. We get a revelation, and it tells us that Jesus is the Lord and Joseph Smith is a prophet, and we ought to say it. That is testimony bearing. But we are obligated also to bear testimony of the truth of the doctrine that we teach, not simply that the work is true, but that we have taught true doctrine, which of course we cannot do unless we have taught by the power of the Spirit.

The fifth chapter of Alma is a very expressive sermon on being born again. Alma teaches the great truths incident to that doctrine in some language and with some expressions that are not found anywhere else in the revelations. And after he has taught his doctrine about being born again, he says this: “For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come” (Alma 5:44).

He is using the scriptures. He is using the revelations that came to the fathers.

“And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true” (Alma 5:45).

He’s testifying of the truth of the doctrine that he taught.

“And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you they [the doctrines he has taught] are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me” (Alma 5:45–46).

The foolishness of teaching! The foolishness of teaching after the manner we have been describing! The teacher’s divine commission!

I repeat: I have no power to create a doctrine. I have no power to manufacture a theory or a philosophy or choose a way in which we
must go or a thing we must believe to gain eternal life in our Father’s kingdom. I am an agent, a servant, a representative, an ambassador, if you will. I have been called of God to preach what? To preach His gospel, not mine. It doesn’t matter what I think. The only commission I have is to proclaim His word. And if I proclaim His word by the power of the Spirit, then everyone involved is bound. People are bound to accept it, or if they reject it, it is at their peril.

Now, my divine commission and your divine commission is (1) to teach the principles of the gospel; (2) to teach them out of the standard works; (3) to teach them by the power of the Holy Ghost; (4) to apply them to the situation at hand; and (5) to bear a personal witness, a witness born of the Spirit, that the doctrine that is taught is true. That is the teacher’s divine commission.

I do not always measure up to that by any means. I guess the Brethren, of whom I am one, do as much preaching and speaking in Church congregations as anyone, unless it is the seminary and institute teachers. There are times when I struggle and strive to get a message over and just do not seem to myself to be getting in tune with the Spirit. The fact is, it is a lot harder for me to choose what ought to be said, what subject ought to be considered, than it is for me to get up and preach it. I am always struggling and trying to get the inspiration to know what ought to be said, what subject ought to be considered, than it is for me to get up and preach it. I am always struggling and trying to get the inspiration to know what ought to be said at general conference or in a stake conference or whatever. If we labor at it and if we struggle, the Spirit will be given by the prayer of faith. If we do our part, we will improve and grow in the things of the Spirit until we get to a position where we can, being in tune, say what the Lord wants said. That is what is expected of us. And that is foolishness in the eyes of the world, in the disciplines of science and sociology and so on. But it is the foolishness of God, and the foolishness of God, which is wiser than men, is what brings salvation.

Let me say just a word about false doctrine. We are supposed to teach. Pitfalls we are supposed to avoid are the teaching of false doctrine: teaching ethics in preference to doctrine, compromising our doctrines with the philosophies of the world, entertaining rather than teaching, and using games and gimmicks rather than sound doctrine, coddling students, as President Clark expressed it.

We ought to judge everything by gospel standards, not the reverse. Do not take a scientific principle, so-called, and try to make the gospel conform to it. Take the gospel for what it is, and, insofar as you can, make other things conform to it, and if they do not conform to it, forget them. Forget them; do not worry. They will vanish away eventu-
ally. In the true sense of the word, the gospel embraces all truth. And everything that is true is going to conform to the principles that God has revealed.

“O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, and pervert the right way of the Lord, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!” (2 Nephi 28:15).

I shall repeat the portion of that that deals with teaching. “Those who preach false doctrines, . . . wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!” (2 Nephi 28:15).

I want to say something about this. That scripture is talking about people who have a form of godliness, as Paul expressed it, but who deny the power thereof (see 2 Timothy 3:5). And the Lord quoted Paul in the First Vision, using his very language. He is talking about those people of whom Paul said, they are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). President Clark said:

You are not to teach the philosophies of the world, ancient or modern, pagan or Christian, for this is the field of the public schools. Your sole field is the Gospel, and that is boundless in its own sphere.

We pay taxes to support those state institutions whose function and work it is to teach the arts, the sciences, literature, history, the languages, and so on through the whole secular curriculum. These institutions are to do this work. But we use the tithes of the Church to carry on the Church school system, and these are impressed with a holy trust. The Church seminaries and institutes are to teach the Gospel.10

You talk about teaching false doctrine and being damned. Here is a list of false doctrines that if someone teaches he will be damned. And there is not one of these that I have ever known to be taught in the Church, but I am giving you the list for a perspective because of what will follow. Teach that God is a spirit, the sectarian trinity. Teach that salvation comes by grace alone, without works. Teach original guilt, or birth sin, as they express it. Teach infant baptism. Teach predestination. Teach that revelation and gifts and miracles have ceased. Teach the Adam-God theory. (That does apply in the Church.) Teach that we should practice plural marriage today. Now any of those are doctrines that damn. They are what I just read about from 2 Nephi 28.

Now here are some doctrines that weaken faith and may damn. It depends on how inured a person gets to them, and how much emphasis he puts on them, and how much the doctrine begins to govern the affairs
of his life. Evolution is one of them. Somebody can get so wrapped up in so-called organic evolution that he ends up not believing in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Such a course leads to damnation.

Somebody can teach that God is progressing in knowledge. And if he begins to believe it, and emphasizes it unduly, and it becomes a ruling thing in his life, then, as the Lectures on Faith say, it is not possible for him to have faith unto life and salvation. He is required to believe, in the Prophet’s language, that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, that He has all power and He knows all things.

If you teach a doctrine that there is a second chance for salvation, you may lose your soul. You will if you believe that doctrine to the point that you do not live right and if you go on the assumption that someday you will have the opportunity for salvation even though you did not keep the commandments here.

And so it is with the paradisiacal creation, with progression from one degree of glory to another, with figuring out what the beasts in the book of Revelation are about or the mysteries in any field. Or maybe you will get talking about the fact that the sons of perdition are not resurrected or where the ten tribes are. Or perhaps you will make a mistake on the true doctrine of the gathering of Israel or some of the events incident to the Second Coming or millennial events and the like.

Now I am not saying that those doctrines will damn in the sense that the first list that I read will, but they may. They certainly will lead people astray, and they will keep you from perfecting the kind of faith that will enable you to do good and work righteousness and perform miracles. I do not get very troubled about an honest and sincere person who makes a mistake in doctrine, provided that it is a mistake of the intellect or a mistake of understanding and provided it is not on a great basic and fundamental principle. If he makes a mistake on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, he will go down to destruction. But if he errs in a lesser way—in a nonmalignant way, if you will—he can still straighten himself out without too much trouble. The Prophet Joseph Smith tells us of an experience he had with a man by the name of Brown in the early days. This man was taken before the high council for teaching false doctrine. He had been explaining the beasts in the book of Revelation. And he came to the Prophet, and the Prophet, with him present in the congregation, then preached a sermon on the subject, and in fact told us what the beasts mean. In the sermon, he said: “I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodist, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the
liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be
trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because
he errs in doctrine.”

That statement applies to doctrines of the lesser sort. If you err in
some doctrines, and I have, and all of us have, what we want to do is
get the further light and knowledge that we ought to receive and get
our souls in tune and clarify our thinking. Now, obviously if you preach
one of these great basic doctrines and it is false and you adhere to it,
you will lose your soul. You know the Book of Mormon account says
that a man goes to hell if he dies believing in infant baptism. Well, he
is denying the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the goodness of God and
the salvation of men if he supposes that infant baptism is needed. It is
my hope, obviously, that we will teach sound, true doctrine. And we
shall do that if we confine ourselves to the scriptures and if we leave the
mysteries alone.

Testimony

The marvelous and wondrous thing about this work that we are
engaged in is the simple fact that it is true. There is not anything you
can imagine or conceive in your heart that is more glorious than the
simple fact that the work we are engaged in is true. This is the Lord’s
work. This is the kingdom of God on earth, and He has issued the
eternal decree that the work is going to roll on until it covers the earth,
until the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the
sea. That will happen because it is true, and truth will prevail. That is
the ultimate destiny of the kingdom. And we shall have peace and joy
and happiness if we stay with the kingdom, believe its principles, and
live its laws.

In addition to the fact that the kingdom is true, the doctrine I
have been teaching tonight is true. The points that I have made under
the heading “The Teacher’s Divine Commission” are true. If we can
conform to them and follow them, we shall rise to a standard of teaching
that will change the lives of people. You do not change anybody’s
life by teaching him mathematics, but as President Brigham Young
told Karl G. Maeser, he was not even to teach the multiplication tables
except by the Spirit of God. That is a lesser thing. But you do change
the lives of people when you teach them the doctrines of salvation.

“It [pleases] God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that
believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

We save ourselves by our teaching, and we save those who will get
in tune with the same Spirit that we have, when we teach those truths. What a glorious and wondrous thing it is not to have to worry about the doctrines of the kingdom, not to have to defend them and support them and uphold them. They are true, and they sustain and defend and uphold themselves. And they do it because the work is true. God be praised that we have the truths of salvation and that we are members of His kingdom, the Church and kingdom of God on earth. I thank Him for this blessing, and I do it for myself, and I act as mouth for all of you on this occasion, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Notes

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, his wife Amelia, and son Joseph in Saigon, 1968; at the
time Joseph was serving as a chaplain in the U.S. military, and Elder and Sister
McConkie were on Church assignment.

Courtesy of Joseph Fielding McConkie.
From Father to Son: Joseph F. McConkie on Gospel Teaching

Interview by Devan Jensen

Joseph Fielding McConkie is a professor of ancient scripture at BYU. Devan Jensen is executive editor at the Religious Studies Center.

The following is an interview the Religious Educator had with Joseph F. McConkie, son of Elder Bruce R. McConkie and author of a biography of his father titled The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son.

Jensen: Please share with us some of the important lessons you learned from your father that have been helpful to you as a gospel teacher. You have probably been asked this a thousand times, but how did your father study the gospel?

McConkie: If you had been able to direct that question to my father, he probably would have responded, “You don’t really want to know.” Often people ask me that question in the hope that there is some kind of secret I could share with them, a shortcut of some sort. There are no shortcuts where gospel scholarship is concerned. Dad simply paid the price.

Next to his family, he made teaching the gospel the great priority of his life. He knew he could not teach what he did not know, so he paid the price that always goes with true competence. If his understanding of the gospel was matched by few, so was his effort.

Jensen: Did he have a particular system for scripture study?

McConkie: No, he did not believe that scriptural understanding is the result of a particular system of marking scriptures, or whether you studied in the morning or the evening, or whether you went through the scriptures topically or chronologically. What mattered to him was
the spirit of the thing. When it came to studying scriptures, for Dad it was like a bear to honey. The scriptures and gospel were the very air he breathed. The stories have been told of how he would assign himself a topic to speak on and organize the talk and give it to himself as he walked from the family home on the Avenues to his classes at the University of Utah, or how he would do the same thing as he drove to stake conferences. He would just find a time and way to learn something because he wanted to.

**Jensen:** What was the most important principle your father shared with you about teaching the gospel?

**McConkie:** The single most important principle that I learned from my father about teaching and studying the gospel was to be true to the revelations of the Restoration. They are the key, he said, by which we unlock the true meaning of all that was taught or revealed to the ancients. I remember as a young teacher asking a curriculum writer why in an Old Testament course they had chosen not to use the scores of revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants that amplified and explained what was going on in the Old Testament. He responded to the effect that he felt each book of scripture should stand independently. My father did not believe that. His position was that without modern revelation, we would not know any more than the sectarian world. The doctrine my father taught me was that the measure of a man’s spirituality was to be found in his loyalty to Joseph Smith and the revelations given through him.

I am fully aware of the argument that to interpret the Old or New Testament through the eyes of the Restoration is to read Mormonism into the ancient texts. I am equally aware that to do otherwise is an admission that we are not really converted to the message of the Restoration. The testimony we have been commissioned to bear to all the world is that the gospel in its pristine purity has been restored again to the earth. That is to say that we make no claim to any priesthood, keys, power, authority, or doctrine that has not been given to us by direct revelation. The greater part of the gospel we received from the ancient prophets themselves. These were the men who tutored Joseph Smith and restored the gospel to him.

Christ told those who rejected Him with arguments from the law of Moses that it would be Moses, not Him, who would stand as their accuser at the day of judgment, for Moses taught and testified of Him (see John 5:39–45). The same principle will hold sway in our day. Those using the words of dead prophets to fight the living ones will
find those very prophets as their accusers come the day of judgment. My father believed, and I have come to know that he was right, that there is a spirit and power that comes from being true to the message of the Restoration that can be had in no other way. It is this same key that unlocks the meaning of ancient texts that also unlocks the hearts of those we seek to convert in our labors as missionaries. Repeatedly in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord tells His missionaries to “declare the things which have been revealed to my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun” (D&C 31:4).

Jensen: Will you share with us a principle that you would not know if Elder McConkie had not been your father.

McConkie: Shortly after joining the religion faculty at Brigham Young University, I was assigned to teach a couple of Book of Mormon classes for returned missionaries. I felt reasonably confident in doing so until we got to 3 Nephi where Christ quotes Micah’s prophecy about a young lion that would “both treadeth down and teareth in pieces” (3 Nephi 20:16). Christ is recorded as having quoted the passage three times, but no direct commentary is appended to it. Were one of my students to ask about the meaning of this passage, I could do no better than say, “I have no idea.”

I took the occasion to visit each of our faculty who regularly taught Book of Mormon to learn how they understood this passage. I received an interesting range of answers, no two of which were the same. I had occasion a few days later to ask the same question of my father. Without a moment’s hesitation he said, “That is a passage that the Lord has not chosen to make clear to us at the present time.”

As one pursues the implications of his answer, an important principle in scriptural study emerges. I call it the doctrine of ambiguity. There is a greater depth and breadth to prophecy and scripture than most of us want to accord it. I have students who argue that the Lord would not deliberately put anything in scripture that He did not want us to understand. I usually respond by asking if they have read Isaiah or the book of Revelation and, if so, if they thought they understood all that was contained in these books. Their objection usually ends at this point.

When we go back and review the messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, we find much that the people of that day could not be expected to understand. For instance, when the Psalm says, “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21), the meaning is plain to all who have read the Gospels but could hardly be clear to those living a thousand years
before the event described would take place or be recorded by Matthew, Mark, or Luke.

One would have to think that it was not intended that those people living during that period identify this prophecy for what it was, while it would be obvious and plain to all who lived after the event. It would appear such passages are given to confirm the verity of significant events rather than to foreshadow them.

In any event, I went into my Book of Mormon classes more confident and comfortable knowing that I had no obligation to clarify every scriptural text.

Jensen: What kind of expectations did your father have for your family as far as gospel understanding was concerned?

McConkie: He loved the gospel. His children loved him and just naturally followed his example. If we were going to speak up on a matter, he expected us to know what we were talking about. He expected us to stand on our own two feet and not lean on him or his understanding. I remember as a relatively young man taking a position opposite some of my uncles in a gospel discussion at a family reunion. I was confident that Dad agreed with the position I was taking. When I turned to him for support I discovered he had slipped out of the room. I was on my own. Later, I learned he was in the kitchen with my mother. She said, “Aren’t you going to go in and help Joseph?” He said, “No, he is doing just fine,” which I understood to mean “Let him stand on his own.”

Jensen: What kind of formal instruction did he give you?

McConkie: There was not a lot of that, though I suppose the way he prepared me for my mission fits in that category. I went a year earlier than we had expected. As soon as he knew I was going, he came to me and said he wanted me to read the Book of Mormon and then report to him. I read the book and reported. His response was, “Now, read the Book of Mormon and report.” I read it again and reported. Again he responded, “Now, I want you to read the Book of Mormon and report.” I read it a third time and reported that I had done so. By this time, I was in the mission field. Then he wrote and said, “Now you are ready to begin to begin.” Then, in his letters, he began to tutor me not just about the Book of Mormon but in all the standard works, showing how the Book of Mormon unlocked their meaning.

Jensen: What attributes did he have as a teacher that you would most like to emulate?


**McConkie:** One of the most important lessons I learned from my father is to trust the Spirit. He did that when he spoke and taught. I think of this classic illustration. When my grandfather, Joseph Fielding Smith, passed away, Dad was asked by the First Presidency to be one of the speakers at his funeral. I had just written a short biography on President Smith, so Dad sat down with me and asked if I had any suggestions as to what he ought to say. I reminded him of the events that surrounded Granddad’s birth. Each of his father’s plural wives wanted their firstborn son to bear his name. Joseph F. Smith felt the right should go to Juliana Lambson, the first of his wives. The others all gave birth to sons while she had not. Juliana, like Hannah of old, went before the Lord and vowed that if the Lord would give her a son to bear his father’s name, she in turn would do all in her power to see that he lived worthy of it.

In telling the story to Dad, I told him my only source was one of Granddaddy’s younger sisters and that she was eighty-three at the time of our interview. I had just completed a master’s degree in history and was worried that historians would not think this a very good source. I sat next to my brother Mark in the Tabernacle at the funeral the next day. I told him I was a little worried about what Dad might say. Mark told me that Dad had told him he was quite aware of my concern, but he said, “What Joseph doesn’t understand is that I will know.”

Dad spoke with great power that day and, among other things, received a confirmation from the Spirit as he spoke that the story was indeed true. Some other rather remarkable things were also revealed to him at that time. This experience simply reflected countless other occasions when he stood on his feet to speak, wholly dependent on the Spirit for the direction he should take. He was fearless in taking it when it came.

**Jensen:** Your father seemed to have an unusual confidence about who he was and what he stood for. How do you think he came to that?

**McConkie:** I asked my father once how he could be so confident in teaching a particular matter when others to whom we look for clear instruction were reluctant to say much. I noted that some with whom I taught would jump on me for saying the same thing, suggesting that I was going beyond the period that ended the sentence. His response was, “If you cannot go beyond the period that ends the sentence, you do not have the Spirit, and if you do not have the Spirit, you have no business teaching in the first place.”

Some are uneasy with such an expression, immediately fearing that if we actually give people the license to use the gift of the Holy Ghost,
someone will abuse it or err in judgment. Occasionally, they will. On the other hand, if we have taught people how to properly use that gift, those they are teaching will easily be able to discern the matter. Dad felt that the greater danger lies in the idea that unless we hold a particular office or position, we are without the ability to use the gifts that God has given us. Such a conclusion does not represent the gospel as Bruce McConkie understood and taught it.

My experience also suggests that people whose understanding is grounded in scripture have a confidence about them in teaching not enjoyed by others. I never saw my father assume competence or knowledge that was not his. He would not bluff. Either he was confident that he could speak as one having authority or he remained silent.

He was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy at the age of thirty-three. He had not served as a bishop, a high councilor, or in a stake presidency, yet he was expected to train those holding these offices. In doing so, he refused to step beyond his own experience and knowledge. Rather, he chose to stand on his own ground. He taught what he knew, and that was the gospel.

A few weeks ago a friend from across campus called to thank me for writing the book on my father. He told me that he had had two personal experiences with him. He said one was a stone, the other a fish. The experience he referred to as the stone dealt with a counseling situation he faced as a young bishop. Not knowing what to do, he had sought the help of his stake president. His stake president was also at a loss as to what to do but told him that Elder McConkie would be their conference visitor in a few weeks and he could ask him.

When the opportunity presented itself, he sought the needed counsel only to have my father respond, “Why in the world are you asking me that question? You are the bishop, you know these people, I do not. It is for you to get the answer, not me.” My friend was greatly disappointed with such a response.

What my friend referred to as the fish was a priesthood training session in which my father exploited a few Mormon myths posing as sacred cows and suggested that they could be replaced with the kind of practical gospel that people could actually live.

Both experiences are vintage Bruce McConkie. I suggest, however, that in the first instance my friend was given a gem, not a stone, and failed to recognize its true worth. He was being taught the importance of his growing up into the office that was his. What Elder McConkie was doing was expressing his confidence in a young bishop and his confidence that the Lord would give that bishop the direction he needed.
Dad had too much respect for the office of a bishop to suppose that he had any right to replace the bishop and get the inspiration the bishop was entitled to. He was doing exactly what the bishop should have been doing, and that was teaching those involved to stand on their own feet and solve their own problems.

**Jensen:** When it came to doctrinal matters, your father rarely quoted other people. Why was that?

**McConkie:** Some years ago, Dad came down and spent a few hours teaching those of us in Religious Education and responded to some of our doctrinal questions. In response to one question, he explained how he went about writing the books in his Messiah series. He said, “When I wrote *The Promised Messiah*, I read the standard works from cover to cover and elicited from them everything I could find that dealt with the first coming of Christ, organized the material, and then wrote the book.”

He then said, “When I wrote *The Millennial Messiah*, what I did was to read the standard works from cover to cover and elicit from them everything I could about the Second Coming of Christ, organize the material, and then write the book.”

I could not help but contrast this with the approach that we as a faculty generally take. I think you could anticipate that the first thing we would do is get a research assistant and assign him or her to collect everything that any of the brethren had to say about the subject. My father would have considered that drinking downstream. He preferred drinking at the fountain head—he had little interest in what others had said about the subject at hand until he had seen what the scriptures say. Then everything else was measured against that standard.

In fact, he said, “I would never quote another man unless I could first square what he said with the scriptures and unless he said what was involved better than I could.”

This often led him to different conclusions than those popularly held in the Church. Yet he was confident in where he stood. As would be expected, he was and still is the source of some criticism, but precious little of it comes from those who are grounded in the scriptures.

**Jensen:** Behind the pulpit, your father was not a storyteller. Was he more likely to tell stories with the family?

**McConkie:** Yes, he shared experiences and stories that were both amusing and instructive. He could tell a story as well as anyone; but, in teaching the gospel, he preferred to get to the point and teach the
principles involved. Others could tell the stories. He also was very sensitive about the way stories could improve with each telling. He told me once that in his lifetime he had known only two honest storytellers. One of them was Heber J. Grant. I do not remember who he said the other one was.

In any event, he wanted to be a gospel teacher, not a storyteller. Those who felt to coach him constantly told him that he would be more popular as a speaker if he would tell stories. Privately, he would remind his children that the storytellers would soon be forgotten, whereas the gospel teachers would be quoted for years to come. In my judgment, the passage of years has proven him right.

**Jensen:** So did he teach you, as his children, to be as independent in their thinking as he was?

**McConkie:** Yes, he did. As to doctrinal questions that came from his children, he followed the principle enunciated in Doctrine and Covenants 9. He would probe to find out what thought and preparation went into asking the question. He did not want just to be the source of an answer; he wanted us to learn how to get answers. What we got by way of an answer always reflected the effort we had made to obtain it.

I have a distinct recollection of discussing a matter with him and getting some very plain and direct instruction, only to go into the classroom with him and hear someone ask the same question and have him respond that he really did not know how to answer the question. It was quite clear that the answers given in both instances were a measure of the confidence and maturity he sensed in the one asking the question.

In answering my questions, the time came, however, when he said, “Look, Junior, you have the same sources available to you as I do to me. You get your own answers.” From then on, I discussed my conclusions with him but did not seek answers from him.

This experience takes us back to the young bishop who thought he had been given a stone. What I had been given was the confidence that I could find answers, a knowledge of the sources to which I should turn, and the standard by which I could test the verity of my answers. I hope that I can do as well by my own children and those I am privileged to teach. Some may think that a stone, and perhaps it is—a seer stone.

**Jensen:** For what would your father like to be remembered most?

**McConkie:** It would have to be his family. He often said, “True greatness is found only in the family.” That is the standard by which he expected to be judged.
**Jensen:** In your judgment, what was your father’s most important contribution in the area of gospel scholarship?

**McConkie:** It would certainly include his role on the Scriptures Committee that gave us our most recent edition of the standard works. When this committee met, the Church generally was unacquainted with the Joseph Smith Translation [JST]. Many viewed it with suspicion. He played a key role in acquainting the Church with the JST and getting the Saints to trust and use it. With that comes a greater testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The generation we are now teaching has no memory of it being otherwise. They have no idea that there was a time when people were reluctant to use the JST.

As most people are aware, Elder McConkie also wrote the chapter headings for the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Pearl of Great Price. What is often missed here is that these headings constitute a commentary, howbeit brief, on each chapter in these books.

His loyalty to the message of the Restoration also found expression in his book *New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. Instead of attempting to give credence to the Articles of Faith by using Bible texts, he gave them a greater credence by sustaining them with revelations given to Joseph Smith. The proof of Joseph Smith’s prophetic role is not in what the ancients said but in what he said. There is a spirit and power that attends the message the Lord gave us to take to the world that exceeds our redelivering the message given to prophets of old. He did the same thing in the writing of his Messiah series. Though it is commentary on Old World scripture, its true meaning is unlocked for us by revelations given through Joseph Smith. No one in our dispensation has done more to illustrate how the revelations of the Restoration unlock the past and enhance our understanding of Christ and His ministry than Bruce McConkie.

**Jensen:** You have just had an experience with cancer. Could you share some of your feelings about what you learned and how it has influenced you.

**McConkie:** Cancer is a great teacher. It commands your attention and sharpens your views on what is important like few things can. One of the great lessons you learn is how real the faith and prayers of others in your behalf are. You discover that there was never any intent that you make it through this life without the help of others. Everywhere I have gone I have met people—people whom I do not know—who have been praying for me. That has been a very touching thing. It brings the realization of how kind and good people are and how important it
is that I live the way I ought to. We have no realization of how much hurt it would cause if we failed to live the way people expect us to.

Cancer also brings with it citizenship in a new world, one in which you realize how many people have things much tougher than you and how much they are aided by your prayers. You become very sensitive to the suffering of others, and your prayer list becomes a lot longer than it ever was. At the same time, you learn to live within the bounds of your strength. You do what you can and then accept the fact that you have to stop and let others help while you get your strength back.

**Jensen:** As a final question, what advice would you give to new faculty or instructors?

**McConkie:** I know of no privilege that matches that of being a teacher, and nothing improves teaching more than an understanding of what you are teaching. There are no teaching methods or classroom gimmicks that can substitute for knowledge of your subject. Let me cite just one example. In recent years, we have heard a lot about being facilitators or discussion leaders; this method has its place, but it is no substitute for teaching. It is not the way Christ taught; it is not the way Joseph Smith taught; it is not the way my father taught; it is not the way anyone of whom we read in the scriptures taught. In my judgment, class discussions should center on how the principles taught can best be applied or how we can help each other better understand them, but it is the role of the teacher to first clearly enunciate those principles. Gospel principles are not negotiable, nor are they to be determined by the class or its most vocal member. The principles should be as clear to the teacher when he or she goes into the classroom as they are when the teacher comes out of it. If you are prepared to teach, the Holy Ghost will be the best source of your methodology. No two classes will be the same any more than two people will be the same. They have different personalities and different needs. For the most part, you will discover how to respond to those differences in the classroom—and not before you get there. This is the miracle of teaching. It belongs to you as a teacher and should not be surrendered to technology, mythology, or a curriculum writer.
In 2011, the Christian world will celebrate the quartocentennial of the publication of the King James translation of the English Bible. The King James Version (KJV) has survived well and continues to stand as one of the most nearly literal English translations. But as with all translations, its rendition of the language of the Bible is useful only “as far as it is translated correctly” (Articles of Faith 1:8). Accordingly, Church scholars continually revisit original texts and seek to uncover the full meaning of any passage of scripture. In this brief note, we hope to alert readers to a few of these problems so they can be aware of these potential trouble spots.

Modern-day readers of the KJV may have difficulties understanding the intended meaning for a number of reasons and on many different levels. For one thing, since 1611, the English language has changed significantly (as all language does with time). In fact, some of the words in the KJV have dropped entirely out of modern English. On some occasions, these words are simple, and the 1611 meaning may not seem to significantly alter the interpretation of the text today; but in other passages, even a slight misunderstanding of what one word means changes the doctrine significantly.

In addition, the translators in King James’s court were Shakespeare’s contemporaries, and they spoke or were influenced by Elizabethan English or the older English used by Tyndale and other early Bible translators. Thus, modern readers of the King James Version encounter some of the same obscure words and language as
do readers of Shakespeare or Chaucer. Some expressions in the KJV assume a high vocabulary level. Words such as “propitiation” (Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2, meaning “atonement”) or “stanched” (Luke 8:44, meaning “stood still”), for example, may press the vocabulary limits and patience especially of some young readers.

Inaccurate translation is another stumbling block to correct understanding, and many readers will totally miss these errors. These words may have a perfectly clear meaning in English today but do not quite convey the actual meaning of the words in the original Greek New Testament writings. For example, virtues listed in 1 Timothy 3:2–4 and Titus 1:7–9 that should be exemplified by a bishop might better be translated “attentive” (instead of “vigilant”), “prudent” (instead of “sober”), “righteous” (not “just”), “a friend to strangers or foreigners” (not “a lover of hospitality”), and “not autocratic” (instead of “not self-willed”). Significant practical and ethical distinctions turn on how these Greek virtues are understood and applied.

Other times, readers think they understand a word but fail to realize what it actually meant two thousand years ago. Thus, the word “lamp” is perfectly understandable today, but if a person thinks of a modern electric lamp, he or she will have a difficult time making any sense of the ten virgins putting oil in their lamps.

In this short vocabulary lesson, we will look at problem words that fall into just two of these categories: first, words that are now archaic and usually unfamiliar, especially to younger readers; and second, words that are easily misunderstood because their usages have shifted. Some of these meanings may be obvious or clear enough from their context, but others may be interesting or obscure enough to deserve particular attention and explanation.

Archaic Words

Some of the KJV’s words are archaic and unfamiliar to modern readers. Fortunately, these are relatively rare. There are not too many of these unknown words to deal with. Here is a compilation of such KJV words used in the New Testament:

**Anon.** In its earliest usage, it meant “straightway,” “at once,” “forthwith,” or “instantly.” Servants also said it in reply to a command, meaning: “Immediately! Presently! I’m coming!” (Matthew 13:20; Mark 1:30).

**To assay.** It means “to try on” (clothing, gloves, and so on), “to try or examine” (as in a courtroom), “to attempt” with the connotation of being tempted, or, as in Saul’s case, “to try” or “to attempt” (Acts 9:26).
Divers. *Divers* in Elizabethan times meant “various” or “several,” but as opposed to *diverse*, it does not imply being different (Mark 8:3).

Draught (pronounced “draft”). This refers to the disciples’ act of “drawing in” a fishing net (Luke 5:4). However, it has a very different meaning in Matthew 15:17, where “draught” refers to an “outhouse” or “privy.”

Fair shew. This phrase refers to a “plausible” or “pleasing pretense” (Galatians 6:12).

Goodman of the house. The Latin term for *goodman* is *pater familias*, which means “man of the house” or “householder.” However, the root of the Greek word for *goodman* is the same as the word *despot*, likely implying a negative or tyrannical rule of the house (Matthew 24:43).

To hale. Not often used in modern discourse, *to hale* means to “drag,” “pull,” or “draw away from” with force or violence. Thus, in Acts 8:3, Saul was not merely summoning the men and women to jail but was physically dragging them with force.

Halt. In the context of Matthew 18:8, “halt” is coupled with “maimed,” and the two words’ meanings are subtly differentiated. “Halt” means “lame” or “crippled,” whereas “maimed” is used to describe mutilation or deformity.

To list. It means “to wish” or “to desire” something, much as the words *wish* and *want* today. One could “list” to taste a certain food or “list” to go to sleep when tired (Matthew 17:12).

Mote. In Matthew 7:3, the Savior is referring to a “minute particle,” “speck,” or “chip”—as small as flecks seen floating in a beam of light. It can also be used figuratively, referring to a “fault” or “blemish.”

To set at nought. When Herod “set Christ at nought,” it was not just an inconsequential brush-off (Luke 23:11). The Greek word means literally “from nothing.” In this sense, “to set at nought” means to “value at nothing” or “despise.” In its noun form, *nought* refers to “something that does not exist.”

To redound. When Paul teaches “that the abundant grace might... redound to the glory of God,” he means “to overflow” or “to abound” (2 Corinthians 4:15).

To shew again. Christ told his disciples to “shew again,” “to report,” “bring tidings” (from a person or a thing), or “make known openly” (Matthew 11:4).

Sore. This is used here as an adverb to intensify the Apostles’ fear (Matthew 17:6). Some synonyms are “very,” “exceedingly,” “extremely,” and “severely.”

To straiten. The servant in this parable feels “straitened,” which
means “confined” or “pressed upon” on every side (Luke 12:50).

To trow. Like the German word trauen, it means “to trust.” In this context, it is used as a dialogue additive meaning to “think,” “believe,” or “suppose” (Luke 17:9).

Ware. This is basically a shortened version of aware, with the same implicit meaning. It also denotes a conscious or cautious “awareness” (2 Timothy 4:15).

Wist. Christ rebukes his mother, “Wist ye not?” meaning “didn’t you know?” (Luke 2:49). This word comes from the English verb to wit, meaning “to know” in the sense of knowing some fact, perceiving, or discerning.

Wot. This is the first and third person present form of wit, meaning here “I know” (Acts 3:17).

Misunderstood Words

Even more problematic, however, are the words that people think they understand but in reality do not. These words are particularly troublesome because one proceeds with a misplaced sense of confidence. When readers come across the words in the following set, they need to do a double take. They need to stop and reprocess these words. They might look familiar, but they are being used in an unfamiliar way. These English words may or may not reflect the meaning of the underlying Greek. Here are a few words in this category:

To adventure. When Paul would not “adventure himself into the theatre” in Ephesus, it means he would not “give himself” or allow himself to go there (Acts 19:31).

To approve. As used in Phillipians 1:10, this word means to “test,” “evaluate,” and “learn,” as well as to “approve.”

Convenient. The things that are “not convenient” in Ephesians 5:4 are things that are “unbecoming, unseemly, improper.”

Couch. This is a bed, not a piece of furniture found in one’s living room (Luke 5:19).

Emulation. By preaching to the Gentiles, Paul wishes to “provoke [some of the Jews] to emulation,” which means that he wants to make them zealously jealous (Romans 11:14).

Hard. When one building was “hard to” another, it meant that they shared an adjoining wall (Acts 18:7).

Instant. This word can have a lot of meanings. Jesus’s accusers were “instant with loud voices,” meaning “insistent” (Luke 23:23). When Paul exhorts people to “continue instant in prayer,” the word means “persistent” (Romans 12:12). When people besought Jesus “instantly,”
it means “urgently” or “hopefully” (Luke 7:4). When the tribes of Israel served God “instantly,” it means “constantly” (Acts 26:7).

**Lewdness.** Today, this is defined as personal immorality or wickedness. In its earlier usage, however, *lewdness* meant “ignorance” or “unlearnedness,” either because of ill-breeding or foolishness (Acts 18:14).

**Mansions.** In the Father’s house (His temple, which models His heavenly realms) are many “resting places” or “dwelling places,” but these places are not necessarily large and spacious (John 14:2).

**To observe.** When Herod “observed” John the Baptist (Mark 6:20), the Greek word may have meant that Herod “protected” him, “kept him in mind,” or “was concerned about him.”

**To occupy.** The servants were not just to occupy the property but to “get doing” or “manage” it, as in a business occupation (Luke 19:13).

**To open.** In Acts 17:3, this means to “explain,” as in opening up one’s understanding.

**Particular.** “In particular,” as members of the body of Christ, means “individually,” not “especially” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

**Peculiar.** Being a “peculiar people” does not mean being weird but being “distinctive,” especially in the sense of being “peculiar to someone”—in other words, “belonging to,” as a personal possession (1 Peter 2:9).

**Perfection.** To bring “fruit to perfection” in Luke 8:14 means “to maturity.” The word *perfect* usually refers to completion or finishing rather than being without error or defect.

**Pitiful.** Fortunately, when the Lord is “very pitiful,” it does not mean pathetic, but “compassionate, tenderhearted,” having pity on us, being full of sympathy (James 5:11).

**To pray.** “We pray you” means “we beseech you,” or “we implore you” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

**To prevent.** When Jesus entered the house, He did not “prevent” Peter, but He “spoke to him first” or “stood in front of him” (Matthew 17:25). In King James’s time, the word simply meant “to come before” or “to act before.”

**To provoke.** This phrase originally meant “to call forth.” When we are to “provoke” one another to good works, this does not mean that we should annoy, but “to call forth, to challenge” (Hebrews 10:24). The Latin “provacere” means “to call forth.”

**Seal.** In scripture, this word usually does not mean “to close,” as in licking and sealing an envelope, but to close and to stamp with an official seal or impression.

**Several.** As used in the parable of the talents, each person was given
an amount according to his “several ability,” not “several abilities.” This means that the Lord gave certain amounts to people according to their “individual abilities” (Matthew 25:15). When two people are obligated under a legal liability that is “joint and several,” this means that they can be held liable together, each for his or her own share, or “severally, individually,” each for the whole amount. The word “several” in Matthew 25:15 is used in this sense.

Spent. When Paul says that he “will very gladly spend and be spent for you,” he says that he will “spend money freely and be completely used up” in the service of his brothers and sisters (2 Corinthians 12:15).

Thought. In saying “take no thought for your life,” the words in the Sermon on the Mount actually mean, “don’t be worried for the sake of your soul” (Matthew 6:25). The point is not that we should not think about our body or our soul but that we need not worry about our temporal or spiritual needs when God is looking after them.

Virtue. When “virtue” went out of Jesus (Luke 8:46), He did not become less virtuous. In this case, “virtue” is the translation for the Greek dynamis (“power”), the Latin word for “strength” in this verse being “virtutem.”

Worship. Being promised to “have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee” (Luke 14:10) means to “have the respect or esteem” of the people who eat together with you, your companions, or close associates.

Conclusion and Outlook

Word studies are important building blocks in our ability to read and understand the scriptures. Without too much difficulty, readers can notice the few archaic words in the KJV and learn their meaning. More effort is required to detect words that appear to be clear and readily understood but, in reality, say something quite different or even unexpected.

A few short studies of Greek New Testament words have been published in the Ensign, but much more work of this nature remains to be done to sharpen our understanding of all the many truths contained in this crucial collection of scriptures. Progress is now being made toward the eventual publication of a multivolume commentary on the New Testament, published at Brigham Young University, covering every word and phrase in these writings from the early Apostles and disciples who followed the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the meridian of time. That project promises to bring to light the meaning of many obscure words and phrases in the New Testament, thereby helping to illuminate and clarify the venerable wording of the King James Version of the Bible.
Archaic Words

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<td>to assay</td>
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<tr>
<td>draught</td>
<td>the act of drawing a net</td>
<td>Luke 5:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>draught</td>
<td>an outhouse, privy</td>
<td>Matt. 15:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair shew</td>
<td>a plausible pretense</td>
<td>Gal. 6:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goodman</td>
<td>man of the house, householder</td>
<td>Matt. 24:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to hale</td>
<td>to drag, draw, pull</td>
<td>Acts 8:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>halt</td>
<td>crippled, deformed</td>
<td>Matt. 18:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to list</td>
<td>to wish, will, desire</td>
<td>Matt. 17:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mote</td>
<td>a speck, chip</td>
<td>Matt. 7:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to set at nought</td>
<td>to value at nothing, despise</td>
<td>Luke 23:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to redound</td>
<td>to abound, overflow</td>
<td>2 Cor. 4:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to shew again</td>
<td>to report</td>
<td>Matt. 11:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sore</td>
<td>very, exceedingly, extremely, severely</td>
<td>Matt. 17:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to straiten</td>
<td>to make tense, confine</td>
<td>Luke 12:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to trow</td>
<td>to think, believe, suppose</td>
<td>Luke 17:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ware</td>
<td>aware, conscious, cautious</td>
<td>2 Tim. 4:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wist</td>
<td>knew, perceived, discerned</td>
<td>Luke 2:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wot</td>
<td>know, perceive, discern</td>
<td>Acts 3:17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Familiar Words with Unexpected Meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to adventure</td>
<td>to arrive, happen</td>
<td>Acts 19:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amazed</td>
<td>afraid, confounded, bewildered</td>
<td>Mark 6:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to approve</td>
<td>to test</td>
<td>Philip 1:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>convenient</td>
<td>becoming, seemly, proper</td>
<td>Eph. 5:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couch</td>
<td>bed</td>
<td>Luke 5:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dog</td>
<td>person who is wicked in some way</td>
<td>Rev. 22:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emulation</td>
<td>envy, jealousy</td>
<td>Rom. 11:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>close, near</td>
<td>Acts 18:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>instant</td>
<td>insistent</td>
<td>Luke 23:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instant</td>
<td>persistent</td>
<td>Rom. 12:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instantly</td>
<td>urgently, hopefully</td>
<td>Luke 7:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instantly</td>
<td>constantly</td>
<td>Acts 26:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lewdness</td>
<td>ignorant, unlearned</td>
<td>Acts 18:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mansion</td>
<td>dwelling or resting place</td>
<td>John 14:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to observe</td>
<td>to protect, to be concerned about</td>
<td>Mark 6:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to occupy</td>
<td>to negotiate, manage</td>
<td>Luke 19:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to open</td>
<td>to expound, interpret, explain</td>
<td>Acts 17:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in particular</td>
<td>individually</td>
<td>1 Cor. 12:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passion</td>
<td>suffering</td>
<td>Acts 1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peculiar</td>
<td>distinctive, belonging to</td>
<td>1 Pet. 2:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perfection</td>
<td>maturity</td>
<td>Luke 8:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pitiful</td>
<td>compassionate, tenderhearted</td>
<td>James 5:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to pray</td>
<td>to beseech, implore</td>
<td>2 Cor. 5:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to prevent</td>
<td>to question</td>
<td>Matt. 17:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to provoke</td>
<td>to call forth, challenge, incite</td>
<td>Heb. 10:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to seal</td>
<td>to stamp with official seal or impression</td>
<td>John 3:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>several</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>Matt. 25:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spent</td>
<td>consumed</td>
<td>2 Cor. 12:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strait</td>
<td>narrow, strict</td>
<td>Matt. 7:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to tax</td>
<td>to register or enroll in a list</td>
<td>Luke 2:1–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thought</td>
<td>worry, anxiety, melancholy</td>
<td>Matt. 6:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virtue</td>
<td>power or energy in a miraculous sense</td>
<td>Luke 8:46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worship</td>
<td>honor or respect</td>
<td>Luke 14:10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

1. Several of these trouble spots have been detected and discussed by others. Footnotes in the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible cover some of these words. Sources for this article include Dewey M. Beegle, *God’s Word into English* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1960); Ronald Bridges and Luther A. Weigle, *The Bible Word Book* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960); Alan S. Duthie, *How to Choose Your Bible Wisely*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995); Melvin

Jesus Praying in Gethsemane, painting by Harry Anderson

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Why Is Abba in the New Testament?

Paul Y. Hoskisson

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What is the Aramaic word abba doing in the Greek New Testament, and what does it signify? It appears in Mark 14:36 and in two other verses. Specifically, the question has been raised whether abba means something formal and respectful, like “father,” or something more intimate and familiar, like “daddy.” Early twentieth-century scholarship and some contemporary, popular notions point to the latter. More recent academic literature points to the former. I will suggest that abba is both deeply intimate and profoundly respectful. But first I will give a very brief overview of the academic literature. Then, I will discuss why I think the scholarly evidence used to justify both the familiar and the formal positions misses the mark. I will conclude that the correct interpretation of abba grows out of Christ’s relationship with His Father and not from any linguistic analysis.

In the last century, the biblical scholar Joachim Jeremias proposed and made popular the view that abba “had a very familiar and intimate tone,” based less on the passage and more on his understanding of the origin of the Aramaic word. “In other words, putting this into English, it was somewhat like saying ‘Daddy,’ though Jeremias seems to have stopped short of saying this explicitly” and later in his life even repudiated any use of “Daddy.” Nevertheless, explicit or not, Jeremias and his followers seem to be responsible for the current fashion of translating abba as “daddy.” This popular view prompted James Barr to publish an article in which he demonstrated that abba cannot mean “daddy” but can mean only “father.” Let us look at the historical and linguistic evidence.
In Mark 14:36 and in the other two Greek New Testament occurrences, *abba* (αββα in Greek) is followed by the Greek translation *ho patér* (ὁ πατήρ), literally, “the father.” No one questions the fact that both the Greek and the Aramaic words have something to do with the word for “father/daddy.” It is also clear from the context that Christ was addressing His “Father.” Therefore, regardless of what the particular grammatical form may be, the only possible translation of both the Aramaic and Greek words is as a vocative—that is, as “O Father/O Daddy,” or “my Father/my Papa,” or something similar, such as the King James Version “*Abba*, Father.” The only question that remains is, what are the forms?

*Abba* in Aramaic is a bit ambiguous because it can mean “the father” or even, as in later rabbinic sources, “my father” or “our father.” The Greek word is not quite as ambiguous as the Aramaic because it clearly means “the Father” or “my Father.” Thus, although it is not clear which exact grammatical meaning is to be attached to the Aramaic and the Greek words, it is clear that Mark records Christ as addressing God with an Aramaic and a Greek word that has something to do with “father/daddy.” But this does not help settle the issue of whether *abba* in Mark 14:36 means “father” or “daddy.”

It is my thesis that with regard to the question of whether *abba* means the rather formal “Father” or the decidedly familiar “Daddy,” any straightforward linguistic analysis of the form misses the mark. Whether *abba* is the familiar “Daddy” or the more formal “Father” depends rather on the manner in which languages express the familiar and the formal.

Early Modern English (the language used in the King James Bible) had both the grammatically familiar forms and the vocabulary to produce the sentence, “Daddy, hast thou a dollar?” In this sentence, “daddy” represents a familiar form of the word “father,” and “hast thou” is a grammatical form expressing familiarity. Thus, “Daddy, hast thou a dollar?” is doubly familiar. However, in contemporary English (Modern English), the grammatical familiar has all but disappeared, leaving only certain vocabulary words and colloquialisms to express familiar speech patterns, such as “Mommy, gimme a dollar,” where “Mommy” is familiar and “gimme” is a familiar colloquialism for “give me.”

Yet Modern English has retained some remnants of the grammatical formal “ye” and the grammatical familiar “thou” of Early Modern English literature, as is widely evident from a casual reading of Shakespeare. “Ye,” as the grammatical formal, was used when speaking with respect, usually to someone of superior rank. “Thou,” as the
grammatical familiar, was used when speaking with close friends, with close family members, and often with people of lower rank. By the time the King James translation was made, however, these forms had already begun to lose their formal and familiar usage. Today, with few exceptions, most speakers of Modern English are not acquainted with the grammatical formal and familiar as they were used in Middle and Early Modern English.

Aramaic and Greek have no grammatically familiar forms. To put this in terms of Early Modern English, there is no way in Aramaic or in Greek to make a distinction between the formal “ye/you” and the familiar “thou,”—that is, between “Can you help me?” and “Canst thou help me?” Therefore, the grammar of Aramaic and Greek cannot provide any evidence one way or the other about the formality or familiarity of the Greek text in which Aramaic 

When we examine vocabulary that can express familiarity, as far as written Aramaic is concerned (the only form of Aramaic we have from the New Testament period), we find that Aramaic has no separate words for “daddy” and “father.” Aramaic must use the same word, either ab or abba, both for the familiar and for the formal. Therefore, as with the grammatical forms just discussed, an appeal to Aramaic vocabulary cannot yield a definitive answer because, with only one word for both “daddy” and “father,” no distinctions can be made on the basis of word usage.

Unlike Aramaic but similar to English, Greek does have the vocabulary to make a distinction between “daddy” and “father.” Therefore, when Mark opted to render abba into Greek with the formal expression ho patér (ὁ πατήρ) he might have been attempting to indicate to his Greek-speaking audience that he believed abba was also a formal expression and not a familiar term of endearment.

The choice of a more formal Greek translation for abba may have settled the issue for Greek-speaking Christians. But the nuanced meanings of Aramaic abba cannot be definitively determined by an appeal to Greek vocabulary. In fact, it is extremely rare that a word in one language can be captured in all of its nuances by a single word in another language. The fact that Greek does have the vocabulary for both the familiar “daddy” and the formal “father” and that Aramaic does not means that any translation into Greek of Aramaic abba must decide whether to use the Greek familiar word or the formal word. The fact that a Greek translation is forced to decide between “daddy” and “father” tells us more about how the translator felt about the Aramaic than about any actual formality or familiarity of the Aramaic word.
In fact, the main problem that underlies the scholarly debate seems to be precisely the unspoken assumption that respect (formality) and intimacy (familiarity) are mutually exclusive—that is, a word or a phrase must be either familiar or formal. This either-or situation results less from any innate conflict between respect and intimacy and more from the blinders that modern scholars wear because of their knowledge of languages, such as English, that require a distinction with regard to the formal and the familiar. That is, if the modern languages a scholar knows make a distinction between familiar and formal, the scholar is forced to impose an interpretation on the text that is not present either in the grammar or vocabulary of the Aramaic or in the grammar of the Greek. Applying this to the text at hand, though *abba* is neither innately familiar nor formal, translators must render the word as familiar or formal in any target language, such as English, that makes a distinction between “daddy” and “father.” Such impositions cannot be avoided.

On the other hand, even though Aramaic lacks both the grammatical means and the vocabulary, it still seems very strange to me, even contrary to mortal experience, for Aramaic not to be able to express the familiarity and intimacy that exist in family settings. Surely Aramaic possessed means, both verbal and nonverbal, of expressing familiarity. Tone, intonation, posture, facial expressions, and other subtleties can be used to distinguish between formal and familiar speech, even in languages that already possess familiar and formal vocabulary and grammatical distinctions. Because these subtleties cannot be reduced to writing, any attempt to determine the formality or familiarity of *abba* on the basis of grammar or vocabulary must fail.

The only possible way to discern the nuances of *abba* must begin with an analysis of the context. In the case of Mark 14:36, only a correct understanding of who Christ was and the situation in which He used *abba* can lead to a correct understanding of the nuances attached to *abba*.

From the Latter-day Saint point of view, Christ was and is the Son of our Heavenly Father in a much more profound way than we are. As the Firstborn (see Hebrews 1:6) in our premortal existence and as the Only Begotten (see John 1:18) in mortality and the Son of the Highest (see Luke 1:32), Christ enjoyed a more intimate and personal relationship with our Heavenly Father while on this earth than any other mortal.

Christ is also at the same time the steward, or servant, of our God (see Jacob 5); and, as such, He is directed by and reports back to His God. In His role as “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2)—that is, as Savior and Redeemer—He was the executor or ser-
vant of the Father’s plan for His children, a role that no other mortal could have taken upon himself. As such, “the accomplishment of the Father’s will was never lost sight of as the object of the Son’s supreme desire” through the terrible ordeal of Gethsemane and Golgatha.19

Given the dual relationship between Christ and His Father,20 we can now turn to Christ’s use of abba in Mark 14:36. The context is within Christ’s “great intercessory prayer,” reported in more detail in John 17. In His role as the steward or Suffering Servant (see Isaiah 53) in God’s plan of redemption, Christ used abba in His final mortal report. It seems to me that in this context of a stewardship account, He would have used abba with the greatest of formal respect for His God. At the same time, as the Son, in His extreme hour of need, He also cried out to His Father. It seems to me that in this context as the Only Begotten Son, His use of abba is deeply intimate, the tender and personal expression of a Son to His Father at the time when His “suffering caused [Christ], even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (D&C 19:18).

Therefore, it may not be out of place to suggest that abba is at once profoundly respectful, the deferential language of the Servant reporting to His God, and at the same time is deeply intimate in a way that no other mortal could have used the word. Respect and familiarity seem to come together in abba. Perhaps the very reason that Mark retained the Aramaic word was to preserve the ambiguity that abba allowed—namely, the formal vocative “O Father!” and the familiar “My Father”—and thereby convey to the reader the respect that Christ had for His God and the intimacy He shared with His Father. 

Notes

Many colleagues and friends have read previous drafts of this paper. I wish to thank them for their always helpful and constructive comments. I especially appreciate the help I received from Wilfred Griggs, Thomas Wayment, and Eric Huntsman with my discussion of New Testament Greek.

1. The other two verses are Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. Because Romans and Galatians are either dependent on Mark, or Mark is dependent on Paul’s usage, or all three are dependent on a third source, such as early Christian liturgy, and because whatever I say about Mark can be applied to Romans and Galatians, I will not single out Paul’s usage of the term for independent treatment.


3. Barr, “‘Abba Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” 28. On the same page, Barr also states that “it was Jeremias who most insisted on the point, built it into a cornerstone of
his theological position, and repeated the arguments again and again.” Compare Geza Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 41–43, especially his statement in this context on page 41 that “much has been written about the significance of the use by Jesus of the title abba, especially by Jeremias and his followers.” See also The Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. A–C, 7.


5. Jeremias stated in his book, *Abba: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 63–64, that to assume abba is “the babble of a child addressing his Heavenly Father . . . would be an inadmissible bagatelle” (my translation).

6. Barr, “’Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” 28, “Few will question the assertion that Jeremias is the person behind the vogue of [translating ‘abbā as ‘Daddy.’] Perhaps some of the popularity of reading abba as “daddy” stems from Modern Hebrew usage. Because Hebrew lacks a word for “daddy,” the regular Aramaic word for “father,” abba was borrowed into Modern Hebrew with the nuance of “daddy.” This is, of course, a late construct and cannot be used as evidence that abba was used for “daddy” in the Hebrew or Aramaic of the New Testament period.

7. See Barr, “’Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” 28–47.


10. Even though the definite article is used, it can still be translated as if the possessive pronoun were there because, as in German and Spanish, it is usual in Greek that when the context is clear, the definite article can be used instead of the possessive pronoun. In contrast, English normally requires the possessive pronoun. Therefore, ὁ ζατήρ can be translated as “the father” or “my father,” depending on the context. In the case at hand, it is clear that Christ is addressing “His Father,” and therefore the translation “my Father” is proper. No doubt for this reason, Martin Luther in his German translation rendered the Greek as “mein Vater,” which remains the standard translation in the modern German Luther Bible.

11. There were always exceptions. In some titled circles in Europe, some parents required their children to address them with the formal but would reply to those same children in the familiar. In addition, it was considered an insult to address someone of higher rank with whom you were not intimately acquainted with “thou.” When a person was speaking with someone of lower rank, speaking in
the familiar could be seen as condescending, patronizing, or even insulting.

12. The King James Version translators seem to have simply used the familiar form “thou” in its various forms whenever the Hebrew or the Greek contained a singular and “ye” in its various forms whenever there was a plural. Thus, in the exchange between Paul and Agrippa in Acts 26, Paul and Agrippa both address each other with “thou,” even though much of the rest of Paul’s address to Agrippa is rather formal in its expression.

13. “You” in English (or, in Early Modern English, “ye”) is historically a plural form, and “thou” is historically singular. In Middle English, “ye” was used for the formal and “thou” was used for the familiar. The distinction I am making here, however, is not between plural and singular but between the familiar “thou” and the more formal “you.”

14. See Barr, “‘Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” 36.

15. Aramaic ab, ἀβ, and abba, ἀββα, are lexically identical, though in a strict sense, the former is indefinite and the latter is definite. As pointed out earlier, the latter can mean “the father,” “my father,” or “our father.” The former means simply “father.” Aramaic can also represent “my father” with abi, ἀβί.

16. Barr, “‘Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” 38, suggests, among other possibilities, παπάς.

17. All European languages with which I am familiar, except English, make grammatical distinctions between familiar and formal; and all, including English, make lexical distinctions.

18. I am aware that some Church members read Jacob 5 differently. Nevertheless, other texts clearly indicate that Christ is directed by and reports back to His Father.

19. James E. Talmage, Jesus the Christ (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915), 614. This passage is on page 569 in more recent printings.

20. Perhaps Christ alluded to these two relationships, His sonship and His stewardship, when after His resurrection He said to Mary, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). If a paraphrase of Paul is allowed, though Christ stood in a unique role as God’s Son, “yet [as the servant of God’s will] learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).
A passage from the Sermon on the Mount shows the use of italic text by the King James Version translators (1979 LDS edition).
The New Translation of the scriptures, known to Latter-day Saints as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) makes changes to the King James Version (KJV) on several different levels. The JST restores, edits, and changes. It restores original text that has been lost and restores what was once said but never became a part of the Bible. It edits the Bible to make it more understandable and to bring it into harmony with modern revelation. It changes the original text of the Bible from what was written by the original authors to reflect new light and understanding brought forward in the Restoration of the gospel. Therefore, the JST restores text and meaning, which are both revealed only in English translation with no restoration of actual words in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic.

To establish a relationship between the JST and the ancient texts of the New Testament, we made some preliminary considerations. First, what is the nature of the translation? In other words, do textual clues suggest that the JST is a new translation dealing with issues associated with the English-language translations familiar to the Prophet in his day, or should the JST be considered a restoration of ancient text? Admittedly, the JST likely does both of the above, but previous to this study, no criteria had been developed to distinguish the two types. Second, what views did Church leaders hold toward the accuracy of biblical text prior to and including the time the JST was completed?
A New Translation or a Restoration of Text?

This study will look at the first of these questions and provide a framework for understanding at least one special category of JST changes to the biblical text—the changes to the italicized verses. As we set out to answer this question, our initial inquiry led to the problem of the italicized words in our English translations of the Bible because there are no italicized words in the ancient manuscripts of the Bible, either in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. Therefore, the issue of the italicized words is exclusively an issue of the English translation of the Bible, including other modern translation languages as well.

The italicized words of the King James Version represent words and context that were provided by the translators that did not directly correspond to a Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic word in their manuscripts. These italicized words have perpetuated an aura of honesty on the part of the translators, who, many thought (based on the conclusions of earlier Protestant biblical scholarship), were so honest in their translation of the sacred text that they would not introduce a single word into the text without calling the reader’s attention to it. Unfortunately, this romantic reconstruction of the translation process may represent only one element of the introduction of italics into the biblical text. The significant inconsistencies on the part of the English translators of the Bible, including the KJV translators, reveals that at times the insertion of italics relied not entirely on honesty but also on previous conventions and impressions.

The 1611 KJV translators were not consistent with their introduction of italicized words. Had they been consistent in their translation, we could logically conjecture that they were completely forthcoming and honest to identify all insertions and additions to the Greek texts in their possession. They would, however, frequently represent one type of Greek construction by introducing an italicized word or words, but when that same construction was encountered later on they would not use an italicized word even though they would translate the passage in the same manner. Some of these inconsistencies can be ascribed to human error, but another portion is the direct result of the perceptions of the various committees of translators who worked on the KJV translation.

Several classic examples of this inconsistency can be found in Luke 17:27 with the phrase “and destroyed them all” while the exact same phrase is rendered two verses later as “and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:29). Another example of frequent inconsistency in the use of italics
in the KJV occurs in vocative constructions—where the subject commands, directs, or invokes—as seen in Luke 19 “thou good servant” (v. 17). A few verses later, a similar vocative statement is translated “thou wicked servant” (Luke 19:22). In both cases, the Greek employs the same construction for the noun and should be translated using italics in both. The issue facing the translators is that the Greek implies the “thou,” and in reading the text in Greek, readers do not have to supply the pronoun. Therefore, is it necessary to italicize a word indicated by the Greek construction but not explicitly stated? Apparently, the answer is sometimes yes and sometimes no.

Typically, the italicized words of the KJV represent one of five categories: (1) supplying implied pronouns; (2) adding the verb to copular constructions—the implied use of the verb “to be”; (3) dealing with elliptical constructions—where a noun is implied such as “things” or “day” to make sense; (4) adding indefinite articles where Greek has none; or (5) working with vocative constructions—such as “Ye” in “Ye fools”—where Greek has only the noun. This is not an exhaustive list of all uses of the italics in the KJV text; however, it clearly demonstrates that the use of italics is an attempt by the translators to represent subtleties of Greek grammatical constructions.

**Joseph Smith’s Views on the Accuracy of the Bible**

The Prophet Joseph Smith became part of this biblical tradition as a youth. He learned from early experience that English translations of the Bible contained flaws and expressed this sentiment on a number of occasions, “From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled.” He later taught, “I believe the Bible, as it ought to be, as it came from the pen of the original writers.” The Lord shared the same sentiment when He told the Prophet, “A commandment I give unto thee—that thou shalt write for him; and the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect” (D&C 35:20; emphasis added).

Most likely the Bible of Joseph Smith’s youth was the Authorized Version, or as Americans have called it, the King James Version. This Bible, however, was not without flaws, and in the minds of early Church leaders, there was room for improvement. The early Saints expressed concern for the accuracy of the text of the Bible, and although we do not possess the initial revelation and direction to begin the New
Translation, we can see that the need to retranslate was perceived in the Church in the 1830s.\textsuperscript{13}

Unfortunately, no direct statement can be attributed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that would clarify his approach or mindset when he began the New Translation. Several statements from the period when the JST was nearing completion do, however, provide valuable context and may reflect what the Prophet Joseph Smith was teaching publicly in the months prior to the completion of the New Translation. For example, he taught, “The book of Mormon, as a revelation from God, possesses some advantage over the old scripture: it has not been tinctured by the wisdom of man, with here and there an Italic word to supply deficiencies.”\textsuperscript{14} And again, “The old and new testaments are filled with errors, obscurities, italics and contradictions, which must be the work of men.”\textsuperscript{15} A later statement by John Taylor or Wilford Woodruff reflects the continuing concern felt for the accuracy of the King James translation and the issue of the italicized words.

Much has been said about the bad translations of the Bible. . . . Every school boy seems to know that when either of the sectarian translators failed in making the two ends of a sentence meet, he filled up the vacuity with \textit{italic}, by which means God has been greatly helped towards expressing himself so as to be understood by the learned world. . . . If their thoughts should not happen to be God’s thoughts, it is a matter of fact that the mother of harlots holds in her hands a golden cup full of the filthiness of her abominations.\textsuperscript{16}

Certainly a significant issue facing the early Church was the accuracy of the translation of the Bible. The Saints had a living prophet who could translate ancient records; therefore, they may have felt it expedient that they also have the most accurate translation of the Bible as they did with the Book of Mormon. The work on the New Translation began in earnest in June 1830 and was declared finished on July 2, 1833.

The intellectual environments of the late New York, Kirtland, and early Missouri periods reflect a significant concern regarding the accuracy of the English translation they were using. Unfortunately, statements by early Church leaders begin to appear toward the end of the period when the JST was nearing completion or already completed. They may reflect more of what the Prophet learned in the process rather than what he sought to accomplish prior to beginning the New Translation.

By the time the Prophet began work on the New Testament, he had already gained a considerable amount of experience in translating the biblical text from his work on the Old Testament. Neither Joseph Smith
nor any other Church leader, to our knowledge, spoke of the New Translation in terms of the restoration of lost text but instead referred to it as a restoration of “meaning,” “intent,” or “correction of error.”

The Prophet realized early in his career that Moroni had quoted scriptures differently than they were recorded in his Bible, that some things in the Bible disagreed with newer revelations, and that the Book of Mormon prophesied of the corruption of the Bible. Our most accurate appraisal of the events surrounding the impetus to begin the New Translation suggests that it restores meaning to the text. In that process, the Prophet certainly did restore meaning, and as the following data will suggest, an important part of the JST would be a corrective effort to emend the KJV. In that process, the Prophet also restored many truths that cannot simply be considered part of the correction of the English text of the Bible. Whether he began the New Translation with the restoration of text in mind is impossible to tell. Our data will show that the New Translation of the New Testament focused heavily on issues associated with the English translation and that, likely as an outgrowth of this effort, it restored many plain and precious truths that go back to the original texts. A future publication on the JST will present evidence to support our belief that the JST also restores lost text.

**The JST and the Italicized Words of the Gospels—A Test Case**

The Bible used by Joseph Smith to carry out the work of the New Translation was an 1828 stereotyped edition published by H. & E. Phinney, Cooperstown, New York. Its text is in almost all particulars identical to the 1979 Latter-day Saint edition of the KJV. However, there are slight variations in the number and content of the italicized words, and therefore the following results are based solely on the 1828 Phinney edition. The study is limited to the Gospels because the number and consistency of the italicized words vary greatly beginning with Acts and continuing through Revelation—a direct result of a change in translators of the KJV.

The four Gospels in the 1828 Phinney Bible contain 1,628 italicized words ranging in length from “a” to “righteousness.” The italicized words are not all of equal value. The vast majority of the italicized words, perhaps as many as 90 percent, are implied in the Greek without any reservation. Therefore, in our test case, we grouped the italicized words into three categories. The first category (A) consists of all those italicized words that should be supplied without reservation based on the Greek syntax and grammar. The second category (B) contains all those places where the KJV translators included a word or phrase based
on a variant reading or a reading that differed from the Greek Textus Receptus that was used in the KJV translation. The third category (C) includes those instances where the translators supplied words or phrases that were foreign to the Greek grammar and syntax and, in some cases, alter the meaning of the Greek text dramatically. Category A is by far the largest and includes 1,410 words. Category B is the smallest, with 35 words. Category C contains 183 words. These categories are derived from a careful comparison of the Greek and English KJV translation and are not based on previous scholarship.

The Prophet Joseph Smith treated the italicized words in three different ways: he either (1) altered them, including the alteration of the italicized words into a new context; (2) removed them entirely—in some instances altering other words and context within the verse and at other times not altering the verse in which they appear, or (3) simply retained them as they were recorded in the KJV text. The JST manuscripts do not employ any means of identifying the italicized words that were retained. An italicized font is a feature of the printed word and not the handwritten; therefore, the italicized words, when retained, do not appear in the JST manuscripts differently than any other words. The Prophet did not indicate whether his retention of an italicized word meant that the word should be considered accurate. He also did not clarify whether the New Translation would continue to italicize words when it was printed, but the earliest publications of JST materials did not use italics.

We wanted to determine whether the New Translation dealt particularly with the italicized words and therefore with the issue of the English translation. If a significant number of JST changes revolved around the italicized words, then the conclusion could be drawn that the italicized words created a starting point for changes. If an insignificant number of italicized words were altered or removed, then the Prophet’s work in the New Translation at times coincided with the italicized words but did not necessarily focus on them. Our hypothesis was that Joseph Smith was drawn to the italicized words and that he viewed their accuracy with suspicion.

We also noted one other significant point in our test case. Up to John 5:47, the Prophet Joseph Smith had his scribes write out the entire text of the New Testament with Joseph Smith reading the text to them out loud. He then made changes to the text as he read it, but he also made subsequent changes after the original dictation—a fact signaled by the many cross outs and erasures beyond corrections of spelling and grammar. At John 6:1, however, the Prophet’s scribes
ceased to write out the entire text with changes. Joseph Smith began marking insertion points for corrections in his Bible and dictated the altered text to his scribes, who wrote the new words in a separate manuscript. The number of minor JST changes decreases dramatically at John 6, and therefore our data reflect this change in procedure.

If we include all four Gospel accounts, the JST alters 29 percent of all italicized words, removes an additional 21 percent, and retains just under 50 percent. By combining the first two percentages, we see that the JST changes slightly more than 50 percent of all italicized words in the four Gospels. This figure, however, does not include differentiation between the three categories of italicized words. When the three types of italicized words are factored in, we find that category A words—that is, words that were supplied based on the Greek syntax or grammar—were altered 29 percent of the time, removed 20 percent of the time, and retained 51 percent of the time. For category A italicized words, there is no significant differentiation from the overall percentages.

For category B italicized words—words that were supplied on the basis of textual variants—34 percent were altered, 17 percent were removed, and 49 percent were retained. Thus, 52 percent of all category B italicized words were either altered or removed, a percentage that is
not significantly different than the overall percentage for the four Gospels. However, for category C italicized words—those words that were supplied that distinctively alter the meaning of the Greek text—nearly 35 percent were altered, 28 percent were removed, and 37 percent were retained. Altogether, nearly 63 percent of all category C italicized words were changed or altered, indicating that they received significantly greater attention by the Prophet during the compilation of the JST.²⁶

**Comparison of Two Sections (Matthew 1:1–John 5:47 and John 6:1–21:25)**

We subjected the data to further testing by dividing the test group into two sections based on the natural division created when the scribes ceased writing out the entire manuscript and began including only those verses that contained changes.²⁷ The only significant change in the data was the increase in the percentage of changes to category C italicized words, indicating that for Matthew 1:1–John 5:47, the Prophet changed the italicized words more often. That procedure may reflect a trend in the JST toward a more textual-oriented approach rather than an English-language-only approach. The suggestion made by the data is that category C italicized words were of greater concern by the Prophet in the process of creating the JST.

In the material for John 6:1–21:25, only 4 percent of category A words were altered, 2 percent were removed, and 94 percent were retained. No category B words exist for this subset, but category C italicized words were altered 3 percent of the time, removed 10 percent of the time, and retained over 87 percent of the time, a stark change from the Matthew 1:1–John 5:47 section. Obviously, the JST initiated a new approach to the text beginning with John 6, changing only 17 italicized words out of a total 238.

We then subjected the above data to further testing to determine whether the dramatic shift in percentage was significant for our study. Because we had determined the categories before collecting the data, we ran the risk of predetermining the outcome of our test. We subjected the data to a probability test using a generalized linear model test to determine whether there was a significant change over time—determined by the natural progression from subset one (Matthew 1:1–John 5:47) to subset two (John 6:1–21:25)—in comparison to the differences in types of italicized words. What we wanted to determine was whether there was a significant difference in the way the Prophet treated the first subset versus the second subset, which we called the progression of time. Joseph Smith worked sequentially through the
New Testament, and therefore time is an important consideration. We also knew that the percentages of changed italicized words were different for the two subsets, but we needed to know whether the Prophet treated the types of italics differently than he had previously, even though he changed them less often.

Again, we determined that a p-value less than or equal to $\alpha (\alpha = 0.05)$ would indicate that there was not a significant difference in the way the JST treated categories A, B, and C over time. Surprisingly, we determined that there was not a significant difference in how the sources (p-value .0478) were treated over time (p-value < .0001) and that the comparison of source versus time was an insignificant comparison, meaning that the JST treats both sections similarly but with varying frequency. In simple terminology, Joseph Smith did not treat the italicized words in a significantly different manner over time, even though the percentages decrease dramatically for the subsets of Matthew 1:1–John 5:47 and John 6:1–21:25.

Conclusion

The overall effect of our study was to determine statistically, if possible, what percentage of the JST dealt with the KJV text on the issue of translation and what percentage may feasibly be considered to do other things such as restore lost text, restore meaning, or teach more complete doctrine. The tests that we conducted determined conclusively that the JST does focus on the issue of the English translation roughly 50 percent of the time when italics are present, indicating that half of all JST changes can be considered issues associated with correcting the English translation.\(^2\) However, these data also indicate that 50 percent of all JST changes do not fall into the category of English translation—at least at the level of the italicized words.

We also sought to determine whether there was any differentiation in how the Prophet treated the different types of italicized words. Our results indicate that Joseph Smith was significantly more likely to alter a category C italicized word—a word supplied in error—than he was to alter a category A italicized word—a word that was supplied from syntax or grammar. The importance of this information for our study is twofold. First, it helps substantiate the claim that Joseph Smith was concerned about the accuracy of the KJV English, and second, it reveals that the JST offers more than a new English translation. Our further testing may be able to reveal how the JST relates to ancient manuscripts of the New Testament.

Joseph Smith did indeed have concerns about the accuracy and
validity of the KJV translation. He did not approach the text as inerrant; and, in fact, his work on the Bible reveals a profound concern that it needed correction. There can be no doubt that the KJV formed part of God’s preparatory work in bringing about the restoration of the Gospel, but the Prophet approached the issue with caution and concern. He sought to correct it, and he altered it freely according to the inspiration given him. He gave us no indication that it was an infallible text.

A similar sentiment can be found throughout the early years of the Church in Salt Lake City. In 1852, after returning from a mission in Europe, Elder John Taylor gave a public report of his success and efforts there. He also took the occasion to comment on the accuracy of the Bible, a result of being exposed to various translations, saying, “I believe the English Bible is translated as well as any book could be by uninspired men.”

Elder Orson Pratt taught shortly after the publication of the *Inspired Version* by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ), “One thing is certain, King James’s translators, being among the wisest men and greatest scholars of their day, did justice to the subject as far as it was possible by uninspired men.”

Elder George A. Smith was perhaps the most decisive on the issue of the KJV translation being uninspired. He taught, “You will remember that not one among this body of learned divines even professed to have the inspiration of God upon him.”

President Brigham Young also dealt with the issue, offering a ray of hope for the KJV, stating, “If it [the Bible] be translated incorrectly, and there is a scholar on the earth who professes to be a Christian, and he can translate it any better than King James’s translators did it, he is under obligation to do so, or the curse is upon him. . . . But I think it is translated just as correctly as the scholars could get it, although it is not correct in a great many instances.”

A more favorable view can be traced to President J. Reuben Clark Jr.’s *Why the King James Version*:

It is the author’s hope that his Notes (contained herein) will help our people who may read them to a renewed confidence in the King James Version, and so to a firmer testimony of the Messiahship of Jesus, by indicating to them that we may rely, as substantially declaring the Word of God, upon the great text of the King James Version, corrupted though it is from the original texts of the Sacred Autographs, . . . especially where that Version is supported by the uncompleted Inspired Version of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

President Clark was responding to the increasingly hostile claims being made by Protestant scholars on the issue of the validity of the
Bible. The twentieth century also witnessed a proliferation of Bible translations where many secular Bible study programs were beginning to move away from using the KJV and instead were using new translations thought to be more correct. President Clark argued that the KJV was part of the language of the Restoration and that it is literarily superior to other translations. The context of his statements suggests that he was arguing for the retention of the KJV among Latter-day Saints and against the trend of secular scholars who were arguing against its accuracy.

Many important reasons exist for continuing to use the KJV, including its beautifully crafted prose, its similarity to the language of the Restoration, its part as a building block of the Restoration, and the use of KJV language in the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages and elsewhere. These important reasons do not force the conclusion that the KJV text is infallible or better than the original texts of the Bible. The JST bears solemn witness to the simple fact that the English of the KJV needed improvement so that the translation of the scriptures would reflect them “even as they are in [God’s] own bosom” (D&C 35:20).

Notes
2. The origin of the italicized words in English translations of the Bible can be traced to Sebastian Münster (AD 1489–1552), who introduced them into his Latin translation to indicate differences between his text and Pagnini’s previous Latin translation. Coverdale used the Münster text, which in turn influenced the English translation known as the Great Bible. Coverdale, however, introduced a second type of italics into the text, those that represented changes made in the Latin text but not found in the Greek. This dual usage of the italics, to indicate words that are not in the original and to identify alternate readings, is found in the King James Version (see Walter F. Specht, “Italics in the English Bible,” Andrews University Seminary Studies 6 [1968]: 88–93).
3. The tradition of including italicized words in English translations of the Bible is nearly obsolete today, except to show chapter headings and to indicate emphasis. Today almost all modern translations have done away with the practice
of including italicized words because they are almost entirely unnecessary and often confuse the modern reader of the Bible. The New Revised Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version are a few of the most important modern translations to cease using italics. The only Bibles to continue the practice are the New American Standard Bible and the New King James Version (see Walter F. Specht, “Italics in the English Bible,” 93).

4. Joseph Smith’s later study of biblical languages cannot be considered part of his efforts to translate the Bible. He did not begin any serious study of ancient languages prior to the Kirtland period and therefore almost certainly relied on pure inspiration rather than on his abilities with the ancient texts in their original languages.

5. For example, see Robert J. Matthews, Selected Writings of Robert J. Matthews (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 22), who states that “the italics enable the reader to distinguish between words found in the manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament that actually translate into English, and words that were necessarily added to make sense in English. This is a sign of the honesty of the translators, who wished to point out such places in their work.”

6. The use of italicized words varies greatly among the different editions of the KJV. The modern italicized words are based primarily on a nineteenth-century edition of the KJV.

7. Six separate committees worked individually on different portions of the Bible to complete the KJV translation. The committees incorporated italics differently into their translations, with some relying more on previous traditions and others relying more heavily on grammatical considerations (see Bruce Metzger, The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001], 70–80).


10. This statement was made six months before the completion of the JST (see History of the Church, 1:245). Other important statements follow: “After telling me these things, he [Moroni] commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament. . . . Instead of quoting the first verse as it reads in our books, he quoted it thus” (Joseph Smith—History 1:36). “Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understanding, and the true meaning and intention of the more mysterious passages revealed unto us” (Joseph Smith—History 1:49). “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God” (Articles of Faith 1:8). “I am now going to take exceptions to the present translation of the Bible in relation to these matters. . . . There is a grand distinction between the actual meaning of the prophets and the present translation” (Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., The Words of Joseph Smith [Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994], 185). “I will now turn linguist. There are many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelations of the Holy Ghost to me” (Ehat and Cook, The Words of Joseph Smith, 211).


12. Joseph Smith almost certainly used the KJV at home as a youth growing up. Prior to beginning the JST, Oliver Cowdery was sent to the E. B. Grandin print shop to purchase a Bible. He purchased an 1828 KJV Bible printed by H. & E. Phinney (see Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Cooperstown Bible: The Histori-
cal Context of the Bible Used in the Joseph Smith Translation,” *BYU Studies* 40 (2001): 41–70). This Bible also included the Apocrypha, which Joseph left intact while completing the JST. See Doctrine and Covenants 91:1–6 regarding the Lord’s statement on the Apocrypha included in Joseph’s Bible.

13. Joseph Smith referred to the JST as the New Translation. The term “Joseph Smith Translation” is a modern designation and was not used at any time by the early Saints (see Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 3; see also Robert J. Matthews, “The Eternal Worth of the JST,” in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored*, 106).

14. William W. Phelps, ed., *The Evening and Morning Star*, January 1833, 58. *The Evening and Morning Star* was published in Independence, Missouri, under the direction of William W. Phelps. Joseph Smith was in Kirtland. Phelps’s statement may reflect something communicated directly to Phelps in his visit to Missouri in the fall of 1832 or may have also been communicated by letter. The subject was weighing on Phelps’s mind in the first six months of 1833 because he published two very strong statements on the nature of the italicized words during that period but then remained silent on the issue thereafter.


17. All calculations are based on the new transcription and facsimile reproduction of Joseph Smith’s marked Bible (see Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*).


19. This dramatic shift occurred because several different committees of translators worked on the 1611 Authorized Version (KJV). The New Testament was divided into two parts: the Gospels were given to one committee, and Acts–Revelation were given to a second committee. Each of the committees, both for the Old and New Testaments, sent their work to be proofed by another committee. The original committee of translators, however, was responsible for the introduction and inclusion of italicized words. The Acts–Revelation committee was less careful in their usage of italics.


22. We categorized the italicized words based on the Nestle-Aland 27th edition of the Greek New Testament (*Novum Testamentum Graece* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993]). The Nestle-Aland Greek text contains the most extensive list of New Testament textual variants in a single volume and was therefore useful in distinguishing which italicized words were supplied from variants and which were supplied from conjecture or syntax.

23. The Textus Receptus was the Greek text created by Erasmus of Rotterdam in the early sixteenth century. It became the basis of comparison for the KJV translators when they needed access to a Greek text. The Textus Receptus is not an ancient manuscript but is a modern collation or compilation of several medieval manuscripts.

24. A difficulty in categorizing the italicized words is that there are several subcategories to each category. For example, a verse may be drastically rearranged in the JST text, including the transposition of the italicized words and their place-
ment into a new context, even though italicized word remains in the text. In some of these instances, the JST alters the original context of the italicized words and is therefore considered in our study to be an altered word, even though the actual italicized word remains in the text.

25. Excerpts from the JST were printed in The Evening and Morning Star, 1832–33; Times and Seasons, 1843; and the Millennial Star, 1851 (see Robert J. Matthews, “The Role of the JST in the Restoration,” in Plain and Precious Truths Restored, 51). The Prophet Joseph Smith asked William W. Phelps not to publish the new translation in a serial format in The Evening and Morning Star, but portions of it were printed in the Lectures on Faith, the Times and Seasons, and The Evening and Morning Star (see Robert L. Millet, “Hard Questions about the JST,” in Plain and Precious Truths Restored, 150; Robert J. Matthews, A Plainer Translation, 52).

26. The figures were subjected to a chi-square statistical comparison to determine the probability of whether the relationship between change and source was a likely outcome from our data or whether it was statistically significant. If the p-value is less than or equal to $\alpha (\alpha = 0.05)$, then the outcome is determined to be statistically significant, meaning that there is a distinct difference in the way Joseph Smith treated the three different categories of italicized words.

27. The percentages for the section of Matthew 1:1–John 5:47 are not significantly different from those achieved when we looked at all four Gospels. Category A italicized words were altered 33 percent, removed 23 percent, and retained 44 percent. The slightly higher percentage of verses that received some change in the JST for Matthew 1:1–John 5:47 (56 percent) is a reflection of the fact that the percentage of changes to John 6:1–21:25 is significantly lower. Category B and C italicized words are treated similarly for the Matthew 1:1–John 5:47 material, with 51 percent of category B words being changed and 77 percent of category C being changed.


34. Clark, Why the King James Version, 6–34.
Temple Symbolism of the Body

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Near the beginning of the Savior’s ministry, after He had cleared the temple of the money changers, Jesus was approached by some of the Jews and asked for a sign to show them He had the authority to expel these people from the temple. Jesus responded, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body” (John 2:19–21).

In this interchange, the Savior referred to His body as a temple, yet the confused Jews perceived only that He was speaking about the temple building where they stood. In making this bold reference to His body as a temple, the Lord was alluding to His future death and subsequent resurrection three days later. Yet why did the Lord refer to His body as a temple? The Apostle Paul gives us insight on the matter when he wrote to the Saints in Corinth, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

From this scripture, we learn that our bodies are temples where the Holy Ghost may abide. We also learn that our bodies are not our own—they were given to us by God. During the two millennia since Christ’s earthly ministry, the attitude of the majority of mankind toward the body illustrates a great misunderstanding of these truths.
Attitudes toward the Body

Seeing the body as a burden, ascetics throughout the ages have sought to bring the body under subjection to the spirit by physically abusing the body—using various means such as extreme fasting, self-flagellation, sleeping on wooden boards, and wearing rough apparel. On the other end of the continuum, from the time of Christ’s ministry in the days of the Roman Empire to the present day, people have indulged themselves in excesses to appease their physical appetites. Hedonistic pursuit of sexual pleasure has resulted in gross immorality and perverse behavior. The Romans also held eating orgies, where people would gorge and purge and gorge again, not unlike some of today’s eating habits where people often eat well beyond the point where they are naturally satiated, sometimes resulting in bulimic behavior. As people seek further bodily pleasures and an escape from reality, drug abuse has escalated to epidemic proportions with all of its attendant personal and social problems, destroying lives and instituting untold pain and suffering.

In modern Western society, many people do not effectively maintain their bodies through beneficial exercise. Both youth and adults transport themselves in a variety of ways to avoid walking even short distances, and as a result many have become couch potatoes. In the last few years, as we have been alerted to the health risks of our sedentary lifestyle, more people have begun a regular exercise regimen. Some carry this to extreme levels and spend vast amounts of time in exercise, attempting to produce a beautifully toned body. Hence, the sculpted body prompts the owner to display it as a status symbol for others to admire.

In the time of the ancient Greek Olympic Games, which were held between 776 BC and AD 393, the body was viewed as an object of beauty to be displayed, so athletes performed in the nude. Now we have entered another period of near worship of the body. This is evidenced by current fashions that cover, uncover, and reveal the body in sensuous ways. Around the world people flaunt themselves on beaches, sometimes topless or nude, and nudity in entertainment is increasingly the norm. Pornography is readily available over the Internet and can be viewed privately to avoid public scrutiny. Its insidious effects have cast a dark shadow in our society.

Part of the focus on achieving a beautiful, individualistic body has led to defacing practices such as tattooing and body piercing. In further pursuit of the ultimate beautiful body, others have turned to cosmetic surgery for help in their quest. In the United States, from 1997 to
2003, there has been an 87 percent increase in the total number of cosmetic surgical procedures such as breast augmentation and reduction, rhinoplasty (nose modification), eyelid surgery, and liposuction. People seek freedom to treat their bodies as they wish. A common aphorism of our increasingly pro-choice society is “It’s my body, and I’ll do what I want with it.”

The Power of Having a Body

Many people do not understand the sacred nature of their bodies and the fact that their bodies are not theirs. Satan does all in his power to perpetuate this by encouraging egocentric, hedonistic behavior because he knows the importance of possessing a physical body and the blessings that can come. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated:

We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into a herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none.

All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power. Only in unrighteousness does the devil have power over us. Brigham Young explains in more detail how Satan gets this power over us:

You are aware that many think that the devil has rule and power over both body and spirit. Now I want to tell you that he does not hold any power over man, only so far as the body overcomes the spirit that is in a man, through yielding to the spirit of evil. . . . In the first place the spirit is pure, and under the special control and influence of the Lord, but the body is of the earth, and is subject to the power of the devil, and is under the mighty influence of that fallen nature that is of the earth. If the spirit yields to the body, the devil then has power to overcome the body and spirit of that man, and he loses both.

Hence, it is important to allow the spirit to rule the body. The Prophet Joseph Smith provides further light on why the spirit is so powerful: “All things whatsoever God in his infinite wisdom has seen fit and proper to reveal to us, while we are dwelling in mortality, in regard to our mortal bodies, are revealed to us in the abstract, and independent of affinity of this mortal tabernacle, but are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all; and those revelations which will save our spirits will save our bodies.” When our spirits understand
the true nature of our bodies, we can act in appropriate ways that will help us to progress and be blessed.

Temple Preparation—Body and Building

To understand the sacredness of our bodies as temples, we can profitably compare the temple building with the temple body. When the Kirtland Saints built the temple, it was constructed with high-quality materials. The sisters donated their china, which was ground and put into the exterior stucco finish to make the walls sparkle and look beautiful. Subsequent temples have always been built out of the best materials. The exteriors of our temple buildings are beautiful, and the grounds are immaculately kept. The interior is also beautifully adorned in simple elegance. Similarly, we should use the best materials to build our bodies. The Lord has furnished us with sound advice on this matter by giving us the Word of Wisdom in Doctrine and Covenants section 89, which outlines healthy and unhealthy foods with an accompanying spiritual promise. We should also be involved in appropriate physical exercise to maintain our health and keep our bodies functioning so we can feel invigorated and able to fulfill our mission here on earth. When we do not eat well or exercise regularly, we feel lethargic; and our spirit has to deal with a dulled body, which can result in a dulling of our spirit, thus hampering our effectiveness.

In addition to our concern for what we ingest, we should also be concerned with our outward appearance. President Gordon B. Hinckley has warned about defacing our bodies with tattoos and piercing. President Boyd K. Packer comments on this latter counsel: “You would not paint a temple with dark pictures or symbols or graffiti or even initials. Do not do so with your body.”

In our wonderful body temple, we have been blessed with the tremendous power to create bodies for spirits awaiting their mortal experience. Satan unleashes all his efforts to tempt us to abuse this power through sexual immorality. President Hinckley encourages us to be morally strong: “Challenging though it may be, there is a way to apply traditional moral principles in our day. For some unknown reason, there is constantly appearing the false rationalization that at one time in the long-ago, virtue was easy and that now it is difficult. I would like to remind any who feel that way that there has never been a time since the Creation when the same forces were not at work that are at work today.” We need to be morally clean to enter the temple building. This is also a requirement of purity if the Holy Spirit is to abide in us. Temple attendance requires a temple recommend, signify-
ing our purity and worthiness. The physical body also needs to be pure so that it can fulfill its intended function as a temple.

We dress in our Sunday clothes when we go to the temple. Once in the temple, we all dress in white, symbolic of purity and equality. Our everyday dress outside the temple should also be modest and clean. President Harold B. Lee admonished us: “Do not underestimate the important symbolic and actual effect of appearance. Persons who are well groomed and modestly dressed invite the companionship of the Spirit of our Father in Heaven and are able to exercise a wholesome influence upon those around them. Persons who are unkempt and careless about their appearance, or adopt the visual symbols of those who often oppose our ideals, expose themselves and persons around them to influences that are degrading and dissonant. Outward appearance is often a reflection of inward tendencies.”

The sacred music played in the temple helps us to be calm and to focus on things of divine importance prior to doing temple work. The kind of music we listen to on a daily basis should be similarly edifying so we are always ready to be taught by the Spirit, whenever He wishes to communicate with us.

Temple Blessings—Body and Building

_Deity manifested._ When the temple building is kept pure and undefiled, blessings attend worthy temple goers. The same principle applies to our bodies. When the body is pure and undefiled, it becomes a temple. A temple is a place where Deity can be manifest. This is clearly stated in the dedicatory prayer offered in the Kirtland Temple. “For thou knowest that we have done this work through great tribulation; and out of our poverty we have given of our substance to build a house to thy name, that the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people” (D&C 109:5).

Temple buildings are places where the Lord may come and manifest Himself. Our bodies, when pure, are places where the Holy Ghost, a Deity, may come. “But the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130:22). What a magnificent blessing to know that if we are worthy, the Spirit can dwell in us!

This presence of Deity can be more than transitory and can actually be a continual presence. Again we read from the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer about the Lord’s presence: “That thy glory may rest down upon thy people, and upon this thy house, which we now dedicate to thee, that it may be sanctified and consecrated to be holy, and that thy
holy presence may be continually in this house; and that all people who shall enter upon the threshold of the Lord’s house may feel thy power, and feel constrained to acknowledge that thou hast sanctified it, and that it is thy house, a place of holiness” (D&C 109:12–13).

A continual presence of the Holy Ghost within us is also a promise to those who are righteous and pure. In Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph Smith was assured that if we are righteous, “the Holy Ghost shall be [our] constant companion” (D&C 121:46).

We may think that if we live the commandments, we can have the influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives, but do we realize the importance of having the Holy Ghost as our constant companion and making His abode with us? Do we realize the blessings that can bring into our lives? What then are the blessings that come from having continual access to Deity?

Sanctification. In the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer just quoted in Doctrine and Covenants 109:12–13, we learn that the presence of the Lord sanctifies and consecrates the building. The presence of the Holy Ghost in us can complete the same function for our bodies; He sanctifies us from all sin. He purges out all that is dross. Speaking to the Nephites, the resurrected Lord explained this: “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20).

Comfort, peace, and knowledge. Whenever I enter the temple, I immediately feel a comfort and peace envelop me. Years ago, after moving to a new city, I was feeling quite homesick, so I decided to go to the temple. I entered the building and sat waiting for a friend to arrive. I thought to myself, “What am I doing in this city? I am so far from home.” My gaze drifted to the wall above me and rested on a photograph of the temple. Immediately, I felt a tremendous outpouring of love soothing me. My eyes then slowly moved across the room to a painting of the Savior. These wonderful feelings of love and peace increased, and accompanying them came these thoughts: You are home, and I am right here.

Things are usually better when we go home. Going to the temple is like going home for me. I always feel love and acceptance and, well, just a feeling of being home. The presence of Deity has this effect. After all, we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, and one day we will go home. The temple helps us experience that feeling of being home while here in mortality.

The Holy Ghost is called the Comforter, or the first Comforter.
As we live pure lives, we will experience His continual presence, and He will be there to lift us in difficult times. “And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26).

If a person continues in humility to be obedient to the commandments, another Comforter is promised. The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote:

> When the Lord has thoroughly proved him and finds that the man is determined to serve Him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the Saints, as is recorded in the testimony of St. John, in the 14th chapter. . . . Now what is the other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.²

We can be taught and thus gain knowledge in both types of temples. As we enter our temple buildings spiritually prepared and worthy, we are able to transcend the physical world and access the divine, spiritual realm. There is a focus on reverence and quietness in the rooms of the temple, which enables such communication to occur. We need to go with an inner quietude and a reverent, reflective demeanor if we wish to be taught by the divine. Then, we are ready to receive revelation and light. The same applies to us as we seek direction in our own lives outside the temple building. As we quietly ponder our inner questions and petition our Father in Heaven, enlightenment can come.

In the temple building, there are multiple meanings to the information we receive. The same is true as we read the scriptures. As we seek for knowledge, we need to get rid of willfulness and submit our will to our Father in Heaven. The Holy Ghost can help us know what to pray for. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

We can gain spiritual knowledge and knowledge to help us in our temporal affairs. “For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter
in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

We can also learn in different ways, cognitively and experientially. The Spirit will witness truth to us. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “Through the Holy Ghost the truth is woven into the very fibre and sinews of the body so that it cannot be forgotten.” As we live according to the truth of the gospel and repent, sin is purged from us and we receive more light. We all know good people who radiate this light and reflect it in their countenances.

Endowed with power and a protective shield. Both kinds of temples give those who are worthy a protective shield and the power to cope with life. Speaking of our temple buildings, President Boyd K. Packer states, “Our labors in the temple cover us with a shield and a protection, both individually and as a people.” This protection is illustrated in an incident recorded in the Old Testament. The Ammonites and others came to do battle against outnumbered Judah. Jehosaphat, the king of Judah, proclaimed a fast and gathered his people to the temple:

And said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?

Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?

And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying,

If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.

Then . . . came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation;

And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus, saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s. (2 Chronicles 20:6–9, 14–15)
Subsequent to this incident, the enemies of Israel warred among themselves and destroyed each other. God protected His people after they pleaded with Him at the temple. Likewise, the Lord has given us a body as a protective shield. Brigham Young described it in this way: “The spirit dwelling within the outer tabernacle, answering to the spirit what our clothing answers to this body, as a covering and shield and protection.”

Remember, righteous beings with bodies have power over those, such as Satan, who do not have bodies. However, when we are unrighteous, we lose the Spirit and divine power with its accompanying protective shield. Joseph Smith, speaking of the unrighteous use of the priesthood and the resulting consequences, stated:

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God. (D&C 121: 36–38)

In the Doctrine and Covenants, after describing His own suffering in the Atonement, the Savior warns Martin Harris that without repentance, sins will lead to suffering. The protective shield is removed when the Spirit has left. “Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit” (D&C 19:20).

A refuge from the world. With all these blessings, the temple is a refuge from the world. It is a place to escape from celestial influences and be comforted, strengthened, taught, and endowed with power and protection. When we are worthy, our bodies can also be a refuge from the world. In its own way, the body can be a traveling tabernacle in the wilderness of the world, that through the influence of the Holy Ghost we can be lifted up and be protected from tainting worldly influences. The body can be our home away from home when we cannot be in the temple building.
Conclusion

Just as Jesus cast the money changers from the temple, we should cast the material world away from and out of us. As we live worthy, righteous lives, we can experience the previously mentioned blessings available to us both when we treat our bodies as temples and when we worthily attend the temple. If we do this, we will ultimately be resurrected with immortal, glorified bodies and have eternal life in the celestial kingdom with our Father and His Son.

John the Revelator describes the holy Jerusalem in the celestial kingdom: “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:22–23). As there is no worldly, impure influence to be shielded from in the celestial kingdom, there is no need for a temple building as a sacred, dedicated place for the Lord to manifest Himself to us because our Father and His Son will be the temples with Their glorified, immortal bodies.

Notes

The Apostolic Fathers as Witnesses to the Early Christian Apostasy

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Critical to an appreciation of the Restoration is an understanding of the early Christian apostasy that necessitated such a restoration. Indeed, of all people, the Latter-day Saints should be among the most interested in the details of early Christian doctrine, practice, and development. The entire Restoration, after all, is based on the understanding that Christ established a church with defined leadership, doctrines, and ordinances, “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). This foundation, however, soon crumbled as the early church fell into an apostasy, replacing its original doctrines and practices with a variety of concepts from throughout the Roman Empire. Thus, a new dispensation was required in order for the original organization to be restored to the earth.

Often in our writing and teaching of the Apostasy, we discuss the death of the Apostles in the mid to late first century, possibly followed by a brief mention of Neoplatonic philosophy entering the church in the third century, and conclude with a reference to a council and creed of the fourth century, leaving this as sufficient evidence that an apostasy occurred. Although these are all aspects of the bigger picture, jumping from the first to the fourth century denies us the opportunity to examine that crucial period when the lights actually went out—the two hundred years in between (with a special emphasis on the early second century).

Fortunately, the era immediately following the death of the New Testament Apostles is rich in written material, presenting a relatively clear picture of what was happening in the church as it dealt with the
increasing loss of revelation and inspired leadership. Though several important studies have been published on the Latter-day Saint understanding of the Apostasy, this particular period is seldom emphasized in our writing and teaching.¹ The purpose of this article is to offer a brief overview of these writings and the individuals who produced them. These texts are among the greatest extant witnesses that an apostasy did occur and in what manner it so quickly evolved. The hope is that once the value of these writings becomes more evident, their use in research and classroom discussions will enhance our understanding of the Apostasy and present a more complete picture.

A major challenge in attempting an overview of such a broad and dynamic period, however, is the ability to successfully deal with any one aspect in the detail it deserves. Therefore, this article will first present, for general readers, a short sketch of some of the early Christian leaders and their writings, leaving more extensive references in the notes for further investigation. The second section will introduce the messages of these writings as they might pertain to studies of the early Christian apostasy, with the hope that they might open the door for more comprehensive study of the apostolic fathers as witnesses to the early Christian apostasy.

**Background to the “Apostolic Fathers”**

During the New Testament period, the Savior and His Apostles spoke on several occasions concerning the future of the church. As has been shown elsewhere, these statements left the New Testament church with an understanding that the immediate future looked bleak under the threat of apostasy, whereas the long term offered promise of hope and renewal.² It is difficult to determine how much of this understanding passed on to future generations of church leaders. There are many writings, however, of the individuals who succeeded the Apostles in various regions of the empire. These writings are perhaps the greatest witnesses as to how this apostasy actually developed.

These men are known to historians as the “apostolic fathers” because of their personal association with the Apostles and perhaps even their apostolic appointments to lead in succession. The era in which these leaders ministered (the late first and early second centuries) is extremely interesting. These individuals knew the pure teachings of the Apostles, perhaps understood that the lights were going out of the church, and were left with the responsibility of holding things together. Their writings were often considered scripture by early Christians and reveal how the postapostolic church understood the Christian message.
They also give precise detail into its internal conflicts.

_Ignatius of Antioch_. One such leader is Ignatius of Antioch. According to the fourth-century church historian Eusebius, Ignatius was ordained to succeed Peter as a bishop of the city and was an ardent defender of apostolic teachings. Little is known about him biographically, but his writings indicate that he was sent to Rome after being condemned to death in Antioch (about AD 107–8). As a military escort marched him through Syria, he wrote seven letters from Smyrna and Troas to various congregations throughout Asia Minor. These letters have been noted for the “unparalleled light they shed on the history of the church at this time.” From them we learn much of church structure, as well as the internal problems causing this profound crisis.

The picture of the church offered by Ignatius in his letters is quite interesting to Latter-day Saints. As acknowledged by leading scholars, it is clear from the texts that the church of Ignatius’s day was still under the direction of the spirit of prophecy. Indeed, Ignatius himself was still claiming revelation, insisting that the Spirit was whispering to him concerning the problems within the church. These problems (discussed below) were beginning to fan out from Syria into Asia Minor, deeply affecting many of the churches along the way, and Ignatius wrote hurriedly to warn them of the approaching storm.

_Polycarp of Smyrna_. A contemporary church leader to whom Ignatius wrote a letter was Polycarp (about AD 70–156). According to early Christian tradition, Polycarp was also “a companion to the apostles . . . on whom the eyewitnesses . . . had conferred the episcopate [bishopric] of the church at Smyrna.” Furthermore, Ignatius was “well aware that Polycarp was an apostolic man” and thus commended him to the Christians at Antioch. John was apparently the Apostle who taught and perhaps even ordained Polycarp, who led the church in Smyrna for over forty years and was considered an important link in the early apostolic tradition. This link was noted early on by Irenaeus, a late second-century writer who had heard Polycarp’s teachings in his childhood. “Polycarp was not only instructed by apostles . . . but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna.” A reference to John as Polycarp’s “ordainer” was set forth by another late second-century writer, Tertullian. “The church at Smyrna . . . records that Polycarp was placed therein by John.”

Polycarp’s important Epistle to the Philippians was most likely written around AD 110, or shortly after Ignatius’s death in Rome. Although not as extensive as the writings of Ignatius, the letter of Polycarp similarly offers insight into both the internal as well as external threats to
the church in Asia Minor in the early second century. Together, the writings of Ignatius and Polycarp provide invaluable source material for understanding the apostasy engulfing the Eastern church.

**Clement of Rome.** Just as the Christian church was growing and encountering difficulties in the East, notably in Asia Minor, so the Western church was developing around the burgeoning center of Rome. Here the Apostles Peter and Paul had preached a few decades earlier and had likewise appointed individuals to lead the church in their absence. A notable apostolic father of the Roman church was Clement.

Again, it is the late second-century Irenaeus who writes of Clement, “He had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, [had] the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes.” Irenaeus’s contemporary, Tertullian, also mentions that “the church in Rome makes Clement to have been ordained . . . by Peter.” Based upon the early dating of these two texts, it is highly probable that Clement indeed, as Ignatius and Polycarp in the East, associated with and was ordained by the Apostles to a position of authority in the Roman church.

Clement is noted for a letter he wrote to the church at Corinth (1 Clement), which was apparently written about the time John was writing Revelation on the isle of Patmos (about AD 95–96). This letter was considered scripture in some areas of the church and was found in some of the oldest surviving manuscripts of the New Testament—a fourth-century Syrian text (the Apostolic Canons) as well as the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus (where it was placed immediately following Revelation). The contents of the letter will be discussed below and, like the writings of Ignatius and Polycarp, will shed much light on the extreme difficulties facing the church, especially in Corinth.

**The Shepherd of Hermas.** One final writing that will be noted here is the Shepherd of Hermas. This was an important text to the Christian community in Rome in the late first or early second century. Authorship is still debated, but there is an interesting possibility that it was written by the Hermas of the Roman church mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:4. It is perhaps one of the greatest witnesses to the state of the church during this period. It attests to the continuation of visions, prophecy, and direct revelation in the early church and also adds to the current discussion of internal crises.

The Shepherd of Hermas was of such value to the early Christians that it appears in an early list of authoritative writings (the Muratorian Canon, about AD 180–200) and was also considered scripture in the late second through third centuries by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria,
and Origen. It continued in some canons well into the fourth century; it was quoted as scripture by Athanasius and appeared at the end of the New Testament in the Codex Sinaiticus.\textsuperscript{20}

There are certainly other individuals and writings of the period that could be considered—for example, Papias,\textsuperscript{21} the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, and so on. The above-mentioned texts and authors were singled out specifically for the light they shed on the discussion of the second-century apostasy. Indeed, the letters of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement, along with the Shepherd of Hermas, are the greatest extant nonbiblical witnesses of the development of an apostasy following the death of the Apostles. The second part of this article will now examine these texts, focusing specifically on those aspects that describe the opening stages of the Great Apostasy.

The Apostolic Fathers and Initial Causes of the Apostasy

Often in Latter-day Saint writing and teaching, the Apostasy is treated rather quickly, with a vague notion of philosophy and creeds replacing revelation. These were certainly symptoms of the deeply rooted apostasy of the third and fourth centuries. However, the actual causes of the Apostasy are much more complicated and are laid out in great detail within the early Christian texts that have been introduced. In this way, the apostolic fathers may be used as invaluable witnesses of the problems within the church that acted as catalysts to the Great Apostasy that was well underway by their time period.

False teachings. A major theme that is often emphasized by the apostolic fathers (perhaps owing to its presence as early as New Testament times) is the permeation of apostate doctrines by false teachers within the church. This problem certainly continued into the early second century. Between Syria and Asia Minor, Ignatius reports in his Epistle to the Ephesians that some are “maliciously and deceitfully” spreading false teachings concerning Christ.\textsuperscript{22} “Therefore, let no one deceive you. . . . I have learned that certain people . . . passed your way with evil doctrine.”\textsuperscript{23} Much of the letter is Ignatius’s plea to reject this false teaching.

His other letters carry similar warnings. To the Trallians he warned of those who “mix Jesus with poison . . . which the unsuspecting victim accepts without fear,”\textsuperscript{24} and to the Philadelphians he urged, “flee from . . . false teaching . . . for many seemingly trustworthy wolves” are attempting “by means of wicked pleasure” to ensnare the saints.\textsuperscript{25} To the Magnesians he wrote, “Do not be deceived by strange doctrines.”\textsuperscript{26} In that same letter Ignatius offers insight into what some of those
strange doctrines are: “I want to forewarn you not to get snagged on the hooks of worthless opinions but instead to be fully convinced about the birth and the suffering and the resurrection.”

Similar concerns were expressed by other leaders in Asia Minor as well. Quoting 1 John 4:2–3, Polycarp likewise warns the Philippians that some are “twist[ing] the sayings of the Lord to suit [their] own sinful desires and claim[ing] that there is neither resurrection or judg-ment . . . [so] let us leave behind the worthless speculation . . . [and] their false teachings.” It is clear from these texts of Ignatius and Polycarp that the issue of the nature of Christ was among the first concepts to be attacked by false teachers within the church (see also 1 John 4:1–6). Modern scholars note that Ignatius (and presumably Polycarp as well) was dealing with the Judaizers denying the divinity of Christ on one hand and with the Docetists (who maintained that all flesh is evil) denying the humanity of Christ on the other.

The Shepherd of Hermas also decries the “hypocrites [who] brought in strange doctrines, and perverted God’s servants” among the Christians in Rome. These teachers came from within the church and “because of this arrogance of theirs, understanding has left them and . . . [they] want to be volunteer teachers, foolish though they are.” It is telling that an entire Mandate from the Shepherd text (there are only twelve) instructs on how to discern between true and false prophets. Although this portion of the text attests to an ongoing and legitimate spirit of prophecy in the church of this period, it is also clear that false prophets and teachers abounded and were succeeding in seducing many. Indeed, false teachings were a serious threat to the young church (at least in Syria, Asia Minor, and Rome), but there were also other factors contributing to its “falling away.”

**Disunity in the church.** It is important to note that, along with false teachings, serious divisions among church members were among the greatest contributors to the early Christian apostasy. Perhaps more than any other warning, the apostolic fathers emphasized the grave danger of such disunity. This was especially the case in Clement’s letter to the Corinthian church. There the situation became so inflamed that church leaders were removed from office, and others usurped their positions. It is difficult to determine whether this was a result of a violent coup or some other kind of power play. In any case, the situation called for external intervention, which was provided by Clement’s letter. Even though Clement’s responsibilities were clearly over the Roman church, his letter to the Corinthians upbraids them for disunity, convictst them of gross errors, and urges them to return rightful leaders to their posi-
tions of authority.

The letter begins by calling this “dispute” a “detestable and unholy schism,” and he sadly remembers a time when “every faction and every schism were abominable” to them. Now he warns that the Corinthians have brought upon themselves “no ordinary harm, but rather great danger . . . [for] recklessly surrender[ing] to the purposes of men who launch out into strife and dissention.”

Clement pleads, “Therefore let us unite with those who devoutly practice peace, and not those who hypocritically wish for peace.” Throughout the letter he asks, “Why is there strife and angry outbursts and dissentions and schisms and conflict among you? . . . Why do we tear and rip apart the members of Christ, and rebel against our own body?” This extreme disunity will have no small effect upon the future of the church. “Your schism has perverted many; it has brought many to despair, plunged many into doubt, and causes all of us to sorrow.”

Unfortunately, such internal dissensions were not unique to Corinth but were occurring in many regions. Even in Clement’s own city of Rome, the Shepherd of Hermas was in circulation and warned of similar disunity there. Early in the text, Hermas has a vision of a great tower that he is told represents the church. He comes to notice that some stones in the tower have serious “cracks” (the word in Greek is schisms, or “schisms”). He is told that these cracked stones “are the ones who are against one another in their hearts and are not at peace among themselves. Instead, they have only the appearance of peace, and when they leave one another their evil thoughts remain in their hearts.”

This is actually a major theme throughout the Shepherd of Hermas text. From an early warning against “doublemindedness” (which is a constant concern to Hermas) to the concluding parables of schisms (for example, “slanderers . . . never at peace among themselves . . . always causing contentions”), the Shepherd of Hermas stands as a powerful witness to the dissensions within the Roman church.

As in Rome and Corinth, Ignatius and Polycarp attest to similar disunity in Syria and Asia Minor. “Flee from division,” Ignatius warned the Philadelphians, and “let there be nothing among you which is capable of dividing you, but be united” was his plea to the Magnesians. Rather, “gather together, let there be one prayer, one petition, one mind.” Ignatius seemed to be convinced that if the church did not unify, there would be disastrous consequences. “Flee the ruler of this age, lest you be worn out by his schemes . . . instead gather together with an undivided heart.” Unity was also an important message in the other letters of Ignatius, as well as in the letter of Polycarp.
passages, one scholar has noted that Ignatius’s prayer was not that pagans stop hounding the Christians but rather that the Christians stop fighting one another and that they recover unity. Others concur and acknowledge that Ignatius went to his death in Rome knowing that the church was splitting.

It is critical to note here that, along with being a major concern for the early church, this disunity is one of the very few references to the ancient apostasy in the entire Doctrine and Covenants. In D&C 64:8 we read, “My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened.” When compared to the early Christian texts, this verse offers an incredibly accurate picture of what largely led to the Great Apostasy.

Worldly distractions. In addition to false teachings and disunity, worldly distractions, including a love of riches, also plagued the early Christian community. According to Polycarp, there were some among the church leadership in Philippi who had sought money above all else. “I warn you, therefore: avoid love of money . . . if a man does not avoid love of money, he will be polluted by idolatry.”

The situation was even more dramatic in the Roman church. The Shepherd of Hermas indicates that there was a group of wealthy saints who, “whenever persecution comes, they deny their Lord because of their riches and their business affairs.” Apparently, it was even worse among the leadership in Rome. Hermas states that there were church leaders who “plundered the livelihood of widows and orphans, and profited themselves from the ministry which they carried out.” On another occasion, Hermas saw a vision of a young shepherd over a large flock. The shepherd was dressed in luxurious clothes and was identified as the “angel of luxury and deception. He crushes the souls of God’s servants and turns them away from the truth, deceiving them with evil desires . . . for they forget the commandments of the living God and live pleasurably in worthless luxury, and are destroyed.” This appears to have been the condition among much of the Roman church leadership in Hermas’s day (see also 1 Nephi 13:6–9).

Problems in church leadership. A fourth major concern for the apostolic fathers was the many problems regarding church leadership. This included both leaders who were themselves becoming corrupt and the membership who were not following the legitimate leaders. The situation in Corinth has already been discussed. Here Clement condemned those “who in arrogance and unruliness have set themselves up as leaders in abominable jealousy.” These self-appointed leaders “exalt[ed]
themselves over [the] flock” and removed the authorized leaders “from the ministry which had been held in honor by them.”

Similar leadership problems are addressed in the Shepherd of Hermas. Indeed, the entire revelation of the text is directed to “the officials of the church, in order that they may direct their ways in righteousness.” Hermas accuses these officials: “You carry . . . poison in your heart. You are calloused and don’t want to cleanse your hearts. . . . How is it that you desire to instruct God’s elect, while you yourselves have no instruction?” The theme of apostate leadership in these and other texts, such as the Didache (a late first-century “handbook of church order”), has led one non-Latter-day Saint scholar to note that “as the . . . apostles disappeared and the directly inspired prophets lost their authority, other figures emerged to take command of the churches.”

The understanding of apostasy and restoration. Although the above sampling of early Christian texts reveals some of the serious problems facing the early second-century church, it is important to consider how these issues fit into the apostolic fathers’ understanding of the future of the church. After all, the mere presence of problems does not necessarily mandate an approaching apostasy. However, if it can be demonstrated that the apostolic fathers themselves viewed these problems as catalysts for a developing apostasy, the case can be strengthened for using their writings as witnesses as to how the lights went out of the church.

We cannot be certain how much the Apostles passed on to these leaders concerning the future of the church and relating to an approaching apostasy and eventual restoration. Certain caution is required in this regard. Perhaps we often assume that the early Christians had the same understanding of how events were to develop as those of us with a hindsight view of the establishment of the church, followed by the Great Apostasy and eventual Restoration preceding the Second Coming and the Millennium. In reality, however, it is possible that the apostolic fathers simply understood that there would be a period of darkness for the church in the days ahead (which they could have understood as persecutions, spiritual apostasy, or both) followed by a period of light and renewal (perhaps pointing to the Restoration, the Millennium, or both).

It is clear, however, that these writers knew they were living in a dark time that was far inferior to the days of the Apostles. Ignatius, for example, while enumerating the above problems among his audience, refers to Satan as “the ruler of this age” in more than one letter. In his Epistle to the Trallians, he decries the false doctrines and leadership problems and connects them to an approaching darkness. “I am guard-
ing you in advance,” he wrote, “because you are very dear to me and I forsee the snares of the devil.”

It has already been mentioned that Ignatius elsewhere described the church as an “unsuspecting victim” being poisoned.

The author of the Shepherd of Hermas, while focusing on all four of the problems listed above, uses intriguing imagery to describe the darkness that was engulfing the church in Rome. On one occasion, he describes the church of his day as an old lady falling asleep. Hermas himself offers an interesting explanation as to why the woman-church was fading: “Because your [plural, speaking to the church] spirit was old and already withered, and you had no power because of your weaknesses and double-mindedness.” Here it seems that the state of the woman-church is directly dependent upon the state of its membership. In this case, the weaknesses and double-mindedness of the people are causing her to fall asleep: “For just as old people, no longer having any hope of renewing their youth, look forward to nothing except their falling asleep so also you, being weakened by the cares of this life, gave yourselves over to indifference.”

Along with the problems among the membership, Hermas uses the same language of “falling asleep” that he uses for the Apostles only a few passages earlier. “These are the apostles and bishops . . . who have walked according to the holiness of God. . . . Some have fallen asleep, while others are still living.” Perhaps Hermas is making another connection, associating the “sleep” of the Apostles with the “sleep” of the woman-church. He goes on to note that the days of the Apostles were the ideal, as “they always agreed with one another, and so they had peace with one another and listened to one another.” This stands in stark contrast to the church of Hermas’s day.

Another image the Shepherd of Hermas uses to emphasize the problems within the church is a description of the future as a dark and stormy wintertime for the righteous. “For this world [aion] is winter to the righteous. . . . Neither the righteous nor the sinners can be distinguished, but all are alike.” While translated here as “world,” the word aion in Greek means a “period of existence,” “an age,” “an era,” or a “definite space of time.”

This is different from the Greek kosmos, which means “the world,” as in the physical earth. Therefore, this passage seems to state that Hermas’s “age” is a stormy one for the righteous, as they can no longer be distinguished from the wicked. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the word aion is the same as in Matthew 28:20, where Jesus offers His parting words to the Apostles, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the [t, ‘age
or era’].” Perhaps these two texts together demonstrate a continuity of understanding that the era of Christ’s presence within the church would soon come to an end.

The Shepherd of Hermas text also describes a great tribulation to come in the form of a beast. The beast of his vision, Hermas is told, “is a foreshadowing of the great tribulation that is coming.” Along with the images of the church as an old lady falling asleep or the era being one of darkness, it is not clear whether this is an approaching persecution, the great spiritual apostasy, or both. We can confidently assert, however, that both Ignatius and the Shepherd of Hermas understood the problems within the church of their day as indicative of an approaching period of spiritual darkness.

All is not gloomy for the apostolic fathers, however, as there is also an understanding of a great day to come. The Shepherd of Hermas describes the church of its day as an old lady falling asleep, but it also describes the day when the woman-church rises again in youthful beauty and becomes a glorious virgin awaiting her marriage. Whereas the early second century was described as the winter of the righteous, “the age [aion] to come is summer to the righteous.” As with the descriptions of a day of darkness, it is not clear whether these descriptions of a glorious day to come refer to the Restoration, the Millennium, or both. It would be safe not to jump to any conclusions. However, it can be stated with confidence that these writers saw their own day as a day of darkness, and a glorious day of light for the church was yet to come.

**Conclusion**

This study has attempted to illuminate the early Christian apostasy by examining those who experienced and wrote of its early stages. It is hoped that a clearer understanding has been reached as to how the Apostasy developed. Indeed, when we study the writings of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement, as well as the Shepherd of Hermas, it is apparent that the development of the Apostasy was much more complicated than is typically presented. False teachers, disunity, love of riches, and aspiring leaders all contributed to the great falling away of the early second-century Christian church. By the late second and early third centuries, Greek philosophy (notably from the Alexandrian schools) had begun to be assimilated into Christian doctrines, and the creeds of the fourth century and onward officially replaced inspired leadership. However, these aspects of Christian history, often presented as the causes of the Apostasy, are merely the symptoms of an apostasy already
well under way by the middle of the second century.

The true detriment to the early Christian church was, in reality, the more fundamental problems about which we have been warned in our own day (for example, throughout the Doctrine and Covenants). In their illustrations of these problems, the apostolic fathers can be an incredibly valuable resource for our understanding and teaching of how exactly the early Apostasy developed, as well as how those problems could be dangerous for groups and individuals in our dispensation. Indeed, the apostolic fathers knew they were living in a period of darkness, and perhaps all that many of their day could do was eagerly await the glorious period of restoration and light to come at the last day.

Notes

1. Among the significant Latter-day Saint historical studies of the Apostasy, Elder James E. Talmage’s *The Great Apostasy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994) is perhaps the earliest serious attempt. Subsequently, Hugh W. Nibley has certainly pioneered Latter-day Saint scholarship in this area by employing a command of the languages and historical background necessary for proper research. Although his methodology is a clear product of 1930s and 1940s scholarship, his contribution in opening further studies in the field cannot be overstated. His published works on the topic are found in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987) and *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987). These writings discuss early Christian ceremonies of particular interest to Latter-day Saints, including baptism for the dead and the early Christian prayer circle, as well as the eventual impact of philosophy and creeds upon the church. Another more recent work dealing with the relationship between early Christianity and Mormonism is Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christian?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991). Robinson deals with the acceptance of the later creeds by modern mainstream Christian denominations and various comments made by early Christian writers on unique Latter-day Saint doctrines. He also coined the metaphor of the Apostasy as “lights going out of the church,” which is employed in portions of this article. Although all of these works (and other competent articles) offer important contributions to apostasy studies, all focus on various aspects of the early Christian period without intending to offer a comprehensive overview. There is much more work that needs to be done, especially, as this article argues, in the writings and contexts of the second-century “apostolic fathers.”


tory, it is good to take note of his clear biases. This primarily entails his desire to establish the “orthodox” line of succession. However, with these early apostolic fathers—Ignatius, Polycarp, Papias, and Clement—Latter-day Saints have no reason to doubt that they were indeed in an authoritative line from the Apostles. They were contemporaneously in the same regions as the Apostles, their writings clearly indicate their leadership positions were well established in those regions, and their writings contain teachings and doctrines that would be quite comfortable to a Latter-day Saint reader.


7. Although this article accepts the more traditional understanding of Ignatius’s place in church history, another view is presented by Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1971), 61–76. Bauer’s thesis throughout his work sharply criticizes claims of the fourth-century church to be the one and true “orthodox” Christianity possessing legitimate apostolic succession, whereas all who disagree in doctrine or practice are to be considered heretical. In reality, Bauer argues, the fourth century “orthodox” church was simply the version of Christianity that won out in the end, allowing them to decide who was heretical and who was orthodox. In Bauer’s effort to push back the “orthodox” conspiracy to as early as possible, his view of Ignatius is not overly flattering. Aspects of this overall thesis are quite intriguing in light of the Latter-day Saint concept of the Apostasy. However, for a Latter-day Saint reader, the writings of Ignatius seem quite solid in matters of doctrine as well as church structure and development. Therefore, perhaps Bauer’s thesis need only be adjusted as to its chronology (that is, possibly reassigning the “orthodox” conspiracy to the period of Irenaeus and Tertullian, immediately following the apostolic fathers).

8. Ignatius, Epistle to the Philadelphians, 7.1–2, in *AF*, 181. For further commentary on Ignatius and the “solid tradition” of the spirit of prophecy within the church at this time, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 148.


14. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.3.3, in ANF, 1:416. This passage is also cited in Eusebius, The History of the Church, 5.6. Earlier in his work, Eusebius also identifies Clement of Rome with the Clement mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4:3, who has his name in the book of life (see The History of the Church, 3.4.9). Although the earliest attribution of this traditional connection is found in Origen, factors including geography and chronology bring this tradition into question. See John Gillman, “Clement,” in ABD, 1:105.


16. For the current scholarly assessment of Clement’s apostolic appointment, see Ehrman, Lost Christianities, 142–48. Here Ehrman discusses the importance of tracing ecclesiastical lineage back to the Apostles who had appointed certain individuals. Clearly, it was important to the early church to note that Christ chose the Apostles, who appointed the leaders of the churches, who then handpicked their successors. Arguments of “apostolic succession” would later be used, as has already been noted, by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others to refute any other claim to truth outside of “orthodoxy.” But by the second and third centuries, many of the bishops in succession had been themselves declared heretical by proto-orthodox theologians. Another treatment of the same topic is found in Stuart G. Hall, Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 33. Hall notes the importance of apostolic succession in connection with Clement as an example of how the Apostles appointed the first bishops and gave rules to carry on. However, it is noted that, contrary to later traditional understanding, in the period of Clement, there is as yet no indication that only one bishop presided in Rome or even in Corinth.

17. See Ehrman, Lost Christianities, 142, as well as AF, 22–26.


19. Although a late second-century dating and a Roman context have long been assigned to the Muratorian Canon, some are now arguing for a later dating (late fourth century, following Eusebius’s listing of canonical works). Precise dating is difficult, however, as the fragment containing the listing of canonized works dates to between the seventh and eighth centuries, forcing scholars to debate internal clues. The fragment was discovered in 1740 by L. A. Muratori in Milan’s Ambrosian Library. See Gregory Allen Robbins, “Muratorian Fragment,” in ABD, 4:928–29.


21. Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, was also associated with Polycarp and possibly the Apostle John. Although he apparently wrote a five-volume treatise, The Sayings of the Lord Explained, preserved only in title by Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 5.33.4, in ANF, 1:563, and Eusebius, The History of the Church, 3.39, the only writings we now have of Papias are a number of fragmented quotations and references, again by Eusebius. His writings are not given fuller treatment here, as the surviving statements shed little light on the apostasy of the church. They do, however, offer wonderful testimony to the kinds of teachings held sacred by the
early church and, through Eusebian commentary, insight into how such things were treated in the fourth century. For example, the fourth-century Eusebius calls Papias “a man of very small intelligence” because he was simple enough to believe in a literal resurrection and millennium, instead of interpreting such apostolic teachings as “mystic and symbolic” as the enlightened fourth-century church did. Eusebius also admits that a “great majority of churchmen [of Papias’s time and shortly after] took the same view.” In this way, the Papias fragments and Eusebian commentary offer interesting insight into earlier beliefs, becoming allegorized within a few centuries. See Eusebius, History of Church, 3.39.

22. Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, 6–7, in AF, 141.
23. Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, 8–9, in AF, 141–43.
24. Ignatius, Epistle to the Trallians, 6, in AF, 163.
25. Ignatius, Epistle to the Philadelphians, 2, in AF, 177.
26. Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, 8, in AF, 155.
27. Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, 11, in AF, 157.
29. For further treatment of the early christological controversies and Ignatius’s role in the debate, see Ehrman, Lost Christianities, 152; AF, 128–130; and Hall, Early Church, 33.

30. The Shepherd of Hermas, Sim. 8.6, in AF, 461–63. Commentary on these false teachers corrupting the community is found in Osiek, 207.
31. The Shepherd of Hermas, Sim. 9.22.2, in AF, 507. See Osiek, The Shepherd of Hermas, 247, for a discussion on how these teachers were claiming their own authority and spreading their false teachings.
32. The Shepherd of Hermas, Man. 11, in AF, 405–9. Osiek, The Shepherd of Hermas, 140–41, sees this passage as a testimony to the vitality of prophecy in the early church. Some in the church are clearly false prophets, ruining the minds of God’s servants. These false prophets say some things that are true as the devil fills them, that they might be able to break down some of the just. Those clothed in truth, however, will not adhere.
33. Ehrman, Lost Christianities, 142–43.
34. Clement, I Clement 1, in AF, 29.
35. Clement, I Clement 1, 14, in AF, 43.
36. Clement, I Clement 1, 15, in AF, 45.
37. Clement, I Clement 1, 46, in AF, 81.
38. Clement, I Clement 1, 46, in AF, 81.
39. The Shepherd of Hermas, Vis. 3.6.3, in AF, 357.
40. The Shepherd of Hermas, Vis. 2.2.4, in AF, 343. In one important passage, Vis. 3.4.3, some in the tower-church are not receiving revelations because of this doublemindedness.
41. The Shepherd of Hermas, Sim. 8.7, in AF, 463. For further insight into the schisms referred to in this passage, see Osiek, The Shepherd of Hermas, 207.
42. A passage that further elaborates upon the degrees of schisms within the community is Sim. 9.23. See Osiek, The Shepherd of Hermas, 247. Here we also learn of those who “persist in their backbiting and hold grudges in their rage toward one another.”
43. Ignatius, Epistle to the Philadelphians, 2, in AF, 177.
44. Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, 6–7, in AF, 155.
45. Ignatius, Epistle to the Philadelphians, 6, in AF, 181.


49. *AF*, 130.


52. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vis. 3.6.5, in *AF*, 357.


58. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vis. 2.2.6, in *AF*, 343. See also Vis. 2.4.2–3, in *AF*, 345.


60. Hall, *Early Church*, 29–30. Here Hall is focusing mainly on the Didache, which he rightly considers to be an early handbook on church leadership. This text was to offer important guidance about Apostles and prophets, especially how to distinguish the true from the false and protect the church from frauds, as well as to offer doctrinal control. Ultimately, however, although the Didache “envisages a church in which apostles, prophets and teachers lead, toward the end we read a direction of another kind.”

61. A challenge often faced in Latter-day Saint teaching and writing concerning this period is that of avoiding sensationalism and irresponsible scholarship. In our zeal to vindicate the Restoration, we occasionally focus on small details that seem to have modern parallels, when, in reality, these conclusions do not accurately reflect what the text actually conveys. Although there may occasionally be legitimate points made in such an approach, we must be careful not to force an issue but rather allow the early Christian writers to speak for themselves and in their proper context. Indeed, with a call for responsible scholarship, many legitimate and powerful insights may be gained from a serious study of these early Christian leaders writing on the dawn of church-wide apostasy.

62. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, 1, in *AF*, 151; *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, 6, in *AF*, 181.


68. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vis. 3.5.1, in *AF*, 355.


The Shepherd of Hermas, Vis. 4.2.5, in AF, 371.

The Shepherd of Hermas, Vis 3.10.4–5, in AF, 365; 3.12.2–3, in AF, 367; 3.13.1–4, in AF, 367; 4.2.1–2, in AF, 371.

The Shepherd of Hermas, Sim. 4, in AF, 425: “For the age [aion] to come is summer to the righteous.”

54. It is intriguing to note that Eusebius himself recognizes the church of the second and third centuries to have passed through dark times, only to reemerge triumphant in the fourth century with the victory of the church through Constantine. For the second century and on, Eusebius emphasizes the constant and growing struggle between heresy and orthodoxy in the church. Heresies, schisms, doctrinal differences, as well as the severe persecutions of the third century, all stand in sharp contrast to the peace and unity won for the church in the fourth century. That Constantine emerges victorious and unifies the church by firmly establishing “orthodoxy” inspires Eusebius to employ millennial language. Having just come out of a horrible period of doctrinal and emotional darkness, Constantine brings the light back in the victory of the church. Book 10 of Eusebius’s History was written “in celebration of the re-establishment of the churches. . . . Sing to the Lord a new song. . . . After those terrifying darksome sights and stories I was now privileged to see and celebrate such things as in truth many righteous men and martyrs of God before us desired to see on earth and did not see, and to hear and did not hear [note the millennial language of Psalms 46:8–9 and 37:33–36]. . . . From that time on a day bright and radiant, with no cloud overshadowing it, shone down with shafts of heavenly light on the churches of Christ throughout the world” (Eusebius, The History of the Church, 10.1). The rebuilding and dedication of the churches and the unification of the members of Christ’s body were all declared “in accordance with a prophet’s prediction. . . . There came together bone to bone, and joint to joint [This is a clear reference to Ezekiel’s vision of the Latter-day gathering and restoration in Ezekiel 37]. There was one power of the divine spirit coursing through all the members, one soul in them all.” Eusebius, The History of the Church, 10.3. His festival oration was that “God . . . bestowed the supreme honour of building His house upon earth and re-establishing it for Christ” (Eusebius, The History of the Church, 10.4). The rest of Book 10 is full of millennial scriptures. The last paragraph of Eusebius’s work reads, “The mighty victor Constantine, pre-eminent in every virtue that true religion can confer. . . . Old troubles were forgotten, and all irreligion passed into oblivion; good things present were enjoyed, those yet to come eagerly awaited” (Eusebius, History of the Church, 10.9). It is fascinating that Eusebius felt the triumph of “orthodoxy” in his day was the great era of light to follow the darkness of the second and third centuries.
Recording thoughts and impressions helps students to act upon personal revelation.

Photograph by Adrianne Gardner Malan.
“I Write the Things of My Soul”: Drawing Closer to the Savior through Writing

Larry W. Tippetts

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*I count myself one of the number of those who write as they learn and learn as they write.*—Augustine

In the scriptures, writing is a command of the Lord. Forms of the word *write* appear nearly a thousand times in the standard works. In the beginning, Adam and Eve and their posterity were commanded to keep a written record appropriately called a “Book of Remembrance,” a book to record their experiences with God (see Moses 6:4–5). I believe the primary purpose of that written record was to help them *remember* all that the Lord had done to bless their lives and also to *remember* what God expected of them.

Forgetfulness is a condition of the mortal state. Yet learning to remember may ultimately determine our eternal reward. In fact, President Spencer W. Kimball suggested that the word *remember* may be the most important word in the dictionary. President Kimball also said, “I suppose there would never be an apostate, there would never be a crime, if people remembered, really remembered, the things they had covenanted at the water’s edge or at the sacrament table and in the temple. . . . I guess we as humans are prone to forget.” President Kimball was convinced that “those who keep a book of remembrance are more likely to keep the Lord in remembrance in their daily lives.”

The Hebrew verb *zakher* (“to remember”), means to be attentive, to act; whereas its antonym, *to forget*, suggests not just innocent passing of a thought from the mind but an intentional failure to act,
akin to apostasy.

To be forgetful means to be heedless, careless, and neglectful. It often reflects a conscious choice for which we will be held accountable. The quality of our memory may well determine our ultimate destiny in eternity, and that writing can serve a divine purpose in shaping that destiny. Note the following examples of how the prophets made use of writing:

Nephi emphasizes, “We labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren” (2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added). Jacob writes a few of the things that he considers “most precious” (Jacob 1:2; emphasis added). Peter, knowing of his imminent death, makes provision through writing, that others will be able to have his words after he is gone so they do not forget (see 2 Peter 1:15). Alma, concerned about King Mosiah’s insistence that Alma take the responsibility to judge the people, inquired of the Lord, and after pouring out his whole soul to God, he heard the voice of the Lord. After receiving the word of the Lord, Alma “wrote them down that he might have them” (Mosiah 26:33; emphasis added). When we read these accounts, it becomes clear why the Lord would encourage all of us to write. “And now, O man, remember, and perish not” (Mosiah 4:30).

Another purpose of writing modeled by the scriptures is that it enables us to sort through our fears, concerns, and questions to arrive at divinely directed conclusions as to how we ought to feel and act. Jeremiah writes of his struggle with the seeming fruitlessness of his prophetic mission, but when he threatens to turn his back on the work God had given him, he simply cannot because the word of God was “as a burning fire shut up in [his] bones” (Jeremiah 20:7–9). We see this process even more clearly as Nephi struggles to write the things of his soul, including his deep feelings of anguish and discouragement following the death of his father, Lehi. Fortunately for us, he also records how, with the help of God, he lifted himself from that depressing state (see 2 Nephi 4:15–35). Reading such examples of how prophets used their journals to work through difficult times provides a marvelous model for us to follow.

Ultimately, the purpose of writing is to keep a principle, idea, or truth before our eyes and mind until we can get it written on our hearts. An associate once said, “Writing in my notes helps me to write it on my soul.” I thought of Abinadi’s statement to the priests of King Noah, “I perceive that they [the commandments of God] are not written in your hearts” (Mosiah 13:11). In contrast, the Lord promised through Jeremiah, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33).
Emphasis on Writing by Latter-day Prophets

We should teach students that if we don’t consider inspiration important enough to write down, not only will we likely forget it but also the Lord may be grieved so that the flow of inspiration diminishes. Elder Henry B. Eyring offers the following counsel:

Could I now give you two practical suggestions? First of all, the Holy Ghost is and must be very sensitive. He can be easily offended. Let me pass along a little advice the Prophet Joseph Smith gave to the leaders of the Church:

“Here is (an) important item. If you assemble from time to time, and proceed to discuss important questions, and pass decisions upon the same, and fail to note them down, by and by you will be driven to straits from which you will not be able to extricate yourselves, because you may be in a situation not to bring your faith to bear with sufficient perfection or power to obtain the desired information; or, perhaps, for neglecting to write these things when God had revealed them, not esteeming them of sufficient worth, the Spirit may withdraw, and God may be angry; and there is, or was, a vast knowledge, of infinite importance, which is now lost” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 73, emphasis added).

I think that means that in your heart, at least, the attitude of writing down even the simplest things that may come from the Spirit would invite the Spirit back again.

Echoing Joseph Smith, Elder Richard G. Scott suggests we keep a private journal to record the impressions that we treasure the most. “Knowledge carefully recorded is knowledge available in time of need. Spiritually sensitive information should be kept in a sacred place that communicates to the Lord how you treasure it. That practice enhances the likelihood of your receiving further light.”

I am convinced that all of us have frequent spiritual promptings and whisperings. Many are not even recognized. Some may be acknowledged, and even treasured for the moment, but later forgotten. Elder Neal A. Maxwell reminded us of this all-too-human tendency: “The prompting that goes unresponded to may not be repeated. Writing down what we have been prompted with is vital. A special thought can also be lost later in the day in the rough and tumble of life. God should not, and may not, choose to repeat the prompting if we assign what was given such a low priority as to put it aside.”

President Lorenzo Snow taught that it is “the grand privilege of every Latter-day Saint . . . to have the manifestations of the Spirit every day of their lives.” Those manifestations need not be dramatic. Rather,
they include the quiet whisperings of encouragement, strength, and peace that lead the man or woman of Christ “in a strait and narrow course . . . and land their immortal souls at the right hand of God” (Helaman 3:29–30). Learning to record the impressions that come will increase our likelihood of obeying those impressions, thereby opening the door to further guidance.10

Over two decades ago, while doing graduate work in how I might help students become better learners, I was impressed with the body of research suggesting that student writing increased their ability to clarify opinions and beliefs. Additionally, writing on the part of students enhanced their ability to retain the knowledge they had worked so hard to gain. I began to experiment in my classroom with a variety of methods designed to encourage students to pick up a pencil and write. The initial results were encouraging, but I learned that I could not teach convincingly what I did not do in my own life, so I began to couple my personal scripture study and devotional times with writing in my own journals. As I disciplined myself to listen more carefully to the spiritual impressions that came to me while pondering or studying, I learned that it required practice to record those impressions in my own words. Often, I felt frustration because my written account did not seem to do justice to what I was feeling or learning. But over the years, I became more and more proficient, and my ability to help students increased proportionately.

I have learned that the wise use of writing exercises can help teachers enhance the conditions of learner readiness and participation and can “be an effective way to have the Holy Spirit help students make personal application of gospel principles.”11 In 1998, I received a strong prophetic confirmation of what I had been doing when Elder Richard G. Scott delivered his powerful message and clear charge to religious educators entitled “Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led.”12 In that address, Elder Scott encouraged us to teach our students that “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.”13 Throughout the talk, Elder Scott repeatedly asked religious educators to do three things for our students:

1. Help students to recognize when the voice of God is speaking to them.
2. Encourage them to write it down.
3. Encourage them to apply it in their lives.
Application in the Classroom

During the first few days of a class, I seek to establish an atmosphere or climate of hopeful expectation by explaining that my desire is that the course will provide many opportunities for students to receive inspiration from the Lord to guide them in their personal decisions and challenges. After briefly outlining my philosophy of writing and inviting them to experiment with it during the semester, I explain that the focus of this class (and of every class I teach) is to help all of us draw closer to the Savior. I explain to students that the seminary or institute classroom is one of the most “inspiration-friendly” settings they will be in all week. But we both have to do our respective parts. “I will give you my best preparation as the teacher, but you have a clearly defined scriptural responsibility as a learner” (see D&C 50:13–22). I also allow time to learn names so that an atmosphere of friendliness, comfort, and security can be established as soon as possible.

On the first day of a class, I give each student a simple sheet of paper entitled “Thoughts and Impressions.” It has a place for the student’s name and brief instructions followed by blank lines on the remaining front and back of the sheet. The instructions read:

Sometime during each class period when you feel an impression to do so (do not wait until the bell), write briefly on one or more of the following regarding our class discussion:

1. Something you most want to remember.

2. The one thing you feel the Lord would most want you to do as a result of this lesson.

3. A question or concern you have.

4. An insight, new idea, or prompting of your own.

At the end of class, leave this sheet with the teacher, and it will be returned to you next class period.

For the first few days of class, I may take a minute during the class (or at the end) to ask a few students to share what they have written. I do this to remind others to write and also to give them examples from their peers as to the kinds of things to write. Following each class, I spend fifteen to twenty minutes reading their comments, responding to each with a check (√), a comment, or a detailed response. Occasion-
ally, I will paper clip a copy of a talk or article that may help answer a concern. I select one or more to read at the start of the next class, which serves as a review and reminder of the previous discussion and enables me to reinforce or clarify before moving into the next lesson. The students are always honored to have their written comments shared with the class, although if it is too personal, I always get their permission in advance, make a copy, and share it anonymously.

An unexpected benefit of this practice has been to help me learn the names and special needs of my students, resulting in much closer relationships with them. Occasionally, I teach a large class of fifty to a hundred students, and even though I do not succeed in matching all the names with faces, it is evident that the students perceive the teacher as one who knows them and is interested in them. The written dialogue is immensely therapeutic for some students. On occasion, multiple students will comment on an issue or express some confusion, which enables me to revisit the topic again to clarify or reinforce a truth.

Many students have moments of profound, possibly even life-changing, insight. I have asked many of them to transfer what they have written on the thought sheet to their personal journal, for I believe that on occasion they are truly writing while “moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 68:4), and for them it becomes personal scripture. One of our outstanding student leaders wrote, “I realized today that I have turned from being ‘loving’ to wanting to be ‘lovable.’ I have become selfish, as I have tried to make sure that I am happy. I must return to wanting to make others happy; that’s when I feel the best.”

Several years ago a young man wrote: “I realize the power media has in my life. What I need to do is convince myself that following all of the counsel we discussed today will bring greater satisfaction into my life than my sports channel or Allman Brothers CDs.” I believe the Holy Ghost bore witness to him of some important principles that day, but he had not yet become convinced. However, the fact that he not only thought about it but also expressed his question in writing may have caused deeper reflection.

A young woman contemplating marriage wrote, “This discussion of personal revelation has come at a perfect time. Last night I prayed with all my heart to know whether Todd and I should be married. I prayed to know in the same manner I know the church is true. Today it hit me. I have never questioned the truth of the Book of Mormon or the power of the Atonement. I have always just known. In the same
manner, I have always just known Todd is the man I want to be with for eternity. The Lord taught me with peace and comfort, not lightning.”

Students ask numerous and varied questions on their thought sheets. In a Preparation for Marriage class, a college freshman wrote, “I didn’t want to ask in class, but I’m not sure what the term ‘necking’ means. I think I know, but I’d just like to be sure.” Some ask for scripture references they missed, “What is the scripture that you quoted . . . the fool rages and is confident?” or request copies of quotes I used in class. After discussing the importance of honesty in relationships, a young man wrote, “Is it better to break a rule like lying, or break a heart?” (My response: “Ah yes, principles in conflict. Sometimes we break a lesser law to keep a higher law, but remember Ephesians 4:15—always speak the truth in love.”)

In a large class of over sixty students, a recently baptized young man wrote a long note on his thought sheet, of which this is just a portion: “This is the first time I have truly felt the Spirit since my confirmation. The elders that were teaching me, both were transferred, my bishop has made no contact with me. I have felt alone in my pursuits having angered my family because of my decision to convert. So without a friend in the ward, or a bishop’s guidance, I have felt Satan’s touch in my life in the past few weeks. Sorry to be so long-winded, but I was just very excited to feel the Spirit again.” After reading this poignant expression, I arranged to have this student visit in my office where we got better acquainted, and I was subsequently able to integrate him more fully in the class, frequently utilizing his point of view in our discussions.

Another benefit of the thought sheets is receiving immediate feedback on my teaching, such as, “How did you know that was exactly what I needed to hear today? You were an answer to my prayer.” Occasionally, students take exception to something I have taught, which allows me to follow up personally or possibly with the entire class. If I have given an incorrect impression to one, it is likely I have also confused others.

I continually gain insights to my students’ unique needs and challenges. A young lady with brief, sloppily written entries added this note about two months into the class: “It’s hard to write my thoughts while listening to the discussion. I’m sorry about that. I can’t focus on two things. Writing takes more time now than before my stroke. I have aphasia from the stroke (loss of speech)” (emphasis added). From that day on, I was able to give her extra help and encouragement. I am repeatedly humbled by the difficult circumstances with which many of our stu-
students struggle on a day-to-day basis and am inspired by their courage and faith in Christ in the midst of those challenges. Certain lessons will strike a powerful chord with some students, and they will write extended paragraphs too personal to share with the class as a whole. The very act of writing creates deep and lasting impressions on their hearts and minds. When I share a profound written expression with the class (with permission), many will refer to the student’s thought as the most important thing they learned that day. For example, I wrote, “Elysha, I was impressed by your description of how you feel when the Lord is speaking to you. Would you mind if I shared it with the class?” Elysha was flattered to have me use her words to help the entire class, and several other students wrote on their own thought sheets about the importance of what she had shared.

Students respond well to personal challenges given in short written notes on their thought sheets. A young woman wrote something she felt she “ought to do.” I simply wrote, “So now that the Spirit has impressed that idea on your mind today, what will you do about it?” In her next reply, she said, “Thanks for what you wrote. That really made me think how much I need to be reminded.” She began working on the impression she had received, giving me periodic updates while I offered encouraging responses. Students often describe and resolve their own concerns in a short paragraph or two. To Allyson, I responded, “You have written a wise analysis of the problem and what to do about it. That is the Holy Ghost leading you along.”

The students understand that the Holy Spirit will often give immediate personal application to them as we discuss scriptural principles. In class we had discussed Doctrine and Covenants 133:14 and the need to flee “spiritual Babylon.” Meredith wrote on her thought sheet, “I must turn my back on debt, which is a result of overspending and indulgence.” We had not discussed debt in class, but in my written response, I assured her that she had been inspired by the Lord. Writing her impression down increased the likelihood of remembering and following through on what she felt. I also attached a conference talk by one of the prophets I had recently read, and the talk helped reinforce her commitment.

I recently conducted a survey of student attitudes and usage of the “Thoughts and Impressions” sheets, which confirmed my informal feelings that the students enjoyed this classroom writing experience and were benefiting in some very important ways. The majority of students (86 percent) used the thought sheets during the semester. When asked to give an overall evaluation, 84 percent said it was “extremely help-
ful,” and 16 percent felt it was “somewhat helpful.” The questionnaire revealed that the three primary purposes of the thought and impression sheets explained at the beginning of the semester had been realized. Students evaluated those purposes positively as summarized below:

1. **To record spiritual promptings or impressions received during class.** Fifty-three percent responded “frequently,” 47 percent said “occasionally,” and none responded “never.” Some additional comments: “As I paid attention in class and to the Spirit, more promptings came.” “The more I write, the more the impressions come.” Another wrote, “There was too much to write! It was great!”

2. **To help remember and apply the things written during class.** Fifty-four percent responded “extremely helpful,” 46 percent said “somewhat helpful,” and none responded “not very helpful.” Some additional comments: “It has helped to look back and read what promptings I have had.” “If I don’t read them later, I forget my impressions.”

3. **To give students an opportunity to ask questions or receive clarification on principles and issues discussed.** Sixty-one percent responded with “very helpful feedback,” 20 percent said “somewhat helpful,” and 18 percent said they “did not use the sheet for this purpose.” Some additional comments: “I liked receiving a reply of substance rather than one of pretended caring.” “Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts.” “I like the comments more than the checks!” Students also were overwhelmingly positive in response to questions regarding the sheets helping them to engage more deeply in class discussions and the course of study, feel more personally connected with the teacher, and make greater personal application of principles into their own lives.

In addition to the “Thoughts and Impressions” sheet, I also constantly encourage the students to keep a more detailed set of class notes in some format. The Salt Lake University Institute of Religion had printed a simple journal, which we sell to students at cost. Many students find this a convenient way to take notes for their institute classes, filling up several volumes during their years in institute. We frequently discuss the importance of keeping a journal to record favorite scriptural insights or possibly a “What would the Lord have me do?” journal. There are many variations on the examples I have shared that teachers and students can develop on their own.

While I was serving as area director of the Salt Lake Valley East Area, many seminary and institute teachers experimented with various forms of classroom writing. Arvel Hemenway used a form of journal writing with his incarcerated students at a drug rehabilitation center.
Over the years, he became increasingly converted to writing because of its powerful impact on his students. Approaching retirement, he said to me, “I think this is the best thing I have ever done in CES.”

**Application in the Classroom**

A teacher who has established the credibility of writing in the hearts and minds of students is in a position to encourage them to use the skills they are learning in the classroom in their personal study at home. The likelihood of this happening increases in direct proportion to whether the teacher actually has developed those disciplines, skills, attitudes, and behaviors in his or her own life. You, the teacher, must be a writer, or you will be limited in your ability to inspire your students. Rather than just telling them about a scriptural insight I found in my personal study, I occasionally read from my own journal as an illustration of the process of reading, thinking, recording, and then applying the passage or principle into my personal life. Students will see us not just as teachers but also as fellow pilgrims journeying side by side along the same path.

I explain to my students the value of *personal spiritual disciplines*—prayer and meditation, solitude, fasting, study, and writing the things of their souls. In class, they receive practical experience with hearing, feeling, and writing down the impressions that descend upon their hearts and minds when the Spirit of the Lord is present. Our work is not done, however, until we have inspired our students to recreate a climate for hearing the voice of the Lord at home. We cannot overemphasize the importance of finding times of solitude when we are not being rushed.

Recently, in class, I suggested they try an experiment next time they were driving alone in their car. We had been discussing the constant noise of the world that occupies our physical hearing nearly every waking hour. I asked how many of them listen to CDs, tapes, or the radio when they drive. All raised their hands. My suggestion was simply to turn off the radio and drive in silence for a while, reflecting on their relationship to God, and see if the Lord might have something to say to them. A few days later a young woman recorded the following on her thought sheet: “I tried doing that last week as I drove to school in the morning. I don’t know if He really had anything specific to say to me, but I did have a wonderful experience through focusing all my thoughts on Him that morning. I know that He talks to us through the scriptures, but I also now know that if we are willing to listen closely, He is always ready to whisper to us, even if it’s just a feeling of love and
comfort.”

Most teachers periodically encourage students to spend quality daily time for personal study and worship. Students who develop this discipline will use the remaining time of the day more effectively. By helping them grasp the idea that praying and meditating, reading scripture and other good literature, or listening to inspired music will open the door to personal inspiration that can be more easily understood and remembered by the use of paper and pen, we will have given our students a spiritual discipline that will enrich them throughout their lives. As we become converted to attuning our spiritual ears to hear the word of the Lord and then confidently record those impressions in sacred personal journals, we will increase the likelihood that we will act on them and subsequently receive further instruction. We will become “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

To reinforce the students’ efforts at home, I try to provide frequent opportunities in class for students to share (verbally or in writing) some of the experiences they are having at home in scripture study and in recognizing and understanding what the Lord is trying to tell them. I also try to help them develop some kind of system for reviewing and retrieving the impressions that come to them; otherwise, they may simply forget what they have written. Just as we organize information for easier retrieval (Topical Guide, indexes, and so forth), there are ways for students to organize the spiritual impressions that come to them. This generally is done at home, but the teacher is in a great position to suggest ways that this can be accomplished.

Additional Thoughts and Testimony

Paul said to the Romans, “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?” (Romans 2:21). Encouraging students to write and helping them learn to recognize how the Holy Ghost guides them have been two of the most rewarding things I have done as a teacher. I am totally committed to this teaching approach, despite the additional time it takes. It is like having two different class sessions. Successful teachers all know the joy felt following an edifying class discussion. I am able to sit down in my office and have another period of edifying interchange with my students—this time in written form. It is a form of private tutoring with each student who chooses to participate.

Not every student will exercise sufficient effort to incorporate writing into his or her means of personal study and growth. Many feel inadequate in reducing their deepest thoughts and feelings into the written word, either because of lack of experience in expressing them-
selves in writing or because of hesitancy to share the deep feelings of their heart with others. However, for those who do, the rewards are immediate and may impact eternity. They will take with them a lifelong skill and attitude of heart that will continue to enrich their lives when they are no longer enrolled in our classes.

How can we measure the value of helping the rising generation experience hearing the voice of the Lord? As our students gain confidence in their ability to express themselves in writing of this type and use their personal journals and other writings as a means of remembering what the Lord has said to them, they will be more likely to apply the principles of life. Next to the habit of regular scripture study and prayer, it may be the most important spiritual discipline they will learn in their years of formal religious education. Furthermore, they will likely pass these disciplines, attitudes, and skills on to the next generation. The depth of learning that takes place in the home far surpasses that which occurs in the classroom.

Elder Henry B. Eyring said that the trying times we live in demand that we must do better.15 We are losing too many youth. If the principles outlined in this article are valid, the questions teachers must answer for themselves include the following: Will this approach make a difference in the lives of my students? Am I able to pay the price necessary to adjust my teaching style? Am I willing to take the extra time it will require to read and respond to what my students write?

Encouraging and teaching our students to write in the classroom and in their personal study at home is not the only method to reach them, but it is one that is based on a firm scriptural foundation and that can provide teachers with another tool to help students hear the voice of God and live their lives consistent with that voice. 

Notes

5. FARMS Update no. 67 (March 1990), based on research by Louis Midgley.
7. Richard G. Scott, “Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge,” Ensign, November
I Write the Things of My Soul

1993, 86.


10. See Elder Richard G. Scott’s personal example of this process while on an assignment in Mexico, in “Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led,” CES Symposium, August 11, 1998, 10–11.


14. Survey by author of eighty students attending New Testament and Preparation for Marriage Classes, spring semester, 2004, Salt Lake University Institute of Religion. This figure represents all students who finished the three classes I taught that semester.

Teaching students to ask questions of the text will help them go beyond the surface to the real substance.

Photograph by Adrianne Gardner Malan.
Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text

Eric D. Huntsman

Good teachers know how to ask questions, and good students become quite capable of answering them. Religious educators, furthermore, should seek to become skilled at asking questions that help students learn and understand essential doctrine and then find ways to integrate the doctrine into their students’ life experiences. The example of Jesus as teacher and the experiences of other successful teachers have demonstrated the value, indeed the necessity, of asking questions that invite the power of the Spirit into the learning process.1

Another tool in the teacher’s arsenal, however, is teaching students how to ask basic questions of the scriptural text to help them appreciate the written word of the Lord in new ways. Whether the text being studied is the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, or the Pearl of Great Price, the text is a historical artifact, and properly understanding both its historical formation and the literary means by which it conveys the principles it contains strengthens the reader’s acceptance of both the text’s historicity and truthfulness as well as his or her recognition of its power to teach and change its reader.

Although most teachers intuitively ask themselves basic historical, literary, and theological questions of a scriptural text and then incorporate the answers to these questions in their instruction, directly asking these questions of students can give added structure to teachers’ treatment of scripture, keep a greater focus on the text itself, and provide a useful way to incorporate biblical and historical scholarship
appropriately while allowing “the ultimate interpretation of doctrinal matters [to rest] with Apostles and prophets.” Furthermore, teaching students to ask and answer these questions themselves trains them in how to study the scriptures more systematically than just looking broadly at the contents of the scriptures or quoting sometimes isolated passages from them.

The Exegetical Method

In biblical studies, the systematic process of asking questions of a text as a way of understanding its meaning is called exegesis (pronounced ek-séj-sis; from the Greek εξεγομαι, meaning “to lead out of”). Usually seen as part of the wider field of hermeneutics (pronounced hér-mé-nyü-tiks; “interpreting” the meaning of the text in both its original context and in its effect on and application to the reader), formal exegesis often employs a wide variety of critical tools to help readers understand the meaning and intent of the text. Until the twentieth century, most exegesis associated with the Bible assumed that by asking and answering the right questions, readers could discover the original meaning of the text, free from presuppositions and biases. Such questioning and analysis, or descriptive exegesis, was seen as being reasonably objective until Rudolf Bultmann, among others, began to question whether anyone could approach any text without presuppositions. In particular, confessional approaches to the study of the Bible—which accept it as an ancient text but overall emphasize that, as scripture, it is the word of God and is a standard for belief and practice—are seen as being dominated by preexisting bias and are termed prescriptive exegesis.

A wide variety of exegetical methods and systems exist, but often their technicalities are beyond, and indeed would detract from, the major purpose of religious education, which focuses on teaching doctrinal truths and leading to conversion. As a result, in most instances Latter-day Saint religious education should not seek to imitate secular religious studies programs. Likewise, the tools or criticisms often employed in exegesis can be taken to extremes and can result in undercutting the reliability of the text as scripture. Nevertheless, religious education has long recognized the value of setting scriptural texts in
their historical context and bringing enough cultural background to their study to make them more understandable, and there is a growing interest in understanding the impact that their literary effect has on their reading. Indeed, Latter-day Saint scholars with both the interest and appropriate training are encouraged to engage historical and critical methodologies to varying degrees “to discover historical backgrounds, provide cultural and linguistic details, and explore new avenues of understanding.”

### Simple exegesis: the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text
- Establish careful reading strategies.
- Ask historical and literary questions, considering the input of scholarship.
- Ask theological questions, recognizing the sole authority of apostles and prophets to interpret doctrine.
- Read by pericopes (by sections), and set the parts in the context of the whole.

Accordingly, a simplified definition of exegesis, “the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text,” can be useful in studying not only the Bible but indeed all scripture. In its approach to scripture as a text, exegesis is akin to the philological approach taken by classicists to Greek and Latin literature or the contextualization, close reading, and *explication du texte* performed by students of comparative literature. When students learn careful reading strategies that help them respect the scriptures as texts as well as religious writings, they can better understand why their apostolic and prophetic authors were inspired to write them as they did. These strategies include asking basic historical and literary questions that allow consideration of material provided by both religious educators and outside scholarship. Through this questioning process, students can better “lead out” (exegesis) the original meaning without unduly “reading in” (eisegesis) their own preconceived notions. Next, and more importantly, readers can then ask theological questions to identify the doctrines and principles in the scriptures; here, in a properly confessional and prescriptive approach, the teachings of ancient and modern apostles and prophets,
who alone can authoritatively interpret doctrinal matters, are conclusive. In addition to asking such questions, readers can then employ another important strategy of reading by sections and then consciously relating those parts to the larger narrative or book, thereby preserving the integrity of the text and reducing the possibility of taking a passage out of context. Through such careful and methodical reading, students and teachers alike can, as one colleague once put it, correctly understand how a principle applied “to them, there, then” before applying it “to us, here, now.”

**Through such careful and methodical reading, students and teachers alike can correctly understand how a principle applied “to them, there, then” before applying it “to us, here, now.”**

### Historical Questions

Although sophisticated exegesis requires readers to ask many questions of a text, reducing the process to the simple formula of asking basic historical, literary, and theological questions is sufficient to have an enriched experience with the scriptures in most Religious Education settings. Indeed, as mentioned, these are questions that good teachers routinely ask themselves when preparing lectures and discussions, but more explicitly following the exegetical model in our classes and teaching students to do so in their own studies provides a useful way to structure classes, study, and discussion.

**Some Historical Questions**

- When and why was this text written?
- What occasioned the event or teaching recorded?
- Who was its author and original audience?
- How does its historical and cultural context affect its interpretation?
- How did the information in it—from the original source, to the author, through editors and translators—get to us?

Historical questions generally fall into the category of *diachronic* exegesis that sees the text as it developed “through time.” Generally, we begin by asking the questions of authorship, original audience, and date (when ascertainable). Although this questioning is often done in a perfunctory way at the beginning of a class or the start of the study of a book of scripture, students frequently do not know how these
assumptions have been reached. In regard to the authorship of the formally anonymous Gospels, for instance, explaining what kind of internal evidence (what the text itself says about who wrote it) and external evidence (what early outside sources, such as patristic authors, said about the authorship) leads to the traditional ascriptions and helps students when they come upon other arguments either in scholarship or from the popular media. A reader can then effectively marshal latter-day confirmations (such as 1 Nephi 14:18–27; Ether 4:16; D&C 7; D&C 77:1–15; D&C 88:141 confirming the identity of the Apostle John as the author of John, Revelation, and, by extension, at least for 1 John) in the discussion. Discussing the dating of Pauline texts, even when the best chronologies are only tentative and approximate, is very useful in seeing how Paul’s thought and teaching developed with the growth of the Church and the changes in the problems that it faced.

Asking these basic questions of Book of Mormon texts may seem superfluous, but they allow, for instance, a detailed discussion of the person and mission of Nephi before a reader begins a study of 1 Nephi and allow teachers to point out to students how a book from the small plates differs from an abridged book in the plates of Mormon. Discussing dating, such as the fact that 1 Nephi was written about 570 BC, helps students understand that the events of 1 Nephi are being recorded long after the fact—when Nephi understood the eventual results of his brothers’ rebelliousness and has experienced the warfare that arose between his descendants and the Lamanites. As always, discussions of Book of Mormon audiences rightly stress that ancient prophets were not only aware of their own people and descendants but also specifically wrote with the latter-day reader in mind.

Other important historical questions include asking what occasioned the event or teaching that a scripture records and then asking how the historical and cultural contexts affect the interpretation of the passage. Student manuals and the instructor’s own training help provide useful background information about these areas. In certain settings, this is also the stage in the exegetical process where we can judiciously introduce some of the findings of outside scholarship—whereas confessional and prescriptive exegesis may often not accept the conclusions of secular scholarship, generally, these scholars have correctly observed features in the text that we, in turn, are called upon to explain in a faithful way. Students will, at some point, come upon many of these arguments, once again in reading outside of school or college or simply through the popular media, where newsmagazines and television documentaries frequently feature issues in religious and biblical
studies. As a result, helping our students know what the questions are and where to look for acceptable answers, both inside and outside the Latter-day Saint community, will help them discuss such issues intelligently and faithfully. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught, we should be “‘bilingual’ . . . in the language of scholarship, and . . . in the language of spiritual things.” President Gordon B. Hinckley has encouraged religious educators “to be reading secular history, the great literature that has survived the ages, and the contemporary thinkers and doers. In so doing we will find inspiration to pass on to our students who will need all the balanced strength they can get as they face the world into which they move.”

One such historical question concerns how the information in scripture came first from the original source, then to the author, and finally through editors and translators to the modern reader. Sometimes this process involves compositional issues that many confessional approaches to scripture can, at times, find problematic. For instance, studies of the Johannine corpus have not only questioned whether the Apostle John authored all five works attributed to him but also have postulated a complex compositional history that begins with the Beloved Disciple—possibly but not necessarily John—as a source, whose material was then worked into the Fourth Gospel by a later Evangelist, and whose school then produced an elder who authored the epistles and a final editor for the Gospel. Apparent differences in style have then suggested a completely different author for the Apocalypse. As noted above, latter-day revelation confirms the Apostle John as the author of virtually all of the Johannine writings. Nevertheless, the final verses of the Gospel were clearly written by someone else (John 21:24–25), suggesting that the Johannine writings did have some kind of editorial history. Comparing the possible compositional history of the Gospel of John to the process involved in the composition and abridgment of the Book of Mormon can help students understand the evidence in a way that does not challenge apostolic authority for the Gospel of John. For instance, the great sermon on the infinite and eternal Atonement of Christ in Alma 34 was delivered by Amulek, apparently recorded by Alma 2, abridged by Mormon, and then translated and published by Joseph Smith, thus demonstrating that collecting and editing does, in fact, happen in scripture.

**Literary Questions**

Students are used to viewing the scriptures as scriptures—sources of religious truth and knowledge—and not as literature. Because
literature consists of writing in prose or poetry that is excellent in form and lasting in value, we could, and probably should, argue that scriptural texts are among the best literature. In antiquity, poets were seen as being inspired by the gods, and artists, composers, and writers continue to be viewed as “inspired” when their work transcends that which can be obtained by the average person. Can we have any doubt that inspired prophets and apostles were truly inspired not only in the content of what they spoke and wrote but also in the form in which it was delivered? In regard to the Book of Mormon, Rust has written that “the impact of what the Book of Mormon says often is created through how it is said. The interconnection of beauty with truth and goodness invites us to Christ. That is, literary elements such as form, imagery, poetry, and narrative help teach and motivate us in ways that touch the hearts and souls as well as our minds.” Indeed, questions of form, structure, and style all serve to reveal the power of the written word of God.

**Some Literary Questions**

- What kind of writing is the passage, and how does its genre affect how we read it?
- How does it fit into its larger context—particularly what comes before and after it?
- What was the author trying to teach or emphasize by relating it as he or she did?

Literary questions constitute much of what is termed *synchronic* exegesis—that is, analysis that considers the text in its finished form “taken all at once.” How a text says what it says—both through use of its original language (grammar and lexicography) and employment of language (in particular rhetoric)—is naturally an important part of the literary analysis of a text. Care must be exercised in a general religion class, however, since not only are most students not prepared with ancient languages but also few instructors can be expected to have a detailed knowledge of these languages or their grammar. As a result, slightly erroneous interpretations based on secondhand understanding of a passage, such as the use of the different Greek words for love (*agapao* and *phileo*) in John 21:15–19, are sometimes perpetuated. Course manuals, commentaries, and other resources can provide teachers with some linguistic insights, but since students read all biblical texts in the approved translations, literary questions should focus on those that can be answered by our studying the translation that students are using.
A major literary concern when we read a passage of scripture is to identify what kind of writing the passage is and how this genre affects how we read it. Genre theory and its significance are continuously developing topics of discussion in biblical studies and elsewhere, but the fundamental point for all readers of scriptural texts is the acknowledgment that we read different types, or genres, of writing differently. For instance, we read a newspaper much differently than we read a novel. Likewise, reading a love letter affects us differently than reading a textbook. Authors, including scriptural authors, use different kinds of writing to produce different effects on their reading audience.

For readers of the Book of Mormon, nowhere is this more evident than when Nephi moves from a narrative style to the moving poetry of the “Psalm of Nephi” in 2 Nephi 4:17–35. Poetic writing, which uses language in a deliberately chosen and arranged manner to evoke images and a specific emotional response, forces a reader to slow down and consider each word, its meaning, and its symbolism. Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophet-authors employed poetic forms of expression for specific purposes, such as portraying deep emotion, elevating their praise of God, or “enticing readers to come to Christ.” Likewise, the specific parallel constructs of Hebrew poetry appear in Book of Mormon Isaiah quotations to concentrate attention on their thought. Drawing attention to poetic passages, perhaps by laying them out in stanzas, helps students recognize the effort that Book of Mormon authors put into the composition of their texts.

Benefits also accrue from asking students to distinguish between different kinds of prose in the Book of Mormon, beginning by differentiating between narrative, which effectively recounts events or simply tells a story, and discourse, such as quotations of sermons, written treatises, allegories, or letters (such as those between Helaman, Moroni, and Pahoran and those of Mormon to Moroni). Discourse in the Book of Mormon has a particularly powerful effect because, as Rust notes, “Sermons, letters, prophecies, and dialogues are presented as living voices. . . . Because so many discourses and dialogues are presented directly in the Book of Mormon, distances break down and time dissolves.”

This kind of genre study has long been an important part of biblical studies. Although the details, and the extremes, of form criticism rarely have place in the average religion class, understanding what kind of text a section of a Gospel or a given New Testament book is helps the reader better understand its meaning and intent. Recognizing that the structure of the second Gospel is, in some ways, a “Marcan necklace,” with different types of text units linked together by narra-
tive-like beads on a string, need not be taken to the extremes of some form criticism; we can, instead, focus attention on the importance of individual stories and Mark’s own artistry. Likewise, understanding Paul’s use and adaptation of the classical epistolary form can help in the understanding of his letters, particularly when we realize that the many books in the New Testament simply broadly defined as “epistles” actually constitute several different types of writing, each with a slightly different intent and impact.

Another important, and often overlooked, literary question is how a given passage relates to the text before and after it. Just as a book or work must be set in a historical and cultural context, a passage, or *pericope* (pronounced pe-ri-ko-pe; from a Greek term meaning “to cut”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A Broad Overview of New Testament Genres</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gospels</strong>—proclamations of the “good news” about Jesus intended to establish or strengthen people’s faith in Him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• quasibiographical, semihistorical portraits of the life, teachings, and actions of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• include a number of “forms” or subgenres, such as genealogies; healing/miracle stories; call stories; parables; sermons; and Infancy, Passion, and Resurrection narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Real letters</strong>—written to specific individuals or communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “occasional in nature,” addressing practical and theological issues relevant to particular church communities (Paul’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church Orders or “Pastoral Epistles”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• regulatory letters, collections of instructions for the practical organization of religious communities (1 Timothy, Titus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Testament</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• a document that gives a dying person’s last wishes and instructions for his/her successors (2 Timothy and 2 Peter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homily/Sermon</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• an exegetical sermon that cites and interprets older biblical texts in reference to Jesus (Hebrews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wisdom collection</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• a collection of general instructions on how to live an ethical Christian life well (James)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistles/encyclicals</strong>—more stylized literary works in letter format for a broad audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “circular letters” intended for broader audiences (1 and 2 Peter, Jude; perhaps Colossians and Ephesians foreshadow)</td>
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</table>
out a passage or selection), needs to be put in its context of the rest of the work. For instance, the well-known story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42) raises questions regarding the respective values of service (Martha’s serving) and hearing the word of the Lord (Mary’s sitting at Jesus’s feet). Rarely is this pericope considered in relation to what comes immediately before it, the parable of the good samaritan (vv. 29–37), an important example of service. Likewise, the pericope about the Samaritan follows the lawyer’s question (vv. 25–28), which stresses the two great commandments: loving God and loving fellowmen, although loving God is the “first and the great” commandment and, in important ways, serves as a prerequisite to being able to serve others.

Another important literary question is “What was the author trying to teach or emphasize by including the passage and relating it as he did?” For instance, Matthew and Luke have the cleansing of the temple immediately after Jesus’s triumphal entry, seemingly on Sunday (Matthew 21:12–17; Luke 19:45–46). Mark, however (11:15–19), moves it to Monday, allowing the episode to be framed by the encounter with the barren fig tree in the morning (11:12–14) and the discovery of the withered fig tree in the evening (11:20–21). Mark may well have adjusted the order to teach an important point beyond the one usually perceived of the necessity of cleansing the Lord’s house: since Israel was likened to a fruitless fig tree by Old Testament prophets (for example, Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10), the temple—barren, defiled, and misused by some of the Jewish leadership of Jesus’s time—was ripe for destruction, just as they were.24

Theological Questions

Because learning gospel truths and learning of the Savior and His Atonement are our primary purposes for studying the scriptures, this is the type of questioning of the text that is rightly the most instinctive for religious educators. Even among secular scholarship, the theological
purpose of a text is understood to be a fundamental part of exegesis, and the claims that a text makes on its readers—how it engages them and how it calls upon them to react in their lives—is what is sometimes referred to as *existential* exegesis. In the context of religious education, we are naturally concerned primarily with what a text teaches us about God, His plan for His children, the doctrines of Christ and the Atonement, and those principles that allow us to apply this plan in our lives.

**Some Theological Questions**
- How does this passage affect and change the reader?
- What principles or doctrines does it illustrate or teach?
- What does it teach us about God and His plan?
- What does it teach us about the person and work of Jesus?
- What have latter-day apostles and prophets taught about this passage?

Theological questions can be framed as simply as “What gospel truth does this passage teach?” or can be focused according to principles and ordinances of the gospel or, for a Book of Mormon class, according to the title-page purposes of demonstrating that Jesus is the Christ, learning what great things the Lord has done for our fathers, and understanding what covenants He has made with His people. The New Testament Gospels focus on Christology—the person and work of Jesus Christ—so questions might appropriately begin with what a text teaches us about the nature of Jesus as the Son of God and what He did for us in His ministry, suffering, death, and Resurrection. Indeed, identifying specific thematic and doctrinal questions for a specific scriptural text at the beginning of a course and then returning to them throughout the semester is an effective way to focus students’ attention on the text’s own stated purposes.

Although seeking answers to historical and literary questions can involve scholarship from within and without the Church, finding answers to theological questions can and should safely rely upon insight from gospel authorities. The first source should be the scriptures themselves, followed by official statements, proclamations, and declarations of the First Presidency and the Twelve, and then the individual teachings of the latter-day prophets and Apostles. Many teachers naturally move toward doctrine, latter-day interpretation, and individual application quickly. However, the pedagogical principle that “that which is taught last is remembered most” suggests that asking historical and literary questions first and then focusing on the doctrines
and official interpretations second can be an effective way to teach the scriptures both as a text and as a way to allow students to leave having had a spiritual focus.

**Reading in Sections**

Following scriptural and prophetic counsel, we enjoin students not just to read the scriptures but also to study and search them. Too often, however, teachers and students alike read the scriptures piecemeal—verse by verse or in chapters only—which disrupts the integrity of the overall text. Although learning scripture mastery lists serves an important purpose early in a student’s study of the scriptures, religious instruction at institutions of higher learning provides opportunities for more in-depth reading and studying of the scriptures that will help avoid the tendency to “proof text,” the process of using verses to prove one’s own point rather than letting the text make its point. An important part of exegesis is reading a text in sections and relating them to the whole.

As suggested above, a literary treatment of the text encourages us to read it by sections or “pericopes.” A pericope is generally a self-contained episode, story, or section of a larger unit, oftentimes discernable in the standard editions of the King James Version by paragraph markings. Delineating pericopes can be an important part of a teacher’s or a student’s class preparation, encouraging him or her to consider and reread passages just read to see how they fit together. Although a common approach to reading and analyzing text in biblical studies, dividing the text into pericopes can also be useful in studying the Book of Mormon, particularly in complex portions of text such as the Isaiah quotations, where identifying the topics of pericopes helps students better see how authors like Nephi are employing the prophecies they quote.

Another useful reading strategy is to outline a book to see how the pericopes and overall content fit together. Such outlines can, of course, be somewhat arbitrary and necessarily are imposing an outside structure upon a text. However, the process of creating or reviewing an outline allows a student to quickly master the overall content of a reading assignment, allowing class instruction to focus on particular pericopes, doctrines, or points.

Furthermore, when used appropriately, such “structural analysis” can help identify the author’s own organization of material and illustrate how the author has attempted to emphasize or highlight certain points. For instance, Matthew divides the body of his Gospel into five sections, each with a narrative block followed by a sermon of discourse material. This organization seems to illustrate how the teachings of
Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text

Christ, the new Moses, have replaced the five books of the law of Moses, but it may also have required Matthew to move some material out of the expected chronological or geographical order. The body of the work is then framed by the infancy narratives at the beginning, answering the important Christological question of who Jesus is, and the passion and resurrection narratives at the end, answering the question of what Jesus did for us. Comparisons with the simpler overall structure of Mark, which has been described as “a drama in three acts” that charts a geographic progression to Jerusalem and the Atonement, can then help us understand why Matthew and Mark at times organized material that they share differently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outline of Matthew</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genealogy and infancy narrative (1:1–2:23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part 1: Proclamation of the kingdom (3:1–7:29)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse: Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part 2: Galilean ministry (8:1–10:42)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse: Mission sermon (10:1–42)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part 3: Opposition to Jesus (11:1–13:52)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse: Sermon in parables (13:1–52)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part 4: Rejection by Israel (13:54–18:25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse: Sermon on the Church—precedence in the kingdom, disciplining those who mislead, disciplining those who wrong (18:1–35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 5: Journey to and ministry in Jerusalem (19:1–25:46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse: Sermon on the last days—prophecies of destruction, necessity for watchfulness, parables of the Second Coming (24:1–25:46)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Climax: Suffering, Death, and Resurrection (26:1–28:20)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Outline of Mark</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heading (1:1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prologue (1:2–13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act I: Authoritative mission in Galilee (1:14–8:30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act II: On the road to Jerusalem (8:31–10:52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act III: Climax in Jerusalem (11:1–16:8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passion narrative (14:32–15:47)</td>
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<td>Resurrection narrative (16:1–18[20])</td>
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Likewise, the familiar order of events in 1 Nephi takes on new meaning when we analyze it structurally. Lehi’s opening ministry (1:4–20) and Nephi’s quotation and interpretation of Isaiah (19:1–22:18) frame the book, and the narrative of the journey through the wilderness (2:1–7:22 and 16:1–19:21) is interrupted by chapters recounting
Lehi’s vision of the tree of life (8:1–10:22) and Nephi’s considerably longer view of the same, his inspired interpretation, and his subsequent visions (1 Nephi 11–14). Indeed, this “Apocalypse of Nephi” dominates the account of the book, focusing on a vision of the Condescension with its interpretive centerpiece that shows that Christ is the love of God, the tree of life, and the fountain of living waters (11:21–25). The importance of this central vision not only to 1 Nephi but also to the whole Book of Mormon has been stressed by President Boyd K. Packer, who has written, “After the people of Lehi left Jerusalem, Lehi had a vision of the Tree of Life, his son Nephi prayed to know its meaning. In answer, he was given a remarkable vision of Christ. That vision is the central message of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ.” Such important themes are often lost when scriptures are read only in a verse-by-verse approach.

Linking Exegesis with Sound Course Objectives and Activities

Carefully organizing a course helps both teacher and student remain focused on the objectives of the class and, in the case of a religion class, focused on a particular volume of scripture. Such organization also presents a methodical way of treating the text. Instructors all have individual course objectives, which should contribute to the overall goals of Religious Education at the BYU campus or the seminary and institute teaching emphasis. Explicitly listing these objectives in the syllabus, reviewing them with the students, and tailoring class discussions, quizzes, writing assignments, and exams to these stated objectives are beneficial aspects of students’ learning experiences. Text boxes are included in this section to illustrate possible course objectives and activities, such as writing a simple exegetical paper.

By including basic exegetical aims in these course objectives, teachers can ensure that the text that is the focus of a class will be examined in a careful and methodical way, understanding it in its original context, gaining a greater appreciation for its power and beauty, and, ultimately, learning its doctrines and how to apply them more carefully.
Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text

For instance, sample course objectives for a Religion 211 or 212 New Testament section could include the expected goals of first increasing the students’ knowledge of the New Testament by familiarizing them with the basic content, themes, and theological concepts of its constituent books and, ultimately, strengthening individual testimonies of sacred truths by increasing students’ understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the doctrines of the Restoration. Exegetical procedures can help accomplish both of these objectives, but adding an additional objective—such as helping students read, discuss, and write about the New Testament as both a source of scriptural knowledge and as a collection of sacred texts—can provide a teacher an opportunity to teach simple exegetical methods directly by helping students ask basic historical, literary, and theological questions.

Sample Course Objectives
1. Increase the student’s knowledge of the New Testament. Familiarize him or her with the basic content, themes, and theological concepts of its constituent books.
2. Help the student read, discuss, and write about the New Testament as both a source of scriptural knowledge and as a collection of sacred texts. Ask basic historical, literary, and theological questions (a process known as “exegesis,” from the Greek “to lead out” or explain).
3. Strengthen individual testimonies of sacred truths: 
a. Increase understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the doctrines of the Restoration
b. Learn what the New Testament Apostles taught about Christ
c. Understand how latter-day apostles and prophets help us understand their writings

By including basic exegetical aims in these course objectives, teachers can ensure that the text that is the focus of a class will be examined in a careful and methodical way.

Many teachers already include these basic questions in the planning of their lectures or lessons; for instance, before beginning a book, we can discuss basic issues of authorship, date, audience, original context, and the overall structure and themes of the book. Formatting quizzes and exams according to the course objectives—including exegetical
objectives—further helps students learn to read and study with these purposes in mind. Quizzes and exams, for example, can be geared to the previously introduced sample objectives if the teacher includes identifications to assess scriptural knowledge, scriptural commentary to assess understanding and analyzing of scripture as text, and short answers or essay questions to assess understanding of doctrine, which can strengthen testimony. Scripture commentary allows students to pursue basic exegesis the most directly. It consists of asking students to respond to important passages of text covered in class. Students are not necessarily required to identify the passage by chapter and verse but instead respond to basic historical questions (Who is speaking? Who recorded the passage? When was it written? What was the situation? and How does it affect our understanding of the passage?); literary questions (What kind of writing is this? What is its context in the larger narrative or book? What does the author emphasize or illustrate by how he wrote the passage?); and then, most importantly, theological questions (What principle is being taught in the passage? How did it apply to the original audience? How does it apply to us?).

Unfortunately, the large size of many classes in the Church effectively precludes extensive writing experiences, but writing about scripture is the most effective means for students to learn exegetical method. The ideal way to teach students how to methodically ask and answer questions about a text in a short paper is to have them treat a single pericope, or passage, rather than an entire book, author, or topic. In its simplest form, a paper simply has a student select a passage of interest and respond to basic historical, literary, and theological questions. In honors sections or smaller classes, teachers may be able to give students a chance to experience slightly more involved and systematic exegesis, following an outline such as the one presented here. Because of the goals of a Religious Education class, the various sections of the paper can be weighted to reflect their importance; for instance, the final reflection section, where most theological questions can be treated and where application to the student is explored, can constitute 30 or 40 percent of the paper’s grade.
Sample Exegetical Paper Outline

Survey or Introduction (for this short paper, 1 paragraph)
- Describe the passage and why it is significant; in a short pericope. You could include the passage as a block quote (single-spaced, double-indented).

Contextual Analysis (2 paragraphs, one on historical context and one on literary)
- The first paragraph should treat the historical context—that is, what event occasioned the teaching, parable, miracle, sermon, etc.
- The second paragraph should treat the passage's literary context. Among other things, it should explain why the author chose to include this event or story in his larger narrative. Why was it important to him and to his original audience? How does the larger context, the text before and after the passage, affect its reading? Look at an outline to see how your pericope fits into the larger narrative.

Formal Analysis (indicates what type of writing the passage is—how it fits into the larger narrative; 1-2 paragraphs)
- The formal analysis discusses what genre or form the passage is—a piece of narrative, a canticle or hymn, a controversy narrative, a parable, a sermon, a discourse, etc.
- How is the pericope structured?

Detailed Analysis (4–5 paragraphs, treating each verse or section of your text)
- Careful scrutiny of the word choice, imagery, allusions to other passages, etc. What are the main points of each part of the text, and how does the writer make these points?

Synthesis (1 paragraph)
- The synthesis is essentially a summation or conclusion before the reflection. Although we are accustomed to summarizing at the end of a paper, what the synthesis at this point does is help keep the paper text-focused: What does your passage say and how does it say it as a TEXT before you begin to discuss what claims it makes on the reader—that is, what does it call upon the reader to believe or do?

Reflection (1–3 good paragraphs; this is the place for your existential exegesis)
- The reflection section is where you can discuss how it engages the reader and what the importance of the passage is to you individually or to Latter-day Saints in general. What does this passage tell us about the Savior and His mission? What doctrines does it teach? How does it motivate us to exercise greater faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? How has it changed you?
We cannot, and should not, expect students in Religious Education to pursue exegesis in the rigid and technical way that a graduate student in religious studies would. However, incorporating basic exegetical tools and methodology into teaching, assessment, and writing can help our students gain a greater appreciation of the scriptures as ancient and literary texts and, in the process, gain a greater respect for the written word of the Lord. A simplified and confessionally prescriptive exegetical model consisting of asking historical, literary, and theological questions enables a student to read what the text says rather than what the student thinks it says—being guided in the final instance by what prophets and apostles teach about its doctrine.

Notes


3. Stanley E. Porter and Kent D. Clarke, “What Is Exegesis? An Analysis of Various Definitions,” in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill, 2002), 6, describe the various fields as follows: “To begin with, the term *interpretation* is often used in a less technical and more general sense . . . [and] being the broadest of the three terms, incorporates both *hermeneutics* and *exegesis* as subcategories. . . . The next term to follow is *hermeneutics*, which refers to the over-arching theories or philosophies that guide exegesis. And finally, *exegesis*, the most specific of the three terms, refers to the actual practice, procedures, and methods one uses to understand a text” (emphasis added).

4. These include both “lower” or *textual criticism*, which consists of comparing and studying the many manuscripts of a text to establish what the autograph or original may have been, and “higher” criticisms, which seek to address questions of how the text was originally written and what it was trying to say. Some so-called higher criticisms include *historical criticism*, which seeks to establish the literal sense of a text (what the author meant to say) by establishing authorship, date of composition, and original audience while taking into account customs and historical context; *literary criticism*, which analyzes the vocabulary, grammar, and style of a text and considers the structure of a work as a whole (examining how the author employs and structures material to make his or her points); and *source*, *form*, and *redaction criticisms*, which examine respectively what sources an author used, how the pieces of the text functioned originally, and how the author edited, shaped, and formed his or her material.


11. In a forthcoming piece with S. Kent Brown in *BYU Studies* (winter 2005), I have noted that Anthony A. Hutchinson, “LDS Approaches to the Holy Bible,” *Dialogue* 15, no. 1 (1982): 99–124, has sought to divide Latter-day Saint writing on the New Testament into four categories, which he called Harmonizing Hermeneutic, Critically Modified Harmonized Hermeneutic, Critical Hermeneutic with Harmonizing, and Critical Hermeneutic. Although it is appropriate for LDS authors trained in history and languages to employ a purely critical hermeneutic for publications in scholarly venues and for presentations in professional organizations, our position there was that when writing for an LDS audience, LDS scholars and teachers understandably seek to employ a critical hermeneutic with some degree of “harmonization”—that is, one that seeks to employ the standard works, takes into account the teachings of LDS authorities, and supports rather than detracts from the doctrines of the Restoration.


22. See John Barton, “Form Criticism (OT),” ABD, 2:838–41; Vernon K. Robbins, “Form Criticism (NT),” ABD, 2:841–44. The “Broad Overview of New
Testament Genres” in the text box is adapted from a list by Professor Felix Just of Loyola Marymount University, http://myweb.lmu.edu/fjust/Bible/Genres.htm (accessed December 21, 2004).


26. The course packets of Todd B. Parker, associate professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU, include the following helpful guidelines for using quotations from Church authorities in supporting the study of the scriptures:

1. Official statements of messages from Church Presidents or statements from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (these often appear in the Ensign magazine).
2. Conference Report talks by the First Presidency and the Twelve.
3. Statements by leaders printed in manuals approved by the Church Correlation Committee.
4. Talks given by the Brethren which have been approved by correlation. Be aware that talks given by the Brethren that have not been approved by correlation are left to the reader to decide whether or not they are scripture. D&C 68:2–4 states that when Apostles speak, “whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture.” D&C 1:37–38 states “whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.” Therefore, if Elder Bruce R. McConkie is quoted from his Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, that quotation represents his opinion. If, however, a statement from his DNTC was quoted in a Church manual approved by correlation, it then has the stamp of approval of the Church. If he is quoted from a conference talk, that also is approved by the Church.

30. Numerous resources and strategies exist for helping instructors organize successful courses. See, in particular, the suggestion for teaching and learning provided by the BYU Faculty Center at http://www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchlrfr.html (accessed December 22, 2004).

31. Adapted from Gorman, Elements of Biblical Exegesis, 205–16.
David O. McKay: Beloved Educator

Michael D. Taylor

Michael D. Taylor, MD, is an anesthesiologist at Provo (Utah) Surgical Center. Editor's note: In 2005 the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Society sisters are studying the teachings of President David O. McKay. The following two articles offer insight into the life of this beloved Church leader.

President David O. McKay had been serving as the President of the Church for one year when I was born, and he passed away just one year before I was called as a full-time missionary for the Church. I thus have sweet and poignant memories of this wonderful servant of the Lord. Many Church members feel a special closeness to or spiritual connection with the prophet who presided over the Church during their spiritually formative years, this often being the childhood and teenage years. Such is definitely the case with me. President McKay’s fervent testimony, inspiring leadership, striking physical appearance, and gentle demeanor are lasting memories. His unflagging devotion to and concern for his wife were legendary long before he passed away, and that marvelous example served as a beacon of conduct for an entire generation of Church members, married and unmarried alike. My testimony of his prophetic call at that time has only strengthened and matured as I have studied his teachings. Below are some interesting facts about his life and ministry:

1. President McKay was born September 8, 1873, in Huntsville, Utah. Brigham Young and Emma Smith were both still alive when he was born.

2. He was the third child and first son born to David McKay and Jennette Evans. There were ten children born into this family: four sons and six daughters. Two of these children died before reaching the age of twelve.

3. President McKay was baptized on September 8, 1881, in Spring
4. He was ordained an Apostle on April 9, 1906, by President Joseph F. Smith. He was only 32 years 7 months old at the time of his apostolic ordination. President McKay’s apostolic line of authority was as follows: David O. McKay—Joseph F. Smith—Brigham Young—The Three Witnesses—Joseph Smith—Peter, James, and John—Jesus Christ.

5. President McKay was sustained as Second Counselor to President Heber J. Grant on October 6, 1934, and was sustained as Second Counselor to President George Albert Smith on May 21, 1945. President McKay is one of only ten brethren who have served as counselor to more than one President of the Church. The other nine are George Q. Cannon, Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, Charles W. Penrose, J. Reuben Clark Jr., Marion G. Romney, N. Eldon Tanner, Gordon B. Hinckley, and Thomas S. Monson.
6. President McKay was sustained as the ninth President of the Church on April 9, 1951. He was 77 years 7 months of age when sustained as President. President McKay had served as an Apostle for forty-five years (1906 to 1951) before being sustained as President of the Church.

7. During his tenure as President, President McKay called four brethren to serve as additional counselors in the First Presidency. These four brethren were Hugh B. Brown, Joseph Fielding Smith, Thorpe B. Isaacson, and Alvin R. Dyer. Brigham Young and Joseph Smith were the only other Presidents to utilize additional counselors in the First Presidency prior to President McKay.

8. Eleven brethren were called as Apostles during President McKay’s tenure as Church President. These Apostles were Marion G. Romney, LeGrand Richards, Adam S. Bennion, Richard L. Evans, George Q. Morris, Hugh B. Brown, Howard W. Hunter, Gordon B. Hinckley, N. Eldon Tanner, Thomas S. Monson, and Alvin R. Dyer. Two of the eleven Apostles called by President McKay have subsequently served as President of the Church (Presidents Hunter and Hinckley).

9. President McKay passed away on January 18, 1970, having served 18 years 9 months as President of the Church. Only Brigham Young and Heber J. Grant served longer as President than President McKay.

10. President McKay served a total of 35 years 3 months in the First Presidency: 16 years 6 months as a counselor and 18 years 9 months as president. Only Joseph F. Smith served longer in the First Presidency than President McKay.

11. President McKay served longer as an Apostle than any other Apostle in this dispensation. He held his apostolic calling for 63 years 9 months (April 9, 1906, to January 18, 1970).

12. President Joseph Fielding Smith succeeded President McKay as President of the Church, and the resulting vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve was filled by Elder Boyd K. Packer.

13. No other President of the Church has lived longer than President McKay. He was 96 years 4 months of age at the time of his passing.

14. President McKay was part of a unique situation that existed early in the twentieth century. From June 23, 1910 (President Hinckley’s birth), to November 19, 1918 (President Joseph F. Smith’s passing), ten of the fifteen Presidents of the Church of this dispensation were living concurrently. Those ten were Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, Howard W. Hunter, and Gordon B. Hinckley.
Marian Roth and Beverly Bekker, May 10, 1952, Berchetes Garden, Germany.

Courtesy of Beverly Bekker.
An Encounter with David O. McKay

Beverly Bekker

Beverly Bekker is a retired employee of LDS Social Services.

With high school graduation just behind us in June 1951, two very close friends and I were planning for careers as airline hostesses. We had to wait until we were twenty-one before we could make this a reality. In the meantime, we were going to work a year and then go to college for a couple of years to meet the airline requirements.

Six months after graduation, the father of one of my friends was recalled to active duty as an officer in the U.S. Air Force Reserves and was sent to Weisbaden, Germany. The United States was one of the occupying forces following World War II. The headquarters of the United States Air Force in Europe (USAFE) was Weisbaden. As soon as government housing was available, his family was to follow him. This was a shock to us three girls. Marian, their daughter, had no desire to go to Germany. She asked her parents if she might be able to remain in California, but her parents thought it best that she go with them.

Rather than break up our threesome, Marian began talking my other friend, Carlene, and me into the possibility of our joining her in Germany. Marian’s parents approved of the idea and said that we could live with them and that we could undoubtedly get work with the U.S. Department of Civil Service. Carlene and I dismissed this idea as impossible for we felt we did not have enough money saved to even begin to get us to Germany. We all went to a travel agency to find out what the fare would be. To our surprise, the tourist class fare was within our means, and we figured that if we could work two more months, we could have enough money to go.
I will never forget the incident that proved to be a turning point in my life. I was at home eating dinner with my family when I popped the question, “Mom, what would you have done if you had had the opportunity to go to Germany at my age?” She answered, “I would have gone.” I said, “Well, I have the opportunity!” I excitedly went on to explain the details. Mother, I believe, was as excited as I was. But my stepfather, with a chorus from my brothers, said, “You aren’t going to let her go, are you?”

Mother replied, “Why not? I think it’s a wonderful opportunity!” Mother and I won out; Carlene also had the consent of her parents.

Carlene and I began to add more of our weekly checks to savings. We went to San Francisco with Marian, her mother, and her brother to apply for our passports. After we got our passports, we again went to San Francisco to the German Consulate office to apply for a German visa. In the meantime, we worked with the travel agency to make our reservations from Oakland, California, to Munich, Germany.

Our itinerary was to leave March 28, 1952, by United Airlines, with stops in Denver and Chicago and arrival at Idlewild Airport in New York. We planned to stay in New York City five days and depart from Hoboken, New Jersey, aboard the Nieuw Amsterdam of the Holland American Lines. The trip to Rotterdam, Holland, would be eight days. We had train reservations from Rotterdam to Munich.

Marian and her mother and brother left Alameda on March 8 in their new Studebaker to drive to their port of exit. Their car would be shipped to Germany with their household goods. They were sent to remote housing in Starnberg, near Munich, until housing was available in Weisbaden.

Carlene and I and our families gathered at the Oakland Airport on the afternoon of March 28. With tears in our eyes, we said good-byes to our family and friends. Our plane left on schedule. There was enough light as the sun set to see the Sierra Nevadas covered with snow.

We arrived at Idlewild Airport about noon the next day. Carlene’s aunt and uncle from Long Island met us. We had reservations at the Times Square Hotel, but Mr. Simmons, Carlene’s uncle, told us that hotel was in the wrong part of town. They took us by cab to the Abbey Hotel near Rockerfeller Square. Carlene’s uncle took us all out to dinner. Afterward, we walked down Fifth Avenue and Broadway and saw Times Square at night. It was quite an experience for us!

The next four days were packed with seeing Central Park, Rockerfeller Plaza, the Statue of Liberty, and the Empire State Building. We
ate lunch at Sardi’s and saw two live NBC radio and TV programs: *Winner Take All* and *Break the Bank*. We went to the Radio City Music Hall and saw *Singing in the Rain* and a good stage show.

On April 3 we packed and went to the pier at Hoboken. We were informed the ship would not be leaving until Monday, April 7, because of engine problems. They told us they were sorry but they had sent notices to our agents. We told them we were short on money. We walked out and started crying. Each of us put a skirt and blouse in my overnight bag and checked our suitcases with Holland America Lines. We met a nice German woman who had similar bad luck. She offered to show us an inexpensive way back to Manhattan. Then we took a bus to Long Island. Carlene’s aunt, on hearing our situation, said that we could stay there until the departure of our ship. They were very good to us.

On April 7 the Simmonses took us by subway to Manhattan. Carlene and I went to the Port Authority Bus Terminal and got a bus to Hoboken. Then we bought some soda crackers and went to the pier. We showed our tickets and passports and went aboard. We explored the whole ship. We were two impressed teenagers! To quote my diary: “We were really thrilled with the first and cabin classes. They have carpeting all over and beautiful furniture, elevators and the whole works. Our room (tourist class) is pretty nice, but we share it with another lady. We had lunch at 12 noon when we left [the pier], and such food and service!”

Carlene needed the soda crackers on the third day out, as did our roommate. However, I did not get seasick. We had a wonderful voyage and wonderful food and met some wonderful people. We got acquainted with two Dutch crew members who taught us some Dutch. I guess I was worried about getting our train tickets at the railroad station. I had them teach me, “Have you tickets for us to Munich?” I still remember this question in Dutch.

On April 15 we docked at Rotterdam, Holland. We got off the ship and went through customs. We then went out front to hail a cab to the railroad station to check our baggage. The cab drivers could not understand English and kept passing us by. We had decided to wait until the crowd thinned out when we heard: “Do you girls want a taxi?” Surprised, we exclaimed: “You speak English!” We happily explained that we wanted to go to the Maas Railroad Station to check our baggage and to confirm our 7:00 p.m. reservations to Munich, Germany.

On the way to the railroad station, he explained that he had
learned to speak English while working with American soldiers during
the war. When we arrived, he showed us where to confirm our reserva-
tions and he checked our luggage for us. Since it was still early in the
day, he asked if we wanted to go downtown. We asked him if he knew
of a restaurant that served American hamburgers. We had delightful
meals on board the ship, but now we just wanted a hamburger. He
drove us to a nice clean restaurant near the center of town. He went in
with us to help us order our food. We were very grateful for all of his
help. About fifteen minutes later, while we were eating our lunch, the
waiter motioned to us that we were wanted on the phone.

To my surprise it was the taxi driver, who said that I had left my
camera in the taxi and that he would be right back with it.

Upon his return, he asked if we would be interested in seeing the
tulips. He went on to explain that the tulip fields were not far from
Rotterdam and that we had arrived at the most beautiful time of the
year. He went on to explain that he and his wife wanted to go and
that if we would be willing to pay eight dollars to cover the gas, he
thought he could arrange to take the afternoon off. We accepted with
enthusiasm. What followed was a wonderful afternoon spent with the
Kramers enjoying the beauty of Holland in the springtime. They took
us to the Keukenhof (almost to Amsterdam), a wonderful flower expo-
sition. On the way, there were canals and fields of tulips. At the end
of the trip they took us to their apartment to freshen up and offered
us some food. They played American records for us. They took us to
the railroad station and stopped on the way and bought us some sand-
wiches to take with us on the train. They saw that we got on the train
okay and stayed and waved good-bye. All this was done in kindness and
friendship. This was the beginning of a long friendship.

On Wednesday, April 16, 1952, at 10:30 a.m. we arrived in
Munich, Germany. Were we ever happy to see Mrs. Roth and Marian
waiting for us! We had so much to share; we couldn’t stop talking.
We had lunch and changed some dollars to German marks. After
some trouble getting our luggage, we succeeded in getting a train to
Starnberg. Starnberg is a beautiful town out in the country next to a
beautiful lake. During the occupation of Germany by the Allied Forces,
homes were requisitioned for military personnel. Remote housing was
furnished to dependents until housing could be obtained closer to the
base or headquarters where the military person was serving. Not only
was housing provided but also a maid was provided as well. Fürstenfel-
brook Airbase was about a forty-five-minute drive from Starnberg. At
the airbase there was a commissary, post exchange, bowling alley, and
movie theater available to military dependents.

Colonel Roth came to Starnberg for the weekend. On Sunday he returned to Weisbaden with the three of us to interview for jobs and take the Civil Service tests. We were interviewed on Monday and tested on Tuesday. None of us passed the typing test because we were so nervous. Marian took her driver’s test and license to drive in Germany. Colonel Roth turned the keys to the car over to Marian and showed her the way out of town and to the autobahn. We did get back to Starnberg but not by the straight route; Marian made some wrong turns.

Life in Starnberg was good. We learned to love this part of the country. We practiced our typing and shorthand every day. We gave each other timed practice tests. Carlene and Marian were tested again May 15 in Weisbaden. I did not go, as I had sprained my finger playing catch with Richard. Carlene passed; Marian was not so lucky. I attended Protestant church services with Mrs. Roth at Furstenfelbrook. Then I happened to see a notice at the post exchange of LDS Services in Munich. On Sunday, June 15, we drove to Munich and attended services at the German chapel. LDS missionaries greeted us. The first part of the services was all in German, and then we separated for classes. The Americans met together in a downstairs classroom. We introduced ourselves, and there were a lot of people from California and Utah. It felt so good to be among the Saints again. The following Sunday, Mrs. Roth attended with me.

On June 23 we found out we were all moving to Weisbaden to permanent housing. We found out that we had become quite attached to Starnberg. My diary stated: “Carlene and I took our last walk down by the canal and river and across the fields. We discussed how we were going to miss Starnberg . . . and everything.” We completed our packing and the next day departed for Weisbaden in the Studebaker. Diary: “Richard and I sat on top of suitcases in the back seat almost all of the way to Weisbaden, and it wasn’t very comfortable. We arrived about 7:00 p.m. and loaded all the stuff in the apartment.”

On June 25 Carlene had a job interview and started work the next day. In the meantime, Marian and I practiced to retake the tests and checked out other sources for employment at other military facilities in the area. On June 30 Marian and I retook the Civil Service tests at USAFE and both of us passed. We were then told by the personnel office that we would be put on a waiting list for job interviews.

After attending LDS Church services in Munich, I wanted to make contact with the Weisbaden group. Colonel Roth had seen a poster at
the American Arms Hotel, where he lived during our stay in remote housing. I got the information and finally was able to make contact on July 1 with the group leader, Captain Savage. He indicated that he and his family lived across the street in the same apartment complex. He invited me to come over that evening to get information about the LDS Servicemen’s Group. Carlene and I went over and we were told about the conference to be held the next day in Frankfurt. President David O. McKay would be presiding with President Cannon of the West German Mission. We were invited to go.

July 2, 1952, stands out as a pivotal experience in my life. In my diary I wrote: “I went (to Frankfurt) with Capt. Savage and wife, two missionaries from California and another nice guy (serviceman) named Jerry. . . . We went to the mission home and met some more people. Then . . . a guy named Bob Smith came with us and we went to Palmen Gardens, where the conference was held. It was a combined meeting of Germans and Americans. The speakers were President McKay’s son and daughter-in-law, his wife, and then President McKay. President McKay gave us a wonderful message.”

On July 2, 1952, I wrote a letter to my mother that summarized my feelings:

Hello there. I just came home from a wonderful conference at Frankfurt. Pres. McKay was there, and I have never met such a wonderful man in all my life. . . . Then we . . . had dinner and had a meeting for servicemen, dependents, American personnel, and missionaries at the German chapel. I have never been to such a wonderful meeting and never heard anyone so wonderful as Pres. McKay. Mom, it was inspiring and he had so much feeling. After the meeting I went up and said hello to him, and he shook my hand and he held it while he asked what I was doing in Germany. . . . My words wouldn’t come out right. He kept a hold of my hand and looked me straight in the eyes, and I could feel the strength within him. He asked about me . . . and if I was getting on all right, and tears came to my eyes the Spirit was so forthcoming [strong]. Then I met Mrs. McKay, and she is a wonderful woman also. Mother, if I never knew it before, I know it now, that the Latter Day Saints is the true Church of Jesus Christ and I have a testimony to that; I feel it way down deep in my heart. Even as I write this now, I have tears in my eyes; the Spirit is so overwhelming in me. I just pray that I may be worthy of the many blessings that have been bestowed on me.

It has been so wonderful to be among these people today, and I am so very happy that they have such wonderful groups of service people and organized Mormon services all over . . . in Germany. Captain Savage is really a wonderful man, and the other boys are really wonderful guys!
As I look back to my experience as a nineteen-year-old traveling with my eighteen-year-old friend, I am grateful that we had the Simmons in New York and the Kramers in Holland that looked after us. The Roths in Starnberg and Weisbaden were like substitute parents to us. I am ever so grateful for their kindness and example. I am so thankful the Lord looked over me and guided me. I felt a need to be with members of my faith. Having the opportunity to hear and meet President McKay became my conversion experience. I had a witness by the Holy Ghost that the Church was true and that David O. McKay was a prophet! I was blessed in my young life to have this testimony and to be nurtured, taught, and strengthened by so many members of the Church while I was there.
Neal A. Maxwell when he served in a student ward bishopric, 1963.

Photo by Boyart Studios; all photos courtesy of Colleen Hinckley Maxwell.
On Thursday, September 4, 1958, I received a telephone call from the secretary of Elder Spencer W. Kimball of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The message was that Elder Kimball was leaving Salt Lake City later that day on a Church assignment. I listened with some concern because he was scheduled to perform our marriage in the Salt Lake Temple the following day, September 5. The secretary said that if we still wanted Elder Kimball to perform the temple ceremony, we would have to come to the temple within the next hour or so. My fiancée, Carole, and I quickly agreed to the change and left for the temple. We had traveled to Salt Lake City the day before from northern California, where I was stationed at Fort Ord and Carole was living in San Jose.

September 5 proved to be the commencement of two new chapters in our lives. The first chapter, our marriage, was certainly the most significant. The second chapter was our acquaintance with Oscar and Judy McConkie, two stalwart members of the kingdom. And through the McConkies, we soon became friends with Neal and Colleen Maxwell.

Immediately after our marriage, we went to the home of Oscar and Judy McConkie for a wedding dinner hosted by them. We had not previously met them, but Judy’s mother and father had been very close friends to my parents for many years. During that dinner, Oscar discussed with us the recent creation of two campus wards at the University of Utah. Oscar also shared with us that he was then serving as the bishop of one of the campus wards, the University Fourth Ward of the University Stake. For the previous twenty months or
so, I had served as group leader for Latter-day Saint soldiers at Fort Ord, California. Being a member of an organized ward was going to be something I had not done for close to four years—two years as a full-time missionary and approximately two years in the U.S. Army. At that dinner, Oscar described how the student wards operated. He also informed me that Neal A. Maxwell was his first counselor. This was the first time that I had heard of him, but within a few weeks my wife and I became aware of the special gifts and talents he brought to the bishopric of the University Fourth Ward. After our move to Salt Lake City, I was eventually called to serve as second counselor to Bishop McConkie. This calling placed me in a very close and personal relationship with two men I dearly love and admire, Oscar W. McConkie and Neal A. Maxwell.

The experiences that my wife and I shared with other members of the University Fourth Ward varied greatly. Some were extremely spiritual, remembrances of which are cherished to this day. These experiences have helped us better understand and appreciate gospel principles and Church organizational procedures. Other experiences might be described as social in nature. Lastly, some were quite humorous. Many of these funny experiences continue to evoke smiles and laughter as we remember them.

We relished the messages of faith and testimony that Bishop McConkie and Brother Maxwell shared at sacrament meetings, Sunday School, and priesthood and Relief Society meetings. As a ward family, we also made monthly trips to the Salt Lake Temple, where we participated in the sacred ordinances of the temple. Afterward, we met in the homes of our bishopric and the homes of other married couples in our ward. There we enjoyed a warm bowl of soup or a dessert and then listened to stories and experiences of faith, as well as doctrinal commentary, from both Bishop McConkie and Brother Maxwell. These many experiences we shared helped us become better husbands and wives and parents.

**Spiritual Experiences**

A particular spiritual experience occurred during this time. In the fall of 1959, a new campus stake was organized at the University of Utah. President Bill Kirton was called as the stake president, and Oscar McConkie was called as his first counselor. Neal was called as bishop of a new student ward. As we prepared for the first stake conference of this newly organized stake, we were informed that the general session of the conference on Sunday would be held in the Tabernacle. Our
conference visitor was Elder Joseph Fielding Smith.

At the priesthood leadership meeting on Saturday afternoon, President Kirton informed us that the stake presidency had met with Elder Smith in preparation for the conference. During that meeting, members of the stake presidency had posed questions to Elder Smith as to meanings and interpretations of various scriptures and temple ordinances. President Kirton then stated that Elder Smith was uncomfortable in discussing such sacred matters outside the temple but that a special meeting would be held in the temple for all priesthood leaders in the stake. Elder Smith said that he would answer and respond to any questions asked by those in attendance. Of course, we were all in attendance at the special temple meeting, including the new bishop in the stake, Bishop Maxwell. We posed a great variety of questions and were more than edified during that special gathering. How do you describe such an event? I believe all of us in attendance received added appreciation of the Prophet’s description of the vision he received, along with Sidney Rigdon, as recorded in section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “For they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit” (v. 116).

Another experience we enjoyed in the campus ward related to both a doctrinal and a procedural aspect of the Church. This particular experience had a profound impact on many of us but may well have had the greatest impact on Elder Maxwell. On this occasion, Bishop Oscar McConkie shared with us the principles and doctrines associated with the giving of fathers’ blessings. The points he made in his presentation did not relate to the blessing that is given to an infant soon after birth. Instead, he focused on the importance of fathers’ blessing their children as they grew and became more mature. Bishop McConkie instructed us in the procedures associated with the giving of such blessings and the times or events when such blessings would be appropriate. Elder Maxwell had not been previously instructed in the giving of fathers’ blessings, because his father had not been raised in a home where the giving of fathers’ blessings was understood or taught. So he listened with great interest to that counsel.

Later, after Elder Maxwell was serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, he attended a stake priesthood meeting where Oscar McConkie was in attendance. While speaking at this particular meeting, Neal referred to his previous associations with Bishop McConkie and to the many principles of Church government and Church policy he learned from him. Elder Maxwell then referred to the special message that Bishop McConkie had given concerning fathers’ blessings. Elder Maxwell then
said that he had asked his own father several times for such a blessing but that the requests were declined because his father was a convert and was unsure how to proceed. Elder Maxwell then related how, many years later and as a General Authority, he finally obtained the desired blessing from his father.

Social Events

As one might well imagine, young people attending a college and university find outlets for social contact. The same was true for those of
us attending the University Fourth Ward. Much of our social contact included other ward members, as well as members of our bishopric. These social activities found us in the homes of the McConkies and the Maxwells on a variety of occasions. Their homes became extensions of the homes of campus ward married couples. There we not only socialized but we watched and observed Bishop McConkie and Brother Maxwell in their dealings with their spouses, Judy McConkie and Colleen Maxwell. We listened to how they spoke to each other. We watched how they demonstrated their love and respect for their companions. We observed how the gospel was truly the very foundation of their homes and families. That which we watched, heard and observed became the standards upon which we, as students, established our own homes, lives, and careers.

At one point while I was attending the University of Utah and serving in the bishopric, Brother Maxwell invited me to come to his university office. While there, he asked me if I would be willing to serve as master of ceremonies for some entertainment productions then being considered by the university. While I was stationed at Fort Ord, I had been a member of the Fort Ord Soldiers’ Chorus, one of the top-ranked vocal groups in the army. As a member of the chorus, I was asked by its director to serve as its master of ceremonies at its concerts. This invitation from Brother Maxwell proved to be a delightful and fulfilling experience, and I was both pleased and honored at the invitation. The experiences I had from that activity provided another special chapter in my life.

Humorous Experiences

I would like to share some humorous events that remain a significant part of our associations with the McConkies and the Maxwells. One must understand that both Oscar McConkie and Neal Maxwell had great appreciation for humor. They both enjoyed very quick and sharp minds. They also loved to laugh. Their personalities provided receptive ears to a good story or a humorous event.

One evening, Bishop McConkie, Brother Maxwell, and I were making visits to various ward members. We did this as a bishopric on a weekly basis. One of our visits made on this particular evening was to the apartment of a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Utah. This student was a little older than most of our student members. He was a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood but was totally inactive. As we sat in his apartment, Neal asked him what had occurred in his life that led him away from the Church. The philosophy student...
responded, “I finally came to realize that Jesus really didn’t want me to be a Sunbeam.” The humorous response from the student has remained a choice remembrance of our service together as members of the University Fourth Ward bishopric.

At Sunday School one day (this was in the day when Sunday School was conducted during the morning hours on Sunday with sacrament meeting held later in the afternoon as a separate meeting), one of the students in the ward was conducting hymn practice. The congregation included over 130 ward members, many of them recently married and some of them with infant children, and Bishop McConkie, Brother Maxwell, and I were on the stand. The student music director was leading the congregation in singing the hymn “We Are Sowing.” We all sang together the words of the hymn “We are sowing, daily sowing countless seeds of good and ill.” We had no sooner finished singing those lyrics when the director cut us off abruptly. Speaking to the congregation, he said, “Singing this hymn reminds me of some news I want to share with you. My wife is expecting our first baby.”

**A Man of Integrity**

One additional experience may be of some interest. Few know the story. In Los Angeles, in the late 1960s, an extremely wealthy man passed away, leaving an estate valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Much of the estate was placed in a trust with three trustees. This trust provided that the money was to be used in the construction of buildings on university and college campuses. There were several conditions included in the trust agreement. One of the conditions that the decedent had included in the trust was that if any university or college asking the trustees for a grant from the trust was owned and operated by a religious organization or church, it had to be Protestant.

Serious consideration was being given by Ernest L. Wilkinson, then president of Brigham Young University, to make formal application for a grant from the trust. President Wilkinson called my senior partner, Adam Y. Bennion, and asked him to research the matter. I was asked to assist Adam in this undertaking. Months later, President Wilkinson concluded his tenure at BYU. As my partner and I discussed the issue that President Wilkinson had given to us, we reviewed the writings and speeches of various Church leaders where definitive comment had been made that the Church was neither Catholic nor Protestant. I expressed to Adam Bennion my concern that if an application was ever made to the trustees and if the application came to the attention of the general
public, the Church could suffer great embarrassment over its perceived inconsistent positions about whether the Church was Protestant or non-Protestant. I also recommended to Adam that with the conclusion of Ernest Wilkinson’s service at BYU as university president, the First Presidency of the Church should be made aware of the situation. Adam asked me who we might call, and I suggested Neal Maxwell, then serving as the commissioner of education. (It is noteworthy that Adam’s father, Adam S. Bennion, had previously served as commissioner of education many years before.)

Adam asked me to make the call. I visited with Neal on the telephone and told him of the undertaking with which we had been involved regarding the trust and a possible application for a grant. He informed me that he would discuss the matter with the First Presidency and that someone would get back to me.

Within a week, I received a telephone call from Dallin H. Oaks, recently appointed as the president of BYU, succeeding Ernest L. Wilkinson. President Oaks asked us to arrange a meeting with the three trustees so that he might meet with them personally. This meeting was scheduled, and President Oaks met with the three trustees, Adam Bennion, and myself. President Oaks expressed his appreciation for the trustees’ willingness to meet with him and for their interest in BYU. He then indicated that while he appreciated the feelings of the trustees toward BYU, BYU would not make any application for a grant from the trust. In my judgment, Neal’s willingness to become involved in this matter saved the Church significant embarrassment had the application been formally submitted.

Qualities of the Heart

Over the years, I have often pondered as to the special qualities developed by Neal during his life. My glimpse into his life was not terribly long. The opportunities for me to learn from him were limited in time, but, given the time that I did share with Neal while I was attending the University of Utah, I have concluded that his strengths related to the heart. First, it was my observation that Neal had sufficient strength of his own identity that he would permit others to know his heart and his personal feelings. By opening his heart and feelings to others, he was able to assure them of his love, respect, and concern for them. Second, it was my observation that by opening his heart and soul to others, they, in turn, would invite Neal to better know and understand the feelings of their own hearts and souls. After all, these were the very characteristics expressed by the Lord to Thomas B. Marsh in
D&C 112, where the Lord stated, “I know thy heart” (v. 11). I am a better man from knowing Neal A. Maxwell. But I am an even better man by permitting Neal A. Maxwell to know me.
New Publications

**Kirtland, Ohio: A Guide to Family History and Historical Sources**
*Kip Sperry*

Kirtland is of unique historical interest because of its roots in Church history and because so many Church members trace their ancestry there. In this book, the author has compiled a wealth of family history and historical sources to help genealogists, historians, and other researchers. The volume includes photographs of the Kirtland Temple and maps of the area. Born in Chardon, Ohio, a few miles east of Kirtland, Kip Sperry is the author of several family history reference books, a certified genealogical instructor, and an accredited genealogist.

*Available February 2005, 236 pp., $24.95*

**The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts**
*Kent P. Jackson*

Just two months after the Church was organized, the Lord directed Joseph Smith to read the Bible carefully and correct it by revelation. The resulting work, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, blesses the Church in many ways. The Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price comes from the beginning pages of the Joseph Smith Translation and provides its greatest doctrinal contributions. In this volume, author Kent P. Jackson studies the history of the text of the Book of Moses from the original manuscripts through later handwritten copies and printings. Illustrated with images of original manuscript pages and early editions, this book shows the text of the Book of Moses as Joseph Smith left it for the Church.

*Available March 2005, 180 pp., $19.95*
Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible:
Original Manuscripts
Edited by Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews

This groundbreaking volume presents the latest research into the history and origin of the Joseph Smith Translation and clarifies earlier understandings. The book begins with a series of essays that introduce the New Translation. The first explains what the translation is and how it was produced. Other essays discuss the doctrinal contributions of the Joseph Smith Translation, the history of the manuscripts since Joseph Smith’s death in 1844, the work of the Prophet’s scribes, and the editorial procedures followed in preparing the transcriptions. The main section of the book presents a typographic transcription of all the original manuscript pages of the Joseph Smith Translation, unedited and preserved exactly as dictated by the Prophet and recorded by his scribes. The editors’ intent has been to render, as exactly as possible, the scribes’ original words, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, strikeouts, and insertions.

Available November 2004, 852 pp., $99.95

Prelude to the Restoration:
From Apostasy to the Restored Church
Thirty-third Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium

Before Joseph Smith was born, religious scholars such as William Tyndale and Martin Luther put their lives in jeopardy to spread the word of God to their followers, blazing doctrinal trails so that a restoration of the gospel could occur. This volume, copublished with Deseret Book, highlights these influential men and other important Reformers who helped pave the way for the Restoration. The book features talks from the Thirty-third Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, held October 29–30, 2004.

Available November 2004, 304 pp., $24.95
Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: The New England States
Edited by Donald Q. Cannon, Arnold K. Garr, and Bruce A. Van Orden

New England. The name suggests revolution. Muskets and cannons. Redcoats and ragged patriots. Yet this area did more than give rise to American freedom; it gave birth to the Restoration. Here, prophets and apostles were born to guide the Church—leaders such as Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball.

Twelve essays take us on a journey through time. We go back to an era when early apostles canvassed New England to elect Joseph Smith president of the United States. A photo essay offers views of a Mayflower replica and of Church history sites, including the birthplace of Joseph Smith in Sharon, Vermont. With a sense of irony, we revisit the Church’s legal battle to build a temple in Boston and finally to add a spire. Contributors to this book include Brigham Young University professors Richard O. Cowan, W. Jeffrey Marsh, Craig J. Ostler, Matthew O. Richardson, Mary Jane Woodger, Dennis A. Wright, and others.

Available at BYU Bookstore November 2004, 270 pp., $19.95

Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless, Second Edition
Hugh W. Nibley

Reaching from the apocalyptic visions of original “treasures in heaven” down to the climax of history, Nibley’s essays in this volume are singular in their penetration, originality, and vitality. The delight of Nibley’s brilliant and sometimes biting prose style imparts a sense of the agelessness of what he calls the “three-act play” of human existence. The author’s own intellectual autobiography, together with his fresh introductory paragraphs for the various chapters, completes this fitting and permanent record of one of the outstanding historians of our time. This revised edition of Nibley’s timeless classic includes a foreword by Truman G. Madsen, emeritus professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University, and a new essay by Gary P. Gillum, who serves as religion, philosophy, and ancient studies librarian at Brigham Young University.

Available December 2004, 326 pp., $27.95
“If a revelation is outside the limits of your specific responsibility, you know it is not from the Lord and you are not bound by it,” writes Elder Dallin H. Oaks on the principle of personal revelation. Other General Authorities, including President James E. Faust and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, share classic articles that will help and inspire teachers and students of Church history. The volume, copublished with Deseret Book, features some of the best out-of-print Sperry Symposium articles on the Doctrine and Covenants.

Available December 2004, 400 pp., $25.95

Historians will find a researcher’s treasure trove in this remarkable two-volume reference work that includes 14,400 entries to publications by or about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In fact, the goal of the compilers was to cite every publication in the first hundred years of the Church’s existence. This attractive, library-quality reference work was compiled by Chad J. Flake, former senior librarian at the Harold B. Library, and Larry W. Draper, curator of the library’s Western and Mormon Americana Print Collections.

Available April 2004, two-volume set, 1526 pp., $149.95

“A well-recognized bibliography in scholarly circles.”—George Mitton, associate editor, Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies

“The most comprehensive resource of early Mormon publications.”—Mike Hooper, American and Mormon history librarian, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University

“This is the most significant bibliography on Mormonism. It includes everything: the good and the bad.”—Patty Aird, Seattle, Washington
Religious Studies Center

Established in 1975 by BYU Religious Education Dean Jeffrey R. Holland, the Religious Studies Center (RSC) is the research arm of Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Since its inception, it has provided funding for numerous projects, including conferences, books, and articles relating to Latter-day Saint culture, history, scripture, and doctrine. The RSC endeavors to use its resources to, first, 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.

Research and Publication

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.

The RSC helps fund several meaningful projects each year and publishes books, articles, a newsletter, and the Religious Educator in helping to promote and disseminate Latter-day Saint research and thought. These
publications enhance the libraries of Latter-day Saint readers and others who take an interest in the history or culture of the Latter-day Saints.

An Invitation to Join with Us

RSC research and publication projects are sustained by university funding and by financial donations from friends who want to encourage the kind of quality work the RSC does. We are thankful for the generosity of those who support our efforts to bring the best scholarship to light. If you would like to become a donor to the RSC to help its mission, please contact the RSC at 370 JSB, BYU, Provo, UT 84602.

The RSC restricts its publications to items that fit within the scholarly range of the curriculum and mission of Religious Education. It produces materials that are well written, rigorous, and original and that reflect the doctrine, the history, the teachings of the living prophets, and the standard works of the Restoration. It seeks works that meet academic needs or fill a niche in the area of faithful scholarship. It welcomes all materials that fit within these parameters.
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