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"The very creation of the earth and our experience here would be utterly wasted but for the eternal union of families that family history and temple work make possible."
“As I have studied the history of family history in this dispensation, it is easy to see the hand of the Lord at work, especially at critical junctures when it was important for the next step to be taken.”

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

ON THE COVER:
Family history is symbolized by aspens with their vast network of interconnected roots.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CORBIS
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Editors’ Introduction

Two hundred years ago this year, Joseph Smith Jr. was born in Sharon, Vermont. Little did the world know the impact he would have or the legacy he would leave. With Elder John Taylor, we proclaim that the Prophet “has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men, than any other man that ever lived in it” and that he left a “fame and name that cannot be slain” (D&C 135:3). This issue celebrates the truths of the Restoration from a variety of perspectives.

First, we look at family history and temple work, a crowning achievement of the Prophet. Elder D. Todd Christofferson shares his views gained while serving as executive director of the Family and Church History Department. Next, we look at “forever families” as seen through the eyes of Douglas and Barbara Smith, a former member of the Seventy and general Relief Society president.

Seminary teacher Cameron J. Packer takes readers on a photographic journey to the Hill Cumorah to witness its changes in appearance over time. This article features the story of the Church’s acquisition of this sacred property.

As the keystone of our religion, the Book of Mormon testifies of the Creator and helps us understand how “all things denote there is a God.” But how can we see the message beyond the symbols, and how can we reinvigorate our scripture study? Articles by Bruce A. Roundy, Robert J. Norman, and R. Mark Mattheson offer suggestions.

Turning to the Doctrine and Covenants, we get detailed insights into revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith on gifts of the Spirit (section 46), the law of consecration (section 85), and counsel to priesthood holders (section 121).

We conclude with two articles on the growth of the Church worldwide, including an interview with Ross H. Cole of the Church Educational System and stories of faith that Kathy K. Clayton tells of the Saints in Abundancia, Paraguay.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Editor-in-Chief
R. Devan Jensen, Executive Editor
Ted D. Stoddard, Associate Editor
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Elder D. Todd Christofferson and Ryan Christofferson during an interview for the *Religious Educator*. Photographs by Craig Dimond.
In fall 2004, the Religious Educator asked Elder Christofferson to look back over his six years as executive director of the Family and Church History Department. During Elder Christofferson’s tenure, the Church History and Family History departments, previously separate organizations, were consolidated. At the end of July 2004, Elder Marlin K. Jensen replaced Elder Christofferson in the Family and Church History Department.

**RSC:** How has the family history program of the Church changed during your six-year tenure in the Family and Church History Department?

**Elder Christofferson:** Among other things, the past six years have seen a continuing move to the Internet. In the 1930s, the cutting-edge technology was microfilm. The Church used and, in some ways, pioneered the development of that technology. It moved the work of the redemption of the dead to a whole new level. Microfilm is now something of a dying technology, but it is still, and will be for many years yet, a crucial element of our program. Then came the computer, and now the Internet, which I believe was invented to facilitate and hasten the work of family history research and the redemption of the dead. Increasingly, people can access in hours or even minutes information that in the past would have taken many months and extensive travel to find. They can collaborate and share with one another as never before. This is the core technology that will move this work to a level that was
only dreamed of and that will make it possible to accomplish what the Lord has directed.

The other major change I would cite is our emphasis on serving the ordinary member of the Church. The department started out as the Genealogical Society of Utah, an organization to collect and make genealogical information available to researchers. It has always been a goal to have a large percentage of adult Church members participating in family history research. Even in the best of circumstances, however, this research is time-consuming and difficult. So over the years, only a fraction of members have actively participated, and we have catered to the needs of that fraction with more and more specialized services. We certainly don’t want to abandon this relatively small but dedicated population of experts and professionals, but at the same time, we have been actively working toward being able to better help the novice as well.

**RSC:** Where do you see the Family and Church History Department headed in the future? What improvements or developments may be in store?

**Elder Christofferson:** Perhaps I could say a little more about the use of Internet technology and helping the ordinary member to give you an idea about what may be in store. When I became executive director of the department in 1998, the project to create the familysearch.org site was already under way. Originally, it was envisioned simply as a search engine to find genealogical information on the Internet. As it was developed, however, the greater focus came to be providing access to and searching the Church’s own extensive databases. Familysearch.org was launched in May 1999 by President Gordon B. Hinckley and became a rousing success instantly. Even now, more than one hundred thousand people use this site every day.

Since then, we have been adding new information and working to make family history information and services on the Internet interactive. We envision a single database combining the best of all our automated databases that people will not simply view but will add to and correct in cooperation with others working on the same lines. Information about temple ordinances will be available to members, showing temple work performed as well as ordinances still needed. Names will be cleared for ordinance work online and sent to the temple directly. If you want to do the work yourself, the names will be reserved for some period so that others cannot clear the same names in the meantime and duplicate what you will be doing. Once performed, temple ordinances will be recorded with the person’s name within days so that you and all those interested in that person have an accurate record. The system will then
not clear that name again for ordinances already performed, thus avoiding wasteful duplication.

With respect to what the family history experience will be in the future for the ordinary member, let me say that we have been studying what it is like for members “on the ground” in Guatemala and Ghana and Korea, all over the world in diverse circumstances and cultures, to search out their roots and prepare names for temple work. We think we better understand now the realities of their lives and situations, what their abilities are, what is and is not available to them, and so on. Everything we are designing and doing now takes that into account. You will see in the future that everyone, no matter their circumstances or the record-keeping practices of their culture, will have access to the simple resources they need to identify their ancestors and perform temple ordinances for them. Whether they have or can use computers and the Internet or have only paper and pencil or not even that, there will be a way for them to be involved and to have the benefit of our sophisticated (but for them unseen) technological resources. Our goal is not to make “every member a family history researcher” but to provide means so that all who wish can, in fact, participate successfully in family history.

*RSC:* How has your service in family history strengthened your own testimony of this work?

*Elder Christofferson:* I came to the department with admittedly limited experience and expertise. The assignment has been a blessing to me and has opened my eyes to the vital mission of redeeming the dead. When one considers that only a minority of those who live prior to the Millennium will have been privileged to receive the essential ordinances of the temple for themselves, the importance and significance of work for the dead comes into sharper focus. Added to that, of course, is the Lord’s declaration at the end of the Old Testament and at the beginning of the Restoration in Doctrine and Covenants 2 that the very creation of the earth and our experience here would be utterly wasted but for the eternal union of families that family history and temple work make possible.

Additionally, I have witnessed divine intervention in and guidance of the department’s work. That has been true in both the past and the present. As I have studied the history of family history in this dispensation, it is easy to see the hand of the Lord at work, especially at critical junctures when it was important for the next step to be taken. In the last few years, key people have been brought to us just as they
and their unique skills were needed. These have been individuals who have joined the department and individuals within other organizations who, with their companies, came to our attention at just the right time. Resources, financial and otherwise, have been available as needed both from the Church budget and from donors. Insights have come in answer to prayer, particularly concerning the need for greater order in our records and processes. Keeping a “proper and faithful record,” as the Lord puts it in Doctrine and Covenants 128, is an essential part of the record “worthy of all acceptation” that must someday be presented to Him.

In 2000, I gave a talk in general conference titled “The Redemption of the Dead and the Testimony of Jesus.” My central thesis was that work for the dead is as powerful a statement and witness as we can make of the divinity of Jesus Christ and His mission. Our work for the dead, in essence, testifies of His Resurrection, of the infinite reach of His Atonement, that He is the sole source of salvation, that He has established the conditions of salvation through Him, and that He will come again. That is the testimony that has come to me in pondering the scriptures and through serving in this department.

RSC: In your mind, how does the Church’s mission of redeeming the dead relate to the other missions of perfecting the Saints and proclaiming the gospel?

Elder Christofferson: I think you could summarize the plan of salvation by saying that our obligation is to worthily receive those ordinances that the Lord has declared essential and then to keep the covenants that those ordinances entail. All those who do so are promised eternal life. That, in a nutshell, is the plan. So our whole effort in the Church is to teach faith in Jesus Christ so that people will repent, receive the ordinances, and keep the covenants. And that applies to everyone. For those who are not yet members of the Church, we start from scratch, proclaiming the gospel and offering the ordinances, beginning with baptism. With regard to members, we strengthen them in receiving all the ordinances and keeping the associated covenants, “enduring to the end.” The dead are taught in the world of spirits and the ordinances provided for them vicariously. So it is all one mission, the same work for everyone, whether, as the Prophet Joseph Smith said, they can attend “to the ordinances in their own propria persona, or by the means of their own agents” (see D&C 128:8).

RSC: What are some of the challenges that the Family and Church
History Department faces as it continues to adapt to new technologies?

Elder Christofferson: One of the challenges with technology is ensuring that it does not become the master but remains the servant. Technology can be a marvelous tool, an essential tool. As I said earlier, I believe that microfilm, computer, and Internet technologies have been and will be crucial to our success in family history and temple work. I believe that the Lord has inspired their development and granted us access to these and other technologies to make it possible to do what He has commanded and to hasten His work in its time. That being said, however, we still have to be cautious that we develop and use the right technology for the right need. Just because something is possible doesn’t mean that we should do it or that we should adopt a certain technology because it is there. President Hinckley repeatedly cautions us not to let these things become “toys.” In other words, we must control technology, not be driven by it.

Another challenge, of course, is cost. It is difficult and costly to keep pace with major technologies that are changing at a dizzying pace. It seems like things that were cutting edge yesterday are obsolete today. Generally speaking, we cannot afford to be at the leading edge (or as some say, referring to the expense required, the “bleeding edge”) of technology. But we must be current with technology that is crucial for our mission, and in some cases, we must create the technology or software programs that will uniquely satisfy our particular needs. All of this costs money and could absorb limitless amounts if permitted. So we must be judicious and pace ourselves. For example, it makes sense now to acquire genealogical records with digital cameras rather than on microfilm so that the information can be shared via the Internet rather than through the somewhat cumbersome (and more costly) process of shipping rolls of film. The family history centers and many of our homes now have computers and Internet connections needed to share information digitally. But we have only limited experience with digital capture and preservation of records. So we are proceeding with a few digital cameras, gaining experience in the field in capturing and cataloging high-quality digital images. We are working with the industry to find ways of preserving and storing digital images that today may not last more than fifteen years. (By contrast, microfilm pictures are generally good for about one hundred years.) We are moving ahead at a measured pace, confident that with the Lord’s help, preservation and other problems will be solved and that when the time is right, we will be ready to make the shift to digital.

One other issue regarding technology that comes to mind is that
while we will necessarily require some very sophisticated programs and tools, they must be largely invisible to users. This is a spiritual work, and we are anxious to keep the emphasis on hearts being turned to the fathers. Technology must not become a distraction. We have used the analogy of the telephone. The user does not need to understand or even be aware of the technology that allows him or her to place a long-distance call—the routers, switches, microwave antennas, and so forth. He or she just needs to know how to punch in the right number. We want it to be that way for ordinary members. They should not have to be adept at any technology to do family history and use the help we are providing. We want them to have a spiritual experience, not a technology experience.

RSC: From time to time, the Church may face opposition from groups that oppose or misunderstand family history or temple work. What approach does the Church take in such situations?

Elder Christofferson: There is, in fact, as you suggest, a good deal of misunderstanding regarding the doctrine of redemption of the dead and vicarious ordinances. While many religions have prayers or ceremonies intended to benefit the souls of the dead, our understanding of life after death and the role of living proxies acting in behalf of the deceased is unique and therefore foreign to the understanding of others. As you know, some have even thought that we baptize the dead rather than perform baptisms for the dead. I ran across an article in a French paper that objected to a microfilming project we have under way in Corsica. In explaining to readers the Church’s interest in family history, the article said that we baptize the persons whose records are filmed by “plunging the microfilm rolls in water.”

I think the best approach is the one taken by President Boyd K. Packer in the late 1970s in Israel when he was assisting in negotiations for access to genealogical records there. He met with a group of archivists, scholars, and rabbis to explain our request for the particular records in question. Among other things, he was asked what the Church would do with the records. President Packer replied without equivocation that in addition to preserving and making the information available to persons searching out their roots, we would also send many of the names to the temple for vicarious ordinances. This caused some stir, but one Jewish official present, I believe one of the rabbis, noted that a person would have to believe Mormon doctrine to believe that vicarious baptisms had any meaning, and since he didn’t believe it, he had no basis for objecting. He did not state the corollary, but I suppose everyone realized that
if our doctrine is valid, there again is no basis for objecting—how could anyone object to a vicarious baptism being offered to someone if it really does have merit? The final decision was that the Church was given access to most government records and also given permission to request other records held by nongovernment custodians.

Some Jewish groups, led by a Jewish Holocaust survivors’ organization, continue to object to proxy baptisms in behalf of any Jew who is not an ancestor of a Church member. There are some current discussions occurring on those issues, but it is important for all Church members and leaders to remember that the First Presidency has directed that we research our own family lines and not pursue what could be termed private extraction projects, submitting names of celebrities, Jewish Holocaust victims, or other unrelated groups or persons. Some claiming good intentions, but acting contrary to the First Presidency’s policy, have subjected the Church and vicarious ordinance work to unnecessary ridicule and opposition.

While some objections or misunderstandings may never be overcome, despite our best efforts, it is important always to emphasize that there is no element of coercion involved. The moral agency of each individual is fundamental in our doctrine, and no one, either in life or after death, can be compelled to accept a baptism or any other ordinance. It is fundamental in the justice of God that everyone be offered the benefit of a baptism, if not here, then hereafter. But it is equally fundamental that everyone be free to accept or reject a proffered baptism. Without the unfettered right to choose, the entire plan of salvation falls. Therefore, a vicarious baptism is no baptism unless and until it is freely accepted as valid by the intended beneficiary. Contrary to the misunderstanding of some, we do not count persons for whom proxy baptisms are performed as members of the Church, and we do not create membership records for them. With a few exceptions, in my experience, once people understand this essential element of our doctrine, their concerns about work for the dead disappear.

**RSC:** You recently had an opportunity to visit China on behalf of the department. How is family history helping to open doors for the Church there and elsewhere?

**Elder Christofferson:** The Church has had particular success collaborating with Chinese authorities to microfilm records there. We have partnered with the national archives and with the extensive government libraries in Beijing and Shanghai to preserve records that are important to the Chinese and that we believe will be increasingly
important to Church members in the years ahead.

As you know, ancestors and the records of ancestors have been important in Chinese culture for centuries. A significant exception was the Cultural Revolution in which, tragically, many records were destroyed. But by and large, the Chinese have preserved excellent records and documents useful for genealogical research, at least for portions of the population. The Shanghai Library has become the foremost institution in the country for family history research, and, among other things, we have supplied some equipment and film for a genealogical reading room in their new, very modern facility. They have a sign posted there expressing their gratitude.

During our visit we met with an official of the national archives in their offices just inside the wall of the Forbidden City complex. We discussed the value of historical and family history records. I suggested, as President Hinckley has stated, that a knowledge of our background helps us appreciate what we enjoy as a result of the sacrifices of our forebears and awakens a sense of obligation in us to honor their sacrifices in the way we live. Our Chinese host gave us an example from his own family. He said one of his ancestors served as a government official in a Chinese dynasty and was approached by someone offering him a bribe to do something improper. The party who wanted the favor stated, as part of his argument, “No one will know.” In refusing, the official responded, “You will know; I will know; the earth will know; and heaven will know.” This account had come down in his family through the generations, and they refer to it simply as “The Four Knows.” Our host said that they all know what that means and that it has inspired them to be honest men and women in all they do.

Family history and records gathering and preservation do engender goodwill. We have even been able to replace crucial vital records for island nations in the South Pacific when the originals have been destroyed by fire or storm. It is true that some record custodians deny us access or resist partnering with us because they object to the possible use of information for vicarious ordinances, but in most cases, our proffers to help have opened doors.

RSC: From an educational perspective, how does the Family and Church History Department approach the challenge of educating both those with little or no family history experience and those family history experts who need to keep up to date with newer methods that are being developed?

Elder Christofferson: The department has many capable staff who
can deal with issues in family history work from the simplest to the most advanced. They have prepared instructional materials that help those all along the spectrum, and they continue to update and simplify these helps. Additionally, the department has several employees whose job it is to evaluate materials in all media and ensure that they are presented in an understandable, useful, and appealing way. They make sure that they actually serve the intended audience and are not just an academic exercise, so to speak.

Increasingly, department staff participate with, and in many cases are members of, genealogical and archival organizations in the United States and internationally where they both stay current and also contribute to the development of new technologies and enhanced processes and procedures for record keeping and record preservation. It is a very active field, and the Church and its representatives are recognized as having valuable experience and expertise to offer. Happily, we are not alone, and many other entities, private, public, and commercial, are also making valuable contributions that we learn from as well.

One of the department’s main objectives at present is to find the best ways to make its help readily available to members of the Church wherever they live. And we want to do it through the priesthood line, not around it. A worldwide support organization is being put in place that will help leaders help their members in family history. It will rely heavily on high priests group leaders and ward family history consultants, among others, and will provide them the training and backup they need to help members in their units. It will not be a complex organizational structure, but it will for the first time reach across the Church in providing assistance that fits the varying circumstances of members as they strive to identify their kindred dead and offer them the ordinances of salvation.

**RSC:** What sort of counsel or advice would you give to those who may feel somewhat overwhelmed by the task of doing family history work?

**Elder Christofferson:** That’s probably everybody. There is really no way not to be overwhelmed, and family history work will always be work. The important things to remember are that this is a spiritual work and that the Lord is behind it and through it. Those who make the effort can count on divine assistance in one form or another. In fact, no matter how good or expert we become, and despite all the technology and all the records that still exist, it will never suffice. All of us have to rely on that divine help to succeed in family history and temple work. As I said earlier, the redemption of the dead is a preeminent part of the mission of
the Church, and the Lord will not let it fail, particularly since otherwise,
as He Himself said, the earth would be utterly wasted at His coming.

That being said, my advice to anyone would be the advice President Hinckley has given at various times: “Do your best.” Start wherever you are with whatever you have. Begin by capturing on paper or computer what you know, and then gather information from family and extended family. Research in records comes only after this foundation is laid. In other words, first draw on living memory and then on recorded memory. You will learn as you go, and there will always be someone along the way, if you look for them, to help you take the next step. Whether your progress at a given moment is rapid or painfully slow, just keep going, doing what you can.

At certain stages in our lives, we can do a lot, and at other times, only a little. A young mother, for example, with all the demands of a growing family, may not be able to do more than keep a box with memorabilia and scraps of paper preserving information about the past that may come to her from time to time. At a different period in her life, she will have time to sort out what she collected, record her family’s history, and pursue research for information to fill the gaps. What we should remember is that we can all do something in family history during the different stages of our lives, and if we do our best, it will all work out in the end. We can rely on the Lord for that. So don’t worry overmuch about what remains; enjoy the experience as you go.

**RSC:** At the stake and ward level, what should a well-run family history program consist of?

**Elder Christofferson:** There are some changes coming in the Church Handbook of Instructions that will simplify somewhat and give greater clarity to the family history organization at the stake and ward levels. I think that will help, but the key to a well-run program will always be simplicity. I believe if I were a bishop again, my approach would be to charge the high priests group leader with the responsibility to lead out in the ward council on this subject. I would ensure that we had one or more (depending on resources) ward family history consultants who were “people persons” who could work under his direction. With the help of the ward council, we would guide the consultant or consultants to work individually with specific members or families to help them in taking their first steps or next steps in family history. The consultant might spend a few days or many days over several weeks helping. I imagine that in the course of a year we could help at least ten families. In five years, we could have a corps of fifty families active
at some level in family history and its attendant temple work. That to me would be a successful, well-run program.

As suggested by my hypothetical situation, everything does not have to be accomplished in one year, and not everyone has to move at the same speed or be doing the same things. I think it is a mistake to try to move the whole ward at the same time and to expect everyone to dedicate the same time and resources to family history.

May I mention also that a well-run family history program will seek to involve new members early on in their Church experience. It immediately gives them a responsibility, as President Hinckley has counseled. The spirit of Elijah, the Holy Ghost, nurtures them, and they find at least one, sometimes many friends as they get involved in tracing their roots, preparing names for temple ordinances, and even going to the temple to perform vicarious baptisms for deceased ancestors. New members should be a high priority for the ward council and family history consultants. And the same can be said for less-active members. Family history involvement is a great reactivation tool.

**RSC:** What guidance would you give to those who are called to teach family history at the local level?

**Elder Christofferson:** I suppose I would reiterate what I said about helping people one by one or family by family. Take them where they are, and help them figure out what to do next and how to do it. To someone teaching the Sunday School family history course, I would also emphasize making it as practical as possible. People do need to understand the underlying doctrine, because, among other things, it provides context and motivation, but they also need some hands-on exercises; they need to get a little how-to experience.

Teachers and consultants should stay abreast, insofar as possible, of developments in technology relevant to family history and of developments in the Church program. I realize that conditions vary widely, and some will be lucky to have pencil and paper, let alone Internet access, but all should become as adept and competent as they can be. All should know how to prepare and submit names to the temple. That is the most important thing.

Let me add one more word about the spiritual underpinnings of our family history work. I mentioned that the doctrine of family history work gives context and motivation. We have been surprised in our research at the family history department to learn that a very significant percentage of Church members are not familiar with the doctrine or principles on which family history and temple work are based. Others
have a limited understanding at best. That is troubling because these are fundamental concepts and are essential to our salvation, for we without our dead cannot be made perfect just as they cannot achieve salvation without us (see D&C 128:15). Joseph Smith declared that this plan that enables us, in this dispensation, “to redeem [the dead] out of their prison” was ordained or prepared even before the world was (D&C 128:22). The Prophet Joseph calls out to all of us, “Shall we not go on in so great a cause?” All Church leaders should understand and teach the doctrine of the redemption of the dead. It will lead to the same enthusiasm that gripped the Saints in Nauvoo when they first heard it preached and inspired them to rush to the Mississippi River and begin performing baptisms for their dead. Who can fault them for their joy or even the initial lack of order or proper record keeping? We need the order and we are getting that under control, but we also need the rush of enthusiasm and Spirit that only the doctrine brings.

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Grandparenting and the Eternal Family Pattern

*Douglas H. and Barbara B. Smith*

*Douglas H. Smith* is a former member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy. *Barbara B. Smith* is a former general president of the Relief Society.

“There is more of a connection than many realize between the order and purpose of the universe and the order and harmony which exists in a happy and good family.”

—President Spencer W. Kimball

We are the happy parents of seven children and have earned the titles of grandparent or great-grandparent to nearly a hundred offspring. Our constant supplication is that our progeny will exert their faith, prove wise and true Saints, and, by their persistent endeavors, enjoy the full spectrum of the gospel. We have gratefully witnessed many tiny infants arriving and maturing to adulthood, choosing to live stalwartly righteous, gospel-wise, and faith-filled lives. We feel so blessed by each of our family members who valiantly hold to the rod (see 1 Nephi 8:24) and stay grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their righteous lives have heaped innumerable blessings upon them and their families and have enhanced and amplified our own eternal parental and wedded partnership. We feel no different than did the New Testament Apostle John when he conveyed his heartfelt charity toward the righteous of his day, expressing that he had “no greater joy than to hear that [his] children [or grandchildren or great-grandchildren] walk in truth” (3 John 1:4).

As grandparents, we would be wise to take heed of some scriptural instruction on how to conduct ourselves. Paul counsels: “That the aged men be . . . temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged
woman likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness . . . that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands. . . . Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. . . . In all things shewing a pattern of good works” (Titus 2:2–7).

Grandparents anywhere can have a positive, even pivotal, influence in the lives of their grandchildren. When grandparents have adaptation, creativity, and outstretched arms full of love, many a grandchild will bask in the affection that is endearingly unique to grandparents.

A Pattern in All Things

We were teachers in a Gospel Doctrine class when the Lord’s pointed declaration came to our attention: “I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived” (D&C 52:14; emphasis added). As our lesson at that time centered around the influence of family on individuals, we turned to Brigham Young’s statement about a family pattern: “What is the basic pattern for a family? The pattern includes mother, father, sister, brother [and, of course, grandparents]. The human family, organized by our Heavenly Father, replicates the premortal family pattern.”2 If we follow the Lord’s divinely designed family pattern, we are more likely to enjoy peace and harmony in our homes.
President Young already knew all this, but the Prophet Joseph must have felt some urgency about it because after his death he came to President Brigham Young and instructed him to “tell the people to keep the spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized and in great confusion.”3 As we read the rest of the Lord’s statement about a pattern in all things, we learn that He is providing us with divine patterns so “that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations” (D&C 52:14). That is why the Prophet Joseph was so adamant: Satan was breaking up the pattern in families.

If the people in the early 1800s had disorganized and confused families, it makes families of this century seem all the more confused. We are grateful that we know the Lord’s pattern for families because we were able to govern our own family accordingly, drawing upon the Spirit for direction.

Families in the Scriptures

The scriptures offer examples of good families who taught their children the gospel despite facing significant trials. Four families come readily to mind:

• Adam and Eve and their children—the first mortal family unit patterned after the premortal family structure.

• Noah, his wife, and their sons and wives—those eight (see 1 Peter 3:20) were not just the only family; they were the only people left on earth (see Genesis 7:23).

• Abraham and Sarah, whose expanding family will be, and could already likely be, as “the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17).

• Lehi, Sariah, their four sons, Zoram, and Ishmael and his household—as Lehi and Ishmael’s children married, that family pattern continued as their families increased with the ongoing generations.

We, as grandparents, have given serious thought to Nephi’s statement regarding likening all scriptures to ourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23). It struck us that one way for us to do this was to record our own family history, just as the four families listed above did.

When we first presented the concept of recording our family his-
tory, not everyone in the family took us seriously. Once they realized we were in earnest, however, it became a project for the entire family. Every family member was asked to write a personal history for the book. Parents wrote the histories of the smaller children and infants. Some family members really enjoyed writing up their life stories; others found it more difficult. With a great deal of persuasion, however, sometimes even because we wrote their histories for them, we finally had a history for every family member.

Living in These Last Days, as it was titled, is now fifty leather-bound books. It was an enormous undertaking, but because we worked on it as one extended family unit, it served as one of those projects that further united us as a family.

A Pattern of Recorded Lineages in the Scriptures

As we were teaching about the lineages of Old Testament families, we became aware of the importance of recording genealogical information for future generations. The Bible and the Book of Mormon record the lineages of families sometimes clear back to Adam.

In our day, we search back in time to connect with our lineage. If we could go back far enough, we would link up with a generation in the Old Testament that would eventually take us back to Adam. That generations were continually updated in the Old Testament is indicative of the importance the Lord places on our lineage.

We can return to our previous examples of the family patterns to illustrate that they all had generation after generation follow them. The bottom line is that lineage, family history, genealogy—call them what you will—are essential in the Lord’s plan of eternal families because those connecting links are, in essence, the ties that bind.

Our Lineage: A Family Temple Project

In the late 1970s, President Spencer W. Kimball asked the Church members to complete four-generation family group sheets. We already had five generations finished, though we were not certain the information was listed at the Church Family History Library. So we brought in a disk and a few weeks later received notice that the disk had been listed. That meant the cards were ready and we could now do the ordinance work. What a surprise and delight when we picked up the cards: fourteen hundred of our ancestors needed temple ordinance work done for them!

We enlisted our brothers and sisters and all of our offspring over
twelve years of age to help us tackle the project. We initiated the project at a family Christmas gathering, setting a goal to complete the work for all fourteen hundred names. It took the entire following year to finish all the work for those ancestors, but when it was done, everyone was overjoyed. The whole experience brought the family closer together and strengthened the love we felt for one another as well as for our ancestors.

On Christmas Eve, our families traditionally have several of the younger children simulate the manger scene. We have continued that for the little children, but for everyone twelve years and older, our special tradition at Christmastime is to go to the temple and do ordinance work. The hallowed season commemorating the birth of Christ, whose perfect life is so full of promise for all mankind, is a perfect time to go to the temple as a family. There we have the ability to act as proxies, allowing our ancestors and others deceased to partake of the promises to the righteous in the plan of salvation.

Patterns of Effective Communication in the Scriptures

Another pattern in the scriptures is a pattern of communication. Some ways to communicate are more effective than others, and certain methods are chosen depending on the circumstances. The following examples illustrate some of those ways:

- The Lord conversing with Adam and Eve and the prophets.
- The brother of Jared talking to the Lord face to face.
- King Benjamin preaching and having his words written and distributed to the people.
- Captain Moroni and Ammoron writing epistles to each other.
• The Lord giving Moses the Ten Commandments engraved on two stone tablets.

• Fathers giving verbal and written counsel and blessings to their sons.

Although not all of these illustrations are explicitly family-oriented, they show the importance of this pattern of communication.

Patterns of Effective Communication in the Family

Maintaining effective communication is central to maintaining family unity and righteousness. Staying close as a family needs more than the casual contact of living in a home together. Staying united with family members requires conscious, regular efforts to interact and converse with one another.

Creative communication can abound within the family. We keep our family communication lines open by often doing things with our immediate and extended family. Some of the projects or traditions we will describe here began with our seven offspring, but most originated with grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Therefore, we originated or participated in most of these enterprises as grandparents or great-grandparents. The best result of all our projects was that they kept the family intact, in touch, and closely bonded. Even as we come close to having one hundred relatives in our immediate family, we are still close-knit. Many of the following activities will help other families to build unity and love.

**Family home evening.** When our children were growing up, Church leaders did not stress family home evening as much as they do now, but we already knew the important pattern of family home evening because we had learned it from our parents. Our family home evenings were held on Monday nights and through the years proved to be an enjoyable and binding time together. They consisted of prayer, music, a lesson, a fun activity, and refreshments.

In later years, President Kimball emphasized the results that would come from holding regular family home evenings. We were able to see the substance of his promise in our adult children as they lived their lives in righteousness. He promised that “as you faithfully plan and hold quality family home evenings, you will gain strength to withstand the temptations of the world and will receive many blessings which will help qualify you to enjoy your families through eternity in the Celestial Kingdom.”

As we continue to see the program’s positive influence upon our
descendants, we feel so blessed that family home evening has always had a place in our family.

_Holiday traditions._ Holidays are always great opportunities for family communication. Christmastime for the Smith family always carries excitement and expectancy in the air and of course the Nativity with the little ones in costumes. One year, as the children were getting older, we had a major production of the Christmas story, complete with costumes and props and a cardboard donkey. That event was memorable.

_Christmas cards._ For nearly three decades, we have sent Christmas cards that not only bear testimony of Christ but also represent our growing children in some fashion. Each year we design our own cards. One year the cards had pictures of our newest babies. Another year our grown children’s homes were the design. Because so many in the family had served or were serving missions, one year we had the cards depict all the places they had been. It was amazing to discover that they had served on every continent except Antarctica. And that is because there is no missionary program there!

_Family conference._ If there really is a pattern in all things, the Church certainly has a grasp on the conference pattern: ward conferences, stake conferences, regional conferences, general conferences, and many more. Borrowing this pattern, we started the Smith family conference as one means of effective communication, especially of spiritual communication. Our family conference is for family members who are old enough to listen to the important messages of the gospel. We hold an opening session, priesthood and Relief Society sessions, and a concluding session, which is a testimony meeting. We are all touched by the Spirit that directs that last session. Afterward the children serve dinner to the adults and even clean up the kitchen. The hope is that we all leave filled not only with food but with a spirit that will always direct our lives. We have established regular family conferences because we feel they will keep us closely united, increase our spirituality, create more persistent family enjoyment, and strengthen our overall resolve to do what is right.

_Summer Olympics._ One year the entire extended family went to Midway, Utah, and held what we called the Smith Family Summer Olympics. We encouraged every family to design a flag, a slogan, and a logo and to prepare for the grand entry. We had activities for every age group and gave medals that represented the gold, silver, and bronze standings. The children loved the competition, and the parents and grandparents had a wonderful time. That evening after the children...
were asleep, the adults talked about the gospel and its influence in our lives.

Road rally. Another activity was a road rally, planned by our oldest daughter, with maps to follow, speed limits to keep, a finish line to cross, and then refreshments! That was great fun for everyone, and, of course, that was the idea.

Pioneer Day. Since we live in Utah, one of our most beloved annual celebrations is the 24th of July, Pioneer Day. It is a time to sit and enjoy conversation with one another. The family goes to Grandma and Grandpa Smith’s and then to the Days of ’47 Pioneer Day parades, rodeos, and varied activities. Barbara introduced two young ladies she met there to two of our grandsons, and both sets married soon after!

Family newsletter. When our sons were of missionary age, we sent them off and started mailing a weekly family newsletter to keep them informed of what was going on at home. We later combined all the newsletters in a book. When our grandsons went on their missions, that further expanded our communication network. As years passed and technology progressed, so did our communication network. Now the Smith family newsletter comes via the Internet.

Books. Before we were great-grandparents, Barbara thought it would be helpful to grandmothers or grandmothers-to-be if she shared what she had learned about being a grandparent from her grandchildren. Growth in Grandmothering was a book written while Barbara felt she was somewhat new at it; after all, she had only thirty-four grandchildren at the time.

Temple marriages. When all those grandchildren began growing up, they naturally started getting married. To this date, Douglas has performed the temple marriages for each of his grandchildren. These marriages further enhance the unity and love we all feel as an extended family, even more so as family members begin their own families. We are now having so many great-grandchildren being born so close together that we hold baby showers for three at a time! Currently, we have seven children, thirty-nine grandchildren, and enough babies on the way to give us thirty-nine great-grandchildren. We are so grateful that these families have been sealed in the temple so they will be a part of our family forever.

Impact of Our Spiritual Origins

In our Gospel Doctrine studies, we learned about our spiritual origins. President Kimball clarified the pattern of the premortal family by confirming that before we were born into mortality, we were born
spirit children of Elohim and His "wife-partner," our spirits’ "heavenly Mother." This is our first family, our first parents, and this is where our spiritual lineage begins.

What a breathtaking heritage: our spirit Father and Mother are Gods! Our grandchildren sensed this heritage when they participated in the ordinance work for our fourteen hundred ancestors. Pride in their identity is strengthened as we continue our annual tradition of temple work at Christmastime. President Harold B. Lee emphatically taught that the result of a clear understanding of who we really are, literal spirit children of Deity, should increase our self-respect, which in turn leads us to greater righteousness and away from sin and despair.

**Noble Spirits Held in Reserve**

We are all more than aware that we are living in the last days. For every good thing that happens, Satan increases his influence to pervert the good and use it for sin, destruction, death, war, famine, disease—more abominations than we can imagine. Nevertheless, in spite of Satan’s most concerted efforts to foil good, good still prevails. It does so because some of the most righteous souls now live on earth, souls who reject Satan’s advances and battle with the perversities that surround us.

With each rising generation, the premortally righteous are coming to earth as advancing battalions of the Lord. It will take the Lord’s finest to defeat the wicked who have hearkened to the prince of darkness. In 1932, President Wilford Woodruff said: “The Lord has chosen a small number of choice spirits of sons and daughters out of all the creations of God, who are to inherit the earth; and the company of choice spirits have been kept in the spirit world for six thousand years to come forth in the last days, to stand in the flesh in the last Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, to organize the Kingdom of God upon the earth, to build it up and to defend it.”

In 1970, President Lee wrote of the glorious, foreordained standing of the youth of the Church: “You our youth of today are among the most illustrious spirits to be born into mortality in any age of the world. Yours is a noble heritage and a wonderful opportunity.”

A decade later President Ezra Taft Benson said: “For nearly six thousand years, God has held you in reserve . . . [for] the final days before the Second Coming of the Lord. . . . God has saved for the final inning some of his strongest children, who will help bear off the Kingdom triumphantly. And that is where you come in, for you are the generation that must be prepared to meet your God. . . . All through the ages the
prophets have looked down through the corridors of time to our day. Billions of the deceased and those yet to be born have their eyes on us. Make no mistake about it—you are a marked generation. There has never been more expected of the faithful in such a short period of time as there is of us. Never before on the face of this earth have the forces of evil and the forces of good been as well organized.”

Who comprises the entirety of the noble reserved for these last days? As you read the above quotes, did you consider when they were made? 1932, 1970, and 1980. We have friends who are nearly sixty years old now who were present in BYU devotional assemblies when the prophets’ assertions were spoken directly to them. Most of those students are now grandparents. In those devotional assemblies, prophets and Apostles, speaking directly to the students, asserted that those students were among the noble held in reserve, were a marked generation, and would assist in carrying off the kingdom triumphantly. We, the authors, and you, the reader, are the noble spirits who were held in reserve for those nearly six thousand years.

We emphasize this nobility because, as stated early on, we can have pivotal influence in the lives of our precious and noble little ones as they grow in this earthly environment. We must believe in who we are and in our marvelous capacity to influence our grandchildren to continue developing in virtue, righteousness, and spiritual maturity so they will be able to carry out their foreordained responsibilities in furthering the kingdom. We must never forget, while we teach our grandchildren who they are, that we also are of the noble birthright.

Agency and the Family Pattern

The law of agency was in effect in the premortal life. Doctrinal lessons regarding agency remind us that in the premortal setting, all spirits were not equally diligent or obedient to the premortal laws. Included among the less valiant were the rebellious who barely avoided the expulsion that happened to Lucifer and his followers. Some of those who were less valiant who have received or will receive bodies are among the diabolical soldiers in Satan’s colossal army. That army opposes Christ’s expressed work and glory, that of bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Satan continually enlists followers now with mortal bodies, to increase his evil influence and power, thinking amiss that he shall someday be victorious over Christ and all who are faithful to Him. Conversely, Christ’s legions draw from the premortal valiant who have ever sought to acquire knowledge and virtue.
Just as Satan glories in every noble soul gone astray, Christ sorrows with each loss. With that same sense of sorrow, Elder Henry B. Eyring mourned, “Even a single individual lost to the gospel of Jesus Christ closes doors for generations of descendants, unless the Lord reaches out to bring some of them back.”

The use of agency, therefore, has a profound effect on the pattern of the family. One poor choice can negatively affect families for generations, while a good choice can have a positive effect for generations.

**A Grandparent’s Role in the Pattern of the Family**

Our grandchildren—these children of such promise—must be loved, guarded, and taught the gospel so that they gain their own testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ and recognize Him as their Savior and Redeemer. They must also know how important it is to use their agency to make righteous choices every day of their lives, repenting as needed and keeping themselves unspotted from the world, so they will be able to carry out their foreordained commissions. They must understand that they have that choice and yet be undeterred by evil influences.

_If ever loving, insightful grandparents were needed, they are needed_
now—to help grandchildren clearly comprehend their true spiritual identity and potential. What a vital, enduring gift is ours to instill with their parents that eternal truth in the minds, hearts, and spirits of our grandchildren. Indeed, our role as grandparents may be the means of keeping close, or bringing back, the precious souls of our grandchildren.

**The Pivotal Influence of Grandparents**

As they were growing up, our children had the benefit of getting to know their loving grandparents and other relatives. These extended family members were always a part of the family and taught our children many virtues and truths by precept and example. As parents, we were appreciative of the time and talents they shared without ever supplanting us as the parents. They were invaluable at times when a child of ours was not very responsive to either parent.

We remember with fondness how Grandma Bradshaw, who was an excellent pianist, would play the songs of Zion on our piano. It was a delight to see one of our children sitting on the piano bench with her, happily singing as Grandma played. Grandma, in her wisdom, would also invite one grandchild at a time to come to her home to stay overnight. She would fix a special meal, and after they cleaned up the kitchen together they would play fun games that developed their thinking skills and helped them learn educational and spiritual concepts. Our children recall with tenderness those times with Grandma and the personal attention and love she gave them.

Grandpa Smith was also a beloved figure in the lives of our children. He had a particular knack for increasing a grandchild’s self-concept and self-confidence. When one of our sons was a teenager, he wasn’t always easy to reach, but Grandpa could reach him. We remember that our teen would balk at our requests, but Grandpa would work his magic and have our son out cutting, trimming, and edging the lawn as well as weeding the flower bed. More than the pay for doing the work, it was Grandpa’s telling him what a fine job he had done that escalated our son’s sense of worth and ability.

Another time one of our daughters had been taking piano lessons for quite a while and was making good progress. Grandpa Smith gave her a challenge with a dangling carrot. He gave her three major piano pieces to learn; if she learned all three pieces, he would give her fifty dollars (which was a lot of money back then). More than wanting the money, though, his granddaughter wanted to please her beloved grandpa. That girl worked so hard and long practicing those pieces
that her fingers ached. About then she would think of Grandpa’s expectation that she really could master that music, and it gave her the motivation to persist. It took her a long time, but she finally met his challenge—and got the fifty dollars to boot.

Those are examples of pivotal grandparenting. They serve as indicators of how grandparents in any generation can be loving adjuncts to parents in their efforts to infuse character and confidence in their children. While grandparents never supersede the parents in their stewardship, they can offer soothing companionship and a unique, bonding friendship. Grandma and Grandpa can be sources of joyful, entertaining fun and vital wisdom. Their approach need not be intrusive. And Grandma’s lap or Grandpa’s knee is ever ready for a cherubic little one enveloped in secure arms of love—for a grandparent’s love and patient acceptance are never in question.

Having and maintaining such endearing relationships with our grandchildren lays a perfect foundation for us to help train them through encouragement, storytelling, songs, poetry, games, and activities. There are so many avenues by which we can supplement and facilitate efforts in rearing those children according to gospel precepts. Sometimes, reinforcement from a dearly loved grandparent that they are children of a loving Heavenly Father can bear more weight than praise heard from someone else. Most encouraging for grandparents is the insight of Elder Neal A. Maxwell that “if we already care about those to be taught, the Lord can inspire us with any customized counsel or emphasis which may be needed.”

**Lifting Grandchildren to Higher Ground**

Now that we are at this grandparenting and great-grandparenting stage, we find ourselves amazed at our ever-increasing posterity and the joy each addition brings us. We have always desired, as our parents and relatives did, to do our part in nurturing our rising generations in daily gospel living. As grandparents, we know we can prove ourselves most useful in assisting in the development of immediate family members.

One example here will suffice. When our granddaughter Becky was taking piano lessons, she was frightened to perform before a crowd. Her piano teacher had her perform a special recital just for her grandparents. Of course, she performed beautifully, and all four of us were delighted. It makes us wonder just how influential our safe environment of love and approval was to Becky.

Because our second- and third-generation descendants may look to us as beacon lights, we must cast a long, bright beam of wise and happy
adherence to treasured gospel values. We can leave no doubt that we are disciples of lifelong, stalwart faith and commitment to Jesus Christ and His gospel. As the Apostle Paul counseled, “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). We must be examples because the age-old adage is true: actions speak louder than words. Only then can we hope that our beloved youth will develop in like manner, conforming their personal lives to the divine image of God.

In looking to us for righteous wisdom and examples, our grandchildren, as well as our own children, may well require Emerson’s standard: “If you would lift me, you must be on higher ground.” We hope our beloved children of all ages will believe in our ability to lift them to higher ground, and we hope the effect may increase the possibility that in our cross-generational family, no one will prove “a weak link in the chain of [our] generations.”

Grandparents: Extensions of Our Grandchildren’s Homes

We know that a defense for righteousness is the home that teaches gospel values and principles; moreover, it is a heaven-imposed responsibility. As instructed in 1 Timothy 5:4, we are to “let them learn first to shew piety at home.” Solomon’s sage advice to parents is that if we will train up our children in righteousness, they will stay true to their upbringing (see Proverbs 22:6). That process, in essence, begins when a newborn is first cradled in its mother’s waiting arms and senses her love—a perfect first lesson, “for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

As grandparents, we are extensions of the homes of every one of our posterity. Grandparents who study, love, and live according to gospel truths can speak to and teach their grandchildren by the Spirit. Because our descendants seem to come to us prepared to live righteousness, it is all the more essential that they receive protection, learn gospel knowledge, and acquire the discernment that will give them reason and power to use their agency toward righteous purposes. Reinforcing with grandchildren that they are children of heavenly parents educates those precious souls about their spiritual identity and engenders high moral character even in their earliest years.

“A Continuation of the Seeds Forever and Ever”

When we really contemplate what we almost cannot comprehend—that what started out as just the two of us now approaches one hundred relatives and a third generation—we have a slight glimpse of
the size of the premortal family and a better sense of “a continuation of the seeds” (D&C 132:19). President Joseph Fielding Smith, speaking of those sealed by the marriage covenant and proving faithful in mortality, clarified that those couples “will have claim on each other in eternity. Their children will belong to them, and they will have the gift of ‘a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.’” That prophetic clarification basically brings the family pattern full circle. And with a “continuation of the seeds,” there will be grandparents galore in that celestial realm.

Outcomes of Endeavoring to Maintain the Eternal Family Pattern

As we have seen, the manner, strategies, teaching, and examples by which we raised our children are now being implemented, refined, and supplemented with divinely ingenious applications in the rearing of their children and are further augmented now by the parents of our third-generation descendants. The outcome of our efforts to apply the divine family pattern and diligently and creatively try to bring up our “children in light and truth” (D&C 93:40) is clear to us, clear down to the third generation.

And What of These “Last Days”

Teachers, through their deep study and prayerful seeking for the Spirit, are almost always the ones who learn most. What we have studied regarding “a pattern in all things” and the eternal pattern for families effectively encompasses and enhances our personal study of how we as grandparents can be pivotal in the lives of our posterity and in the preservation of our family legacy.

From our eight decades in our family timeline, we have learned the importance of the eternal pattern of the family, and we want our family to be complete in the eternities. As grandparents and great-grandparents, we have engaged ourselves as advocates for our offspring and as supportive sentinels for our grandchildren as they learn and apply gospel truths. Our earnest prayer is that come the final, eternal accounting, there will be, at our supernal family table, no empty chairs.  

Notes

11. Neal A. Maxwell, That Ye May Believe (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 41.
W. W. Phelps wrote, “Cumorah . . . is well calculated to stand in this generation, as a monument of marvelous works and wonders.”

With a stately monument of the angel Moroni cresting its summit and a yearly pageant commemorating salient events associated with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the hill is fulfilling the role that Brother Phelps envisioned. However, the general population of the Church is relatively unfamiliar with the story of how this significant Latter-day Saint landmark was acquired.

As a result of the religious experiences the Prophet Joseph Smith had on the Hill Cumorah and the subsequent teachings of early Church leaders, members of the Church naturally desired to visit the hill along with other sites belonging to the “Mormon culture hearth.”

Initially, the Latter-day Saints may have been content to just visit these sites; however, as the Church’s resources increased, so did the desire to own them. Although the story of how the Church acquired the Hill Cumorah is historical in nature, it also manifests the hand of Deity.

Remembering the Beginnings

The experiences of Joseph Smith at the Hill Cumorah, along with the teachings and writings of early leaders, effectively memorialized the hill in the minds of the Church members. One writer for the Deseret News wrote: “When Joseph Smith received the plates from Moroni, the Hill Cumorah had faithfully discharged its sacred trust, and as far as historical importance is concerned, ‘passed out of the picture.’ But not
so in the memories of the thousands and thousands of people who have accepted the Gospel message and followed the inspired teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. To them it is and always will be a sacred shrine.”

Because this article reflected the growing attitude of Church members at that time, it is easy to see why the Saints in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began traveling back to Palmyra to see the Hill Cumorah. Many individuals during this time frame made the trek east, essentially enacting some of the first Church history tours. The Hill Cumorah was high on the list of must-sees for these early pilgrims. One such visitor, James A. Little, reflected on the wellspring of feelings generated by his visit. He said, “On the 11th of last December I stood for the first time on the hill Cumorah. I had longed to see this spot, now associated in the minds of the Saints with the events of the deepest interest. I seemed impressed with an inspiration peculiar to the place. Although enveloped in a cold scudding snow storm, I was able to call up from the shadowy past some of the important events which have closed and commenced grand epochs in the history of the Western Hemisphere with a rapidity and vividness impossible to represent to others.”

A few years after James A. Little’s visit to Cumorah, Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith departed Salt Lake City for the East. On this journey, they stopped at a number of Church history sites; and while in Kirtland, they diligently sought to acquire “the mind of the spirit” and concluded that while they were so near, they should visit the Hill Cumorah. In a correspondence to President John Taylor dated September 17, 1878, they wrote the following of their experience at Cumorah:

In a beautiful little grove on this memorable hill, we bowed in humble and fervent prayer, rendering prayer and thanksgiving to Almighty God for the treasure of knowledge and truth so long concealed beneath its surface, to be brought forth by the gift and power of God to us and the world in this dispensation. The spirit of prayer, of blessing and prophecy rested upon us so that we rejoiced exceedingly. After prayers we laid our hands upon and blessed each other, giving utterance as the spirit dictated. We spent several hours looking over the hill, viewing the surrounding country, in meditation, prayer, and thanksgiving. After which we drove to the little town of Manchester and returned to Palmyra, rejoicing and feeling that we had not spent our time in vain. We cut a few sticks from near the summit of the hill, which we brought with us as momentoes [sic] of our visit.

Another notable Latter-day Saint, Susa Young Gates, daughter of Brigham Young, also found the Hill Cumorah to be a place of great significance. She recounted, “The drive around the north end of the Hill repaid us for coming; the mighty sentinel rises with a strength and
majesty when you face him which impresses you with all the dignity and force of which an inanimate custodian is capable. What a rush of emotions filled my heart!"

Perhaps the most significant of these visits or pilgrimages to the Hill Cumorah came shortly after Susa Young Gates’s trip, when Joseph F. Smith, as President of the Church, once again set foot on the slopes of Cumorah. In company with others, he traveled back to Sharon, Vermont, in December 1905 for the purpose of dedicating a monument commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. On their return, President Smith and party stopped at the railway station in Palmyra, New York, and drove out to the Hill Cumorah. After climbing to its summit and discussing some of the history of the place, President Smith offered a prayer. As reported in the Deseret News, “[This prayer was a] comprehensive and splendid prayer, which brought tears to many an eye, and softened all hearts, evoking a unanimous Amen at the close. The party rejoiced exceedingly at this fresh manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit, testifying to the soul of the truth of the latter-day work and foretelling its ultimate triumph over all opposing powers.”

It is apparent from these accounts that many Latter-day Saint visitors had spiritual experiences that renewed their faith in the Restoration while visiting the hill wherein was found the keystone of their religion, the Book of Mormon.

By 1911, larger groups numbering around 200 to 250 Latter-day Saints were making their way to the Hill Cumorah. The Palmyra newspaper headlines often portrayed these “pilgrimages” in an almost ominous, invasion-like tone. However, these same newspapers at times portrayed a sense of hospitality and graciousness toward these Latter-day Saint pilgrims of the late 1800s and early 1900s. This positive feeling reflected in the local newspapers, however, would noticeably cool with the arrival of a permanent Latter-day Saint presence in the area.

**A Foot in the Door**

As a direct result of the Saints’ adherence to the law of tithing, the Church was able to remove itself from the bonds of financial debt by the beginning of the twentieth century. In the April 1907 general conference of the Church, President Joseph F. Smith announced, “Today the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints owes not a dollar that it cannot pay at once. At last we are in a position that we can pay as we go.” This newfound financial freedom allowed the Church to further expand what had already begun as a limited and careful acquisition
of selected Church history sites. Two months after President Smith’s declaration of financial freedom, Elder George Albert Smith purchased the one-hundred-acre Smith homestead near Palmyra, New York, from a man named William Avery Chapman. Because Mr. Chapman was getting too old and arthritic to run the farm himself, he decided to sell it to Elder Smith, with whom he had developed a friendship during many visits. Although the purchased farm did not include the Hill Cumorah, this was the foot in the door that the Church needed to begin acquiring the hill and many other New York and Pennsylvania historical sites.

One problem, as alluded to earlier, was a prejudice that had been festering in that region of the country for almost a century. Some citizens of the Palmyra-Manchester area had become embittered against the Latter-day Saints, as Susa Young Gates found out in her visit to the Hill Cumorah. Mr. George Sampson, who operated a farm embracing the north end of the hill and a significant portion of the east side, approached the party and, upon learning that they were Mormons, stated, “Well, no Mormons can set foot inside my house, I know them all! They are a bad, wicked, deceitful lot; I know them, O, I know them. . . . Old Joe Smith and Brigham Young and the men that started this thing were rascals and scoundrels. I know them all, and a worse lot of men never lived.”

Despite the antagonistic feelings against them, the Church still purchased the one-hundred-acre Smith farm in 1907 but allowed the current owner, Mr. William Avery Chapman, to move out on his own timetable. This turned out to be about seven years later. When in 1915 Mr. Chapman finally moved from the farm, it became necessary for the Church to find a man to move into the Smith home who could handle the local prejudice and hopefully begin changing the attitude toward the Church.

Willard Washington Bean

With this in the back of his mind, Elder George Albert Smith visited Richfield, Utah, in 1914 for a stake conference. While the Apostle was seated on the stand, a man by the name of Willard Washington Bean walked in the back. According to Elder Smith, “When [Willard] stepped in that door the impression was so strong it was just like a voice said to me, ‘There’s your man.’” Willard Bean, a former boxer who had tutored the great Jack Dempsey, was a perfect match for the challenge. He had seen much of prejudice while serving a mission in the southern states and had succeeded in winning friends from among
those who at first were the most hostile toward the Church. As a result of his unique personality and abilities, Willard Bean became a key figure in the Church’s acquisition of the Hill Cumorah and many other significant historical sites.

In 1915, Willard and his new bride, Rebecca, were set apart for their mission to Palmyra-Manchester by President Joseph F. Smith and were told that they were heading to “the most prejudiced place in the world.” This prophetic statement was fulfilled upon the Beans’ arrival in Palmyra. No sooner had they settled into the Smiths’ Manchester frame home than a committee of townspeople was sent to inform them that they were to leave the area. Willard went out on the doorstep and said, “Well, now, I’m sorry to hear that. We had hoped to come out here and settle with your people and be an asset to this community, but I’m telling you we’re here to stay if we have to fight our way. . . . I’ll take you on one at a time or three at a time. We’re here to stay.” Willard attributed the residents’ hostility to their embarrassment in being associated with the birthplace of a religion that had practiced polygamy and was politically unpopular. As a result, several people with strong anti-Mormon feelings were hired to lecture to the community regarding the evils of Mormonism. The Bean children were ostracized at school, lies and rumors were spread, and life in general was made difficult for the family from Utah. This treatment seemed to bring out the best in Willard Bean and even led to the first purchase of part of the Hill Cumorah. According to Willard, “When they began to abuse the Mormon people my fighting blood came to the surface and I didn’t hesitate to transfer it [the Smith homestead] over to the church. It was then that the Mormon Church was getting a foothold that might well become a problem and disgrace to the community. But I met the issue by negotiating for a slice of the Hill Cumorah.”
Purchase of the First “Slice” of the Hill, 1923

The first time the Beans visited the Hill Cumorah, they were met by a man holding a shotgun who said, “Nobody steps on this hill belongs to the Mormon Church.” But within about five years, Willard had become friendly with a man named James H. Inglis, whose farm included a small “slice of the Hill Cumorah.” The Inglis farm was ninety-eight acres and extended halfway up the west side of the Hill Cumorah and included “the entire apron or flat between the hill, and the highway.” Bean thought that if the Church were ever able to purchase the rest of the hill, it would certainly need this portion to be able to access it easily as well as provide parking space for visitors. Therefore, it must have struck Bean as providential when one day while they were visiting, Mr. Inglis said, “Let me sell you my farm. You will then be able to say that you own part of the hill at least.” On June 19, 1923, Bean wrote to the Presiding Bishopric as follows:

I am writing you about a farm which I am fully convinced the church should acquire. Perhaps you will remember a beautiful, well kept farm at the foot of Cumorah hill taking in part of the foot of the hill proper. Infact [sic] the fence at the point of the hill runs probably 2/3 of way up.

The farm is a nicely kept, productive farm, has never been tenanted out, hence not run down, consisting of 90 acres practically all tillable. . . . Has a house of probably 12, or more rooms. At [sic] attractively located commanding beautiful view of west side of hill where the Plates were obtained, and on the state road where could do a big missionary work with tourists and others who stop to view and snap the hill.

He asks $11,000, for the property which is not above the market price. Infact when he told his neighbor that he had offered his farm for sale his neighbor thot [sic] him foolish as he asked $15,000 for his which has only 10 acres more and not as good a house.

I didn’t intend to bring this to your attention until fall when I plan to be to conference. But am most afraid it wont keep. Am afraid if it becomes rumored about that he has offered to me for $11,000 that some fellow, to be ornery, will grab it and then hold it for a fabulous price. And it seems to me that this is THE chance to get part of the Hill, thus gaining a foothold, at market value.

However, by the time Bean obtained permission to proceed, Mr. Inglis’s wife had all but talked him out of selling the farm. Willard learned that at the time Inglis offered to sell, he was having difficulty with his hired help. But shortly thereafter, his old helper, who had been
with him for nine years, returned to work for him again, which caused Inglis to rethink his offer. Mr. Inglis, however, advancing in age and realizing that he had given his word, told Willard Bean that if he would purchase the equipment and livestock in addition, he would still sell him the farm. One more condition that Inglis requested was that the sale be done without any publicity because they expected some “criticism and scensure [sic] from their neighbors and friends” for selling to the “Mormons.” This prompted Inglis to transfer the title to Bean rather than to the Church. Although the price of the Inglis farm was $13,000, the public records show the transfer of title on September 17, 1923, to Willard Bean for only one dollar. Because New York was a “nondisclosure” state, Inglis was not required to publicly disclose the actual sales price of his farm. However, he was required to assign and disclose some monetary value to the transfer of title of the property to Willard Bean. He followed a longstanding legal precedent—still in effect today—that was to assign a value of one dollar to the property. This procedure, along with requiring that Willard Bean be the buyer, ensured that public records would not disclose the actual amount for which Inglis sold it. Bean explained this procedure to the Presiding Bishopric as follows: “You will observe that had to make transfer to me first. That was not necessary but he was so afraid somebody would think he was selling to the Mormon Church and censure him.” On the contrary, it surprisingly turned out that many of the Palmyra resi-
dents, by that time, had warmed up to the permanent Latter-day Saint presence in Palmyra and even wished the Church could obtain the rest of the Hill Cumorah. Bean wrote: “As soon as the paper announced the sale the business men and larger caliber citizens almost shouted for joy and wished that we could get the balance of the Hill and establish a Shrine here etc. etc. Every man who had a farm between us and the Hill came to me and wanted to sell. A hotel men [sic] in Palmyra got it into his head that we would even want a Hotel and offered to sell at a bargain.”

Thus, within the space of eight years, the efforts of the Bean family resulted in at least a partial change of sentiment toward the Latter-day Saints and the purchase of part of the Hill Cumorah. President Heber J. Grant officially announced to the Church in the October 1923 general conference the following: “We are now the owners of a part of the Hill Cumorah. The Church, a few weeks ago, purchased a farm of ninety odd acres, which embraces the West slope of the Hill Cumorah, about one-third of the way up the hill. There is a nice farm house, and it is a very fine piece of property. Elder Willard Bean, in charge of the Memorial Home, of the Smith Farm, wrote us that he could purchase this property, and we are glad that at least part of the hill is in the possession of the Church.”

The Purchase of a Second Sizeable Portion of the Hill Cumorah, 1928

The rest of the Hill Cumorah was owned by a man named Pliny T. Sexton. A local banker and millionaire, Mr. Sexton owned at least forty-eight properties, including many farms and about one-fourth of all the village property of Palmyra. He also held large portions of land in Kansas and Nebraska. The farm that contained the major portion of the Hill Cumorah (excluding the Inglis property) was deeded to Sexton in 1903 by the widow of Rear Admiral William T. Sampson, who had been in command of the North Atlantic Squadron in the Spanish-American War. Sampson had owned this property since March 13, 1879, when it was deeded to him by the estate of George A. Parker, who died intestate and without descendants. From Parker, the ownership of this portion of the Hill Cumorah traced its way back to Anson Robinson, who received it by will from his father, Randall Robinson, who owned the property from 1826 until his death in 1862. Randall Robinson purchased the property from Nathaniel Gorham on April 8, 1826.

After Sexton came into possession of this property, he did what he did with many of his other properties, hiring the Sampson farm (also
referred to by some as “Mormon Hill farm”) out to tenant workers. These tenants were usually those who were hostile to Latter-day Saints who visited the hill. But after becoming acquainted with Willard Bean, Sexton demanded that his tenants be respectful toward Latter-day Saint visitors.

Upon becoming friends with Sexton, Willard Bean did all he could to convert him to the restored gospel. Although he never joined the Church, Sexton was impressed with Bean’s religion and even commented that he had never heard such a clear interpretation of the scriptures as that which Willard Bean gave in his street meetings outside Sexton’s window. Mr. Sexton also became acquainted with some of the Church’s leaders. When General Authorities visited the Joseph Smith farm, Willard Bean took the opportunity to introduce them to the owner of the Hill Cumorah. During one such visit, the Church made its first attempt to buy the rest of the hill. President Heber J. Grant, Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley, and his son Preston Nibley, accompanied by Willard Bean, visited the aging Pliny Sexton at his bank office. After an enjoyable visit, Bishop Nibley ventured to obtain the Hill Cumorah by saying, “Mr. Sexton—this has been a most pleasant visit. We have enjoyed it immensely and now in order to make a perfect day of it, let me phone up the morning newspaper in Rochester and
have them send a photographer over with a movie camera and have you go down in history by having you photographed on top of Cumorah Hill in the act of handing the deed to that historic property, to Heber J. Grant, president of the Mormon Church.”

Although Pliny Sexton was considered a kindhearted and generous man, he was also known to be “cold blooded in business deals.” He replied, “Well, I am ready and willing provided I get the proper monetary consideration.” Following this response, the visit quickly came to an end, but while returning to the Smith homestead, Bishop Nibley told Willard, “When the Lord wants us to get possession of that hill, the way will be opened up.”

Another opportunity to obtain the hill came in 1919. Willard Bean reported that Mr. Sexton, at the end of World War I, was having trouble finding suitable tenants to work some of his properties. Knowing that the Church was interested in the Hill Cumorah property, he called Willard Bean and requested a visit. When Willard arrived at his office, Sexton stated that because of his tenant dilemma, it might be a good time for him to sell the hill to the Church. When Willard asked him what price he was asking, Sexton responded, “Right at the present time I believe I could handle $100,000 with less trouble than the hill property.” This exorbitant price shocked Willard, and he jokingly asked if Mr. Sexton had been out to hear the latest anti-Mormon speaker, Mrs. Shepherd, talk about the tremendous wealth of the Mormon Church. Mr. Sexton denied this but said “a piece of property connected with the early rise of a Church as that is with yours should be worth a king’s
ransom.” Willard then explained that “the Church had gone along now nearly a hundred years without any noticeable suffering and could probably go on indefinitely without possessing the hill.” Willard did, however, promise to inform the Presiding Bishopric regarding Sexton’s offer, which he did, and was promptly supported in his rejection at that price.

Although disappointed in not being able to obtain the Hill Cumorah, Willard Bean maintained a good relationship with Sexton. It seems at one point that Willard thought Sexton might make a change in his will that would turn the Hill Cumorah over to the Church upon his death, but no change was made. More time passed, and on September 5, 1924, Pliny T. Sexton passed away without selling any of his property to the Church.

Local newspapers heralded Sexton as the “perfect billionaire,” and although the Church had refused to buy Sexton’s property at the unwarranted price he asked, these same papers all mentioned how the “Mormon billions” could not persuade him to part with his property, as if the Church had offered a blank check to him.

A few weeks after Sexton’s passing, Bean received a letter from Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley. It requested that Willard keep the Church leaders informed in respect to any developments regarding the Hill Cumorah but to not appear too eager about obtaining it. Bishop Nibley further stated: “If we use caution and the Lord wants us to have possession of the hill, it will be so overruled. Or, on the other hand, no matter how anxious and how hard we may try, unless the matter is overruled in our favor, we will not succeed.”

An article in the Deseret News at the time of Sexton’s death implied that although Sexton would not sell to the Church, maybe some of his heirs would. Ironically, some of Sexton’s heirs would prove to be a bigger obstacle than he was. Sexton’s nearest of kin was a niece, who had married a German count named Hans Giese, and an adopted niece, Mrs. Ray. These two ladies, according to Willard, “rounded up other prejudiced heirs and formed a little group who pledged themselves not to sell the ‘Mormon Hill,’ as it was familiarly known, to the Mormon Church at any price.” Part of the reason for their prejudice, and therefore refusal to sell the rest of the Hill Cumorah to the Church, was that the Church had refused to pay the exorbitant price of $100,000 the first time Sexton had offered to sell it. Therefore, whenever these heirs or their representatives would meet at the county seat in Lyons, New York, they would register a protest against selling the hill to the Church, which legally blocked the Church being able to buy it.
top of this, these heirs put a staunch anti-Mormon as the tenant farmer on the farm that included the significant remaining portion of the Hill Cumorah. These tenants once again began driving Latter-day Saint visitors off the hill. Willard Bean told the Presiding Bishopric how he responded to this situation:

They ordered our people off a time or two, but when I threatened to post a big sign on our land by the state road where the little lane leads up to his house, warning all Mormons to keep off the hill by order of Frank Burgiss lessee, he began to change his attitude. I would have had it photographed for the local correspondent of a Rochester daily, who is friendly, which would have given him a little publicity he wouldnt relish. . . . The executors sent their foreman out yesterday to talk with him, which was probably unnecessary as he has been [on] very good behaviour since my little talk with him.55

At this point, it appeared that the Church would not be able to acquire the remaining portion of the hill anytime soon because of a few of the heirs who were decidedly against selling to the Latter-day Saints. This course of events may have continued for some time were it not for a key player named C. C. Congdon. Congdon was the lawyer of the Pliny T. Sexton estate, and Willard Bean had just happened to become good friends with Congdon after moving to Palmyra. Congdon was somewhat upset that Sexton had not simply willed the Hill Cumorah over to the Church before his death, and although loyal to his charge as the Sexton estate lawyer, he kept Willard informed regarding the heirs’ plans. Although not a member of the Church, Congdon would ultimately prove to be a major factor in the Church’s being able to purchase the Hill Cumorah.56

By 1925, despite the portion of heirs opposed to the Church, half of the Sexton heirs had settled on asking the Latter-day Saints to pay $50,000 for the Sampson farm, which included the north and most of the eastern portion of the Hill Cumorah, or $75,000 for this and other surrounding farms.57 The Sampson farm was worth $13,000 to $14,000 as a farm, and Willard Bean felt that the Church might consider paying up to $20,000 for it in light of the sentimental value it held—but $50,000 was far beyond reasonable.58 Even if the Church had been willing to pay this exorbitant price for the hill, the purchase would not have succeeded because the anti-Mormon contingent of heirs continued to register protests against selling to the Church.59 As time passed, however, the diehard members of the opposition bloc began to pass away. In January 1925, the cashier, Mr. Smith, who had
worked for Sexton for fifty years, passed away. Although he was paid only $50 a month and had received only one small raise during that time, he had sided with the Sexton heirs in opposing the sale of the hill to the Mormons. Coincidentally, in this same year, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints made an appearance in Palmyra and expressed interest in purchasing the Sexton portion of Cumorah. An Elder Landes, along with two others from their church, made an inquiry and said they would send an offer on the hill.

Mrs. Lucy A. S. Giese was the next heir to pass away. She had strongly opposed selling the hill to the Church. In 1924, she experienced health problems and decided to go to Europe with her husband to visit his parents and hopefully aid in her recovery. However, in 1927, she returned to Palmyra in a wheelchair and died shortly thereafter.

By 1927, the heirs who were willing to sell to the Church were still stuck on the $50,000 price tag they had originally assigned to the Sampson farm. But, in January 1927, C. C. Congdon thought that the heirs might go as low as $35,000 for the Sampson farm as long as they were getting $50,000 for the entire purchase. So he packaged a deal, including additional farms bordering Cumorah, that would bring the entire package to around $50,000. On August 11, 1927, Willard Bean wrote a letter to President Heber J. Grant outlining this proposal. It presented the offer of the Sampson farm for $35,000 plus some surrounding property for a total of $48,000.

Therefore, in 1927, it looked as if the Church might be able to obtain the rest of the Hill Cumorah at close to market value with the additional property averaged into the deal. However, in December 1927, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints made another appearance. In a letter to the Presiding Bishopric, Bean said that President Frederick M. Smith (of the RLDS Church) made a visit to the executors of the Sexton estate and intimated that he would talk to some of their rich members about making an offer for the hill. This development naturally excited the heirs who, according to Bean, got the idea that they could “pit one church against the other” and turn it into a bidding war for the hill property. This attitude turned out to be a false alarm, however, and it was not long before the Sexton heirs realized that their best chance for getting any money for the property was still The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A few months later would prove to be the ideal time for the Church to secure the remaining significant portion of the hill.
On January 30, 1928, Mr. C. C. Congdon telephoned Willard Bean and requested him to come to his office. Willard responded that he would be over as soon as he had eaten his lunch, but Congdon replied that he wanted to talk with him while nobody was around, including his secretary. Willard promptly went over, and Mr. Congdon informed him that he had just returned from Lyons where the heirs had met. Further, because Mrs. Ray, the foremost remaining anti-Mormon heir, was ill, nobody had remembered to register a protest. Congdon had also just met with the surrogate judge and told him that there were three bids for the Hill Cumorah (Sampson farm): one for $25,000 by a local company; one by a California man for $30,000, who felt he could sell it to the Church for $35,000; and the Church’s bid of $35,000. The judge told him that if he could complete the deal with the Church before any protest could be filed, the deal would be legally binding. Congdon went on to tell Willard: “Now you know, and I know that the proper thing would have been for the old gentleman, Sexton, to have willed that hill to the Mormon Church. But he didn’t. You are the only people who can use that hill and by right ought to have it. Now its [sic] up to us to fix this deal up so they can get what they demand and at the same time arrange so you people can get the worth of your money.”

So the $50,000 mark expected by the heirs could be reached, some additional property surrounding the hill was added to the deal. The Bennett farm, consisting of 220 acres and bordering the Hill Cumorah on the southeast side, was valued at $10,000. A smaller but unproductive ninety-seven-acre farm known as the Tripp farm bordered the Sampson farm on the east and was valued at $2,000. These two farms, together with the hill proper at $35,000, brought the total to only $47,000. Willard then suggested that the heirs had a “white elephant” on their hands in the form of a red brick building known as the Grange Hall. Although it had cost $27,000 when it was first built in 1911, the heirs were not able to sell it. Willard offered $6,000 for it, bringing the total to $53,000. Mr. Congdon thought it was a deal he could get by the heirs and succeeded in obtaining the needed signatures. He did not, however, require Willard Bean to sign a forfeit on the sale because he was afraid it might become public and threaten the deal.

It is interesting to note that while events in obtaining the hill were developing rapidly in New York, Church leaders in Salt Lake City were right in step without actually having conversed with Willard Bean. On February 2, 1928, Willard wrote up the proposal for the purchase of the hill and surrounding properties and airmailed it to the First Presidency,
asking them to let him know “at their earliest convenience.”\textsuperscript{72} Two days later, Willard received a telegram from the First Presidency that said, “See lawyer of Sexton estate and get definite offer for Hill Cumorah alone if possible; if not, with adjacent properties, put it in writing, put up forfeit, and let us hear from you at earliest convenience.”\textsuperscript{73}

This telegram was dated the same day that Willard had written and sent his letter to the First Presidency. Two days after receiving this telegram, Willard received another from the First Presidency that said, “Terms satisfactory. Close deal.”\textsuperscript{74} It is, therefore, evident that the First Presidency was well aware that the time had come for the Church to purchase the Hill Cumorah, a point acknowledged by the First Presidency in a letter they sent to Willard Bean that said, “We were very glad to learn that you had secured an option on the Hill Cumorah Farm and other property before receiving word from us to do so. We had already noticed the singular coincidence of your writing to us the very same day and possibly the same hour that we were writing to you.”\textsuperscript{75} Also of interest is the timing of this purchase in relation to the 1930 centennial of the organization of the Church. With this purchase, the Church would have not only the Joseph Smith Sr. farm and Sacred Grove but also the Hill Cumorah as well—all sites where significant events occurred prior to the Church’s organization.

The Church closed the deal with the Sexton heirs and thus came into possession of 482 acres of land, in addition to the 97.5 acres they already owned, which included almost all of the Hill Cumorah and much of the surrounding land. By 1929, the Church had sold the Tripp farm on the east side of the hill, which did not have any historical significance, for the price they paid for it, bringing the total acreage of Hill Cumorah property to 487 acres.\textsuperscript{76}

**Reaction to the Purchase**

Between the time the Beans moved to Palmyra and the time the Church purchased the rest of the Hill Cumorah, the local sentiment had already changed dramatically. The Beans’ good nature, industry, and determination had won them many friends in the area. Therefore, aside from the hostile Sexton heirs (most of whom had died) and a few others, it seems that many of the local Palmyra residents viewed the Church’s acquisition of the Hill Cumorah favorably.\textsuperscript{77}

However, some people farther away from Palmyra who were not acquainted with the Beans used the purchase of the Hill Cumorah as another excuse to attack the Church. A Detroit newspaper, for example,
printed an article stained with anti-Mormon rhetoric by a man named Jackson D. Haag. The article begins with a short paragraph explaining that the “Mormon Church” had just purchased the Hill Cumorah and then spends the rest of a full page casting Joseph Smith and his family in a negative light. Although the author claimed he did not know what the Church was planning to do with the Hill Cumorah, he flippantly asserted that the Church would make a “shrine” out of it. Although he used this term pejoratively, he waxed somewhat prophetic in that one day millions would view it as a sacred place. Although these attacks existed, they seem relatively few; and the Church took over ownership without any noticeable public relations problems.

In Utah, the Saints were kept up to date regarding the purchase of the Hill Cumorah via the Deseret News, which printed articles documenting basic events of the purchase. Naturally, there was great excitement among the Saints at having acquired this piece of property that was so prominent in our history. In the April 1928 general conference of the Church, President Heber J. Grant officially announced the purchase of the rest of the Hill Cumorah as follows: “Within a short time the Church has purchased the Hill Cumorah. The purchase embraces the farm where the hill stands, and the adjoining farm, which together with one that we had already purchased, including part of the hill, gives us now the entire possession of the Hill Cumorah. I know that the hearts of the latter-day Saints thrilled with pride when the announcement was made that we had secured this property.”

Following this announcement, President Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency dedicated his entire address to the topic of the Hill Cumorah. This talk seems to have been a directive to the Latter-day Saints on how they should view the Hill Cumorah and its purchase by the Church. President Ivins wasted no time in stating the magnitude of the hill’s purchase:
The purchase of this hill, which President Grant has announced, is an event of more than ordinary importance to the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The memories of the remote past which cluster round this sacred spot, its close association with the opening of the present gospel dispensation, which has resulted in bringing together this congregation of people, for without it this tabernacle would not have been erected, nor would we have been gathered here in worship today, and the thought which we entertain of the possibilities which its bosom may unfold, make the acquisition of this hill almost an epochal accomplishment in the history of the Church.\(^\text{82}\)

President Ivins then spent the majority of his talk attempting to establish what he termed as “facts” regarding the geography of the Hill Cumorah. It appears that President Ivins was attempting to refocus Latter-day Saints on what had been previously taught about the Hill Cumorah by many of the prophets and apostles. Referring to a talk by Elder B. H. Roberts, President Ivins proclaimed that the Hill Cumorah and the hill Ramah are identical and that both Jaredites and Nephites had their last great struggle around this hill. He reiterated that Moroni deposited all the records from Ammonon in this hill except for the abridgment from the plates of Nephi. He then reminded the members that Moroni deposited Mormon’s abridgment and his own abridgment of the Jaredite record in this hill and testified that it was from this hill that Joseph Smith obtained possession of these plates. President Ivins also reaffirmed what previous leaders of the Church had taught about additional records being deposited in the Hill Cumorah, stating that they “still lie in their repository, awaiting the time when the Lord shall see fit to bring them forth, that they may be published to the world.” However, he also quickly stated that “whether they have been removed from the spot where Mormon deposited them we cannot tell, but this we know, that they are safe under the guardianship of the Lord, and will be brought forth at the proper time.” Interestingly, President Ivins seemed to place particular emphasis on the future role he felt the Hill Cumorah would play in bringing forth records:

All of these incidents to which I have referred . . . are very closely associated with this particular spot in the state of New York. Therefore, I feel . . . that the acquisition of that spot of ground is more than an incident in the history of the Church; it is an epoch—an epoch which in my opinion is fraught with that which may become of greater interest to the Latter-day Saints than that which has already occurred. We know that all of these records, all the sacred records of the Nephite people, were deposited by Mormon in that hill. That incident alone is sufficient to make it the sacred and hallowed spot that it is to us.\(^\text{83}\)
President Ivins concluded his talk by stating that the way the Church had come into possession of the hill “seems to have been providential.”\(^{84}\) Thus, the reaction of at least one Church leader was exuberance over the fact that the Church had obtained a property that was significant not only because of its past but possibly because of its future.

Conclusion

Although some local citizens living in the vicinity of the hill where the Church got its start may have hoped Mormonism would completely fade away, this new religious society took just the opposite course. In the West, the Church increased in numbers, strength, and prosperity; and with the passage of years, a grateful membership began to look back toward the birthplace of their religion in hopes of purchasing their precious homelands.\(^{85}\) Because of the many wonderful events associated with the Hill Cumorah, its acquisition by the Church was an exciting accomplishment made possible by the intervention of Deity. Just as W. W. Phelps envisioned, the Hill Cumorah does stand as a monument of marvelous works and wonders, even in the story of its reclamation by the Church. \(^{RE}\)

Notes

2. Klaus D. Gurgel, “Mormons in Canada and Religious Travel Patterns to the Mormon Culture Hearth” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1975). “Mormon culture hearth” is the term Gurgel assigned to the Palmyra-Manchester, New York, region, where many of the events significant to the rise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints transpired.
3. President Anthony W. Ivins, in the April 1928 general conference, said that the purchase of the Hill Cumorah “seems to have been providential” (in Conference Report, April 1928, 15).
5. James A. Little, “Reminiscences of Cumorah,” Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Archives, April 21, 1876, 3; hereafter cited as Journal History.
9. A circa 1910 article with the headline “Mormon Pilgrimage to Gold Bible Hill: Two Hundred Believers in Church of Latter Day Saints Visit Birthplace of Faith in Town of Manchester,” found in King’s Daughter’s Free Library, Palmyra, New York, file marked “Churches L.D.S. (Mormon) Hill Cumorah.”
10. 1911 articles with headline, “250 Utah Mormons Invade Palmyra,” “Huge Mormon Choir Making First Invasion of the Eastern States,” and “Palmyra Awaits Mormon Visit,” found in the King’s Daughter’s Free Library, Palmyra, New York, file marked “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) or (Mormon) History—‘Pro’—views and opinions.”

11. Although the local newspapers report a hospitable reception of these early Latter-day Saint pilgrimages, there are records of some Church members being rudely treated, as in the case of Susa Young Gates (see Gates, “A Visit to the Hill Cumorah,” 21–22). The larger groups may have been seen as bringing in some business to the area and therefore treated better. Such seems to be implied by one article that stated how the town members and businesses went to great lengths to court the patronage of a two-hundred-person party of Saints; November 1, 1911, newspaper article entitled, “Mormon Pilgrims Visit Home of Prophet Who Found ‘Golden Plates,’” located in the King’s Daughter’s Free Library, file marked, “Church of Jesus Christ Historical Sites (LDS).” In spite of this, President Joseph F. Smith still commented that Palmyra was one of the most prejudiced places in the world (see Willard Washington Bean, Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah, 2:24).

12. Willard Bean was the permanent presence of the Church in Palmyra from 1915 to 1939. While he was there, pilgrimages to the Hill Cumorah continued. Since Bean was there, he took on the responsibility of showing the visitors around the farm and hill. One example of this is a letter from Joseph F. Smith to Willard Bean requesting Bean to show President Smith’s daughters the Hill Cumorah and Sacred Grove (Joseph F. Smith, July 16, 1916, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection).

15. Although the purchase of the Joseph Smith farm did not include the Hill Cumorah, Eastern newspapers reported that it did. They also reported that the Mormon Church was planning on putting a tabernacle on top of it; see the Deseret News, June 12, 1907, as found in Journal History, June 11, 1907, 2. Two informative works on this era of the Hill Cumorah are Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan’s article entitled “The Hill Called Cumorah,” Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: New York (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 71–91; and Rand Hugh Packer, “History of Four Mormon Landmarks in Western New York: The Joseph Smith Farm, Hill Cumorah, the Martin Harris Farm, and the Peter Whitmer Sr. Farm” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975).
23. Willard Bean had two children from a previous marriage, Paul and Phyllis, who went to Palmyra with Willard and Rebecca.
24. Bean, Autobiography, 2:31; emphasis added. The transfer of the farm referred to in this quote is the fact that the farm was bought by George Albert Acquiring Cumorah
Smith as a private party and not by the Church. Willard had been directed not to be too hasty in transferring the title to the Church, but the negative treatment they received hastened the transfer, according to Bean.


28. Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, June 19, 1923, General Office Files, Presiding Bishopric, Church Archives. All letters from Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric were obtained from this source unless otherwise specified. Apparently, another reason why Bean was so motivated to acquire a portion of the Hill Cumorah was that members of the RLDS Church were making advances on another owner of the Hill Cumorah property, Pliny T. Sexton, with regards to purchasing his lands, one of which included a major portion of the Hill Cumorah. Willard said that six carloads of members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints had visited two weeks previously (see Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, September 15, 1923, Church Archives).

29. Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, July 31, 1923, Church Archives.

30. Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, July 31, 1923, Church Archives.

31. The Inglis farm was valued at $11,000 and the equipment and livestock at $3,000, making the purchase what B. H. Roberts called “a good buy” (Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, September 15, 1923, and October 16, 1923).

32. A copy of this transaction is found in the “Hill Cumorah” file of the Real Estate Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; see also John Davis Giles Collection, reel 5, box 6, folder 12, Church Archives; Bean, Autobiography, 2:31–32.

33. Personal interview with Jeff Reeves, Orem, UT, August 20, 2002.

34. Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, January 14, 1924, Church Archives.

35. Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, January 14, 1924, Church Archives.


39. Information taken from copies of the pertinent land deeds in the writer’s possession, obtained from Ontario County RAIMS, 3051 County Complex Drive, Canandaigua, NY 14424 (see also Journal History, December 21, 1929, 8–10; John Davis Giles Collection, reel 5, box 6, folder 12, Church Archives; and Historic Sites file, Church History Library, folder labeled “Hill Cumorah”).


41. Bean, Autobiography, 2:34.

42. The exact date of this particular visit is not known; however, Bean said that it occurred prior to 1919 (Bean, “How We Got the Hill Cumorah,” 3).


45. Bean, Autobiography, 2:34.

46. Bean implied that Sexton had accumulated numerous properties by “buying up and foreclosing mortgages” and simply had too many properties to find tenants
for (Bean, *Autobiography*, 2:32). An unfortunate result of this was that many of his properties fell into disrepair. In 1924 Bean wrote, “Dozens of his [Sexton’s] farms are so badly run down that they will hardly be able to give them away” (Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, December 1, 1924, Church Archives).

47. Bean, “How We Got the Hill Cumorah,” 3. For the rest of his life, Sexton would not budge from his original asking price of $100,000 and even told Bean that if the Church did not purchase it at that price, his hill property would go to the State Historical Society upon his death (Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, March 1, 1923, Church Archives).


49. Mr. Sexton’s will was made in 1907 and probated on September 13, 1927, at Lyons, New York. One paper reported, “The estate, valued at $2,000,000, one-half of which is represented by real estate and the other half by personal property, is reported to be the largest ever taken before the Wayne county surrogate court for settlement” (Journal History, September 13, 1927, 2).

50. Miscellaneous articles found in King’s Daughter’s Free Library, Palmyra, New York, family file cabinet, folder marked “Pliny Titus Sexton.”


52. Journal History, September 16, 1924, 6.


55. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, October 3, 1924. In this letter, Willard also states that Burgiss “is out of harmony with public sentiment which is overwhelmingly in favor of us getting the Hill.”


57. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, January 22, 1925, and Bean, *Autobiography*, 2:34; see also Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, January 24, 1927. The other farms Bean is referring to are the Bennett and Tripp farms; for sketches of the Cumorah farms, see appendix in Bean, *Autobiography*, 3:158.

58. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, February 9, 1925.


60. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, January 22, 1925.


62. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, January 22, 1925. The amount of the RLDS offer was not known to Bean.

63. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, December 31, 1924.


65. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, January 18, 1927, and August 11, 1927.

66. Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, December 20, 1927. The RLDS interest in the Hill Cumorah provides good corroborative evidence of the historical importance of the hill.


70. The Grange Hall was a building that was appraised at $38,000 at the time of this deal. Mr. Sexton had previously foreclosed a mortgage of $9,500 on it, but Willard was able to get it in the deal for only $6,000 (Bean, *Autobiography*, 2:34).

72. Bean, “How We Got the Hill Cumorah,” 6; see also Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, February 2, 1928.


75. The First Presidency to Willard W. Bean, March 6, 1928, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.


77. Bean, “How We Got the Hill Cumorah,” 3; also personal interview with Palmyra Bean Packer, who was living at the Joseph Smith farm at the time the Church purchased the Hill Cumorah and is now residing in Provo, Utah.


80. *Journal History*, February 18, 1928, 2.

81. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, April 1928, 3. For all intents and purposes, the Church does own the entire hill; however, technically, the Church’s property ends on the south before the hill actually does (see map of current Church property in the appendix of Bean, *Autobiography*, 3:159).

82. Anthony W. Ivins, in Conference Report, June 6, 1928, 10–15; emphasis added. This talk was later reprinted in *Improvement Era*, June 1928, 675–81.


84. Ivins, in Conference Report, April 6, 1928, 10–15.

The scriptures are full of types and shadows that symbolize the Savior if we will open our eyes to see them. As Joseph Fielding McConkie wrote, “Symbols are the timeless and universal language in which God, in his wisdom, has chosen to teach his gospel and bear witness of his Son.” These symbols include “objects, places, personal names, titles, animals, events, feeling, foods, persons, words, rituals, and elements.”

In the world of nature around us, the Creator has provided symbols such as rocks, water, and trees to help us “always remember him” (Moroni 4:3). As Alma testified, “All things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it” (Alma 30:44). After Adam was baptized, the Lord taught him about these physical symbols: “All things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me” (Moses 6:63). We conclude that the very order of the physical elements and the wonder, order, and complexity of living things bear witness of a Creator.

The Savior is identified with essential elements for life, including support and nourishment for growth. He is the “rock of [our] salvation” (2 Nephi 9:45), the “light and life of the world” (Mosiah 16:9), and the “living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25). As we found our lives on Him and as His influence grows in our lives, we grow up unto Him as trees of righteousness (see Helaman 3:21; Isaiah 61:3). Let us consider some
of these symbols in nature and note other symbols of Christ as we read the scriptures and observe the world around us.

The Rock of Our Redeemer

Rocks, mountains, and other topographical features represent spiritual phenomena. Prophets such as the brother of Jared, Moses, and Nephi sought the Lord on the tops of mountains, which are likened unto or associated with temples (see Isaiah 2:2–3; 56:7; 66:20; Micah 4:1–2). When we are in a valley, mountains cause us to look heavenward, just as when we see the spires of a temple. When we are on top of a mountain, just as when we are in a temple, we can see much more clearly “things as they really are” (Jacob 4:13), having a broader physical or spiritual perspective.

The tops of many mountains throughout the world are composed of some of the oldest and most resistant rock because the softer rocks once on top of them have eroded away. These rocks owe their resistance and strength to the fact that they were formed from softer rocks under tremendous pressure. So is the strength and endurance that comes from going to the “mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2), or the temple, and building your life on “the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God . . . that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12). As the storms or trials of life come, those founded upon the Savior are refined and sustained by Him and become as precious jewels (see Malachi 3:17; D&C 60:4; 101:3) or gold (see Isaiah 13:12; Revelation 3:18).

The Savior declared Himself as the “stone of Israel” (D&C 50:44). Faith in Jesus Christ and His role in the plan of redemption is an “anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast” (Ether 12:4). The infinite expression of personal love of the Father and Son for us in the Atonement of Christ is a foundation from which one will not fall, when truly converted (see Romans 8:31–39). The Atonement is “infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:10, 14) and will not fail us. While obedience to His commandments is likened unto building upon this sure foundation, rejecting, disobeying, or following our own doctrine is likened unto building on a sandy foundation (see 2 Nephi 28:28; Matthew 7:24–27; 3 Nephi 11:40; 3 Nephi 18:12). To the disbelieving Jews whose hearts were more set on the honors of men than on God (see John 5:44), Christ became “a stone
of stumbling, and . . . a rock of offense” (2 Nephi 18:14). Eventually, all who are not built upon the true rock must fall, as did the great and spacious building, because it had no real foundation (see 1 Nephi 8:26; 1 Nephi 11:36).

As the chief cornerstone on which the kingdom of God is built, Christ is symbolized in the chief cornerstone of the temple (see Ephesians 2:19–21). President Hinckley has reminded us how anciently the cornerstones were set to provide a foundation and guide for the rest of the building. The chief cornerstone was set on the southeast corner where sunlight rising from the east first falls.3

The Light of the World

To Nicodemus, who came in the dark, Jesus taught that light had come into the world (see John 3:18–21). During the Feast of the Tabernacles on the temple mount near where the four large lampstands, or menorahs, were lighted, Jesus declared Himself the “light of the world” (John 8:12). As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, this light illuminates both truth and error, causing the wicked to hate it because it exposes them, while the righteous are drawn to it because their deeds are of God and are consistent with truth. As the sun rises every day, light divides the darkness. It is natural to consider the sun at the center of the solar system as representative of Christ, who should be at the center of our lives. He is referred to as “the Sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4:2), as well as the “Son of righteousness” (2 Nephi 26:9). He declared Himself to John as “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). He is associated with all physical and spiritual light and truth (see D&C 88:6–13).

A portion of this light is given to everyone who comes into the world (see John 1:9; D&C 93:2), but we are also told that “the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit” (D&C 84:46). The coming of light into the world happens with the actual first and second comings of the Savior physically into the world. It also happens to individuals personally, and through the work of angels, prophets, priesthood, and the Holy Ghost to prepare the world for His physical coming. Therefore, Peter spoke of relying on the “more sure knowledge of the word of prophesy . . . as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (Joseph Smith Translation, 2 Peter 1:19).

The Restoration of the gospel brought a major increase of light into the world. This message is very evident in hymns of the Restoration, such as Parley P. Pratt’s “The Morning Breaks” (Hymns no. 1), includ-
ing lines like “The dawning of a brighter day” and “The clouds of error disappear before the rays of truth divine.” The Prophet Joseph Smith prayed at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple that the “Church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (D&C 109:73). As the moon reflects the light of the sun to a dark world, so do the Church and its members reflect the light of Christ to a spiritually dark world. The Savior told the Nephites, “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (3 Nephi 18:24). The actual phases of the moon and their depiction on our temples suggest the increase in this light for individual members and the Church as a whole: “That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24).

The dawning of a brighter day is also seen in the rising sun motif in and on our temples and is especially evident with the Nauvoo Temple. When the Lord appears, He will eclipse the light of both the sun and moon (see Isaiah 60:19, D&C 133:49) since His light and glory are far beyond what we commonly experience, indeed “above the brightness of the sun” as described by Paul (Acts 26:13) and Joseph Smith (Joseph Smith—History 1:16).

The Savior said those who follow Him would have the “light of life” (John 8:12), bringing to remembrance the children of Israel who followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (see Exodus 13:21). The sun supplies the energy that powers the physical and biological processes that sustain life on the earth. Only a very small amount of the sun’s radiant energy is used in photosynthesis, the process by which carbohydrates are made from water and carbon dioxide. Yet virtually all life depends on this process for the basic food and chemical energy of life. The association of Christ with the light “which is in all things, which giveth life to all things” (D&C 88:13) makes it clear that we are dependent on Him for both the physical and spiritual sustenance of life (see D&C 93:9). The Savior strongly taught this concept by proclaiming Himself as the true manna or bread from heaven—the bread of life (see John 6:31–58). As the sun sustains life on this earth, so the Light of the World sustains life in mortality and finally eternally, through the Resurrection (see D&C 88:14–17; John 6:50, 51, 54, 58).

The earth’s orbit and angle relative to the sun create the seasons. The seasons can also represent phases in the history of mankind relative
to the plan of redemption. The autumn or fall can represent the fall of Adam and of mankind into a world of eventual death. The winter represents death and the spiritual darkness of the world. The spring represents a newness of life through redemption and resurrection, and the summer represents the harvest of souls (see Jeremiah 8:20; D&C 45:2; 56:16).

The energy from the sun flows through the earth’s ecosystems and is the energy from which all life draws its support. Other important elements for life, such as water, nitrogen, carbon, and phosphorus, cycle through our systems at very small to global scales. Such cycles in nature, with the rounds of the sun, moon, and other celestial bodies, remind us that “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (1 Nephi 10:19). As we become more aware of how the Creation works, it is obvious that God has a “pattern in all things” (D&C 52:14). He has told us of certain overriding patterns: “But remember that all my judgments are not given unto men; and as the words have gone forth out of my mouth even so shall they be fulfilled, that the first shall be last, and that the last shall be first in all things whatsoever I have created by the word of my power, which is the power of my Spirit” (D&C 29:30). The Lord created all things “first spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, first temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work” (D&C 29:32). The pattern of the Lord in the Creation is also His pattern in creating us into beings of eternal life. First as spiritual children of God (see Hebrews 12:9), we then become temporal through the fall and the birth of our mortal bodies (see 2 Nephi 2:22–25). We become spiritual again in nature as we are born again through the “travail” (Isaiah 53:11) of the Savior’s Atonement and our own repentance (see Mosiah 3:19, 4:2–3). As the earth was created spiritually, then temporally, then dies and is quickened to become eternal, so are we reborn through spiritual rebirth and quickened in the Resurrection (see D&C 88:25–32). In all the vast rounds and processes of the Lord’s creative work, He preserves it all, for it is the workmanship of His hand (see D&C 29:23–25).

The Living Waters

Dozens of scriptures liken different aspects of water to the Savior and His word—including rain, snow, fountains, rivers, streams, springs, waves, seas, and rainbows. As an example, the constancy of peace that comes from obedience is likened to a flowing river, stream, or the waves of the sea (see Isaiah 48:18, 66:12; 1 Nephi 20:18). One of the Lord’s most dramatic declarations was during the last great day of the Feast of the Tabernacles: “Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him
come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37–38). Of this declaration John interpreted: “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

All life depends on water. In semiarid to arid lands, such as Israel and much of the Middle East, the coming of the rains and the capture of water in cisterns were essential to life and the development of civilization. The lack of rain constituted crop failure and a famine for the people.

The Lord likened his word unto these essential rains: “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11). When the people cherish the word, hearken, and obey, then as the rain, the word makes their lives bountiful. The peace, joy, and knowledge of the obedient in the last days and in the Millennium are associated with the abundance of water: “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1). “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). “He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth” (Psalms 72:6). “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

The righteous who keep the commandments from the heart, such as the law of the fast, are told: “And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not” (Isaiah 58:11). On the other hand, those who hearkened not to the prophets during Jeremiah’s time were told: “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). When His people reject the word or living waters, the Lord may withhold rain from the earth, resulting in a famine (see Luke 4:25; Helaman 1; Ether 9:25). Then when the people turn again unto Him, the Lord sends the rains to break the famine (see 1 Kings 18:1–2; Helaman 11:13, 17). When the Lord-withholds His word from man, it is also spoken of as a famine: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing
the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

Christ is the source of living waters as shown by the waters that issued forth out of the rock that Moses struck (see 1 Corinthians 10:4). He taught the woman at Jacob’s well in Samaria: “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). To spiritually reawaken the Nephites, Alma reminded them: “Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you. Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely” (Alma 5:33–34). This invitation has been extended through the Restoration in the latter days (see D&C 10:66). One can accept the invitation by being baptized in water (see Alma 5:62), which is symbolic of the cleansing power of the Atonement.

There are many other symbols of cleansing and purity associated with water and the blood of the Atonement. We are told that though our “sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Under the direction of the Lord, Moses changed the water to blood (see Exodus 7:19) and divided the waters of the Red Sea to deliver Israel from bondage (see Exodus 14:16–30). Similarly, we are delivered from the bondage of sin by the blood of the Atonement and the waters of baptism (see 1 Corinthians 10:2). A major theme of the history of the covenant people is the spiritual bondage of sin that leads to physical bondage. Deliverance from both forms of bondage comes when the people turn to the Lord, have their hearts changed, and enter into a covenant with Him through baptism (see especially Alma 5). That which destroys sin in the sinner or destroys the sinner who will not repent also purifies and saves the repentant. Therefore, the eight souls of Noah’s family are spoken of as being “saved by water” (1 Peter 3:20), which water also destroyed the wicked who “hearkened not” (Moses 8:20) to Noah.

After Moses brought the children of Israel across the Red Sea into the Sinai wilderness for three days, they found no water but the bitter or salty waters of Marah. The Lord told Moses to cut down a tree and cast it into the water, which made the water sweet to drink (see Exodus 23:25). Likewise, the Atonement of Christ, with His victory on the cross or tree (see Acts 5:30; 10:39), delivers us from sin and death and turns our mortal experience from bitter to sweet. We are tried in the wilderness of this life, where we have covenanted with Him, and are therefore in the world but not of the world. Yet if we will follow the
Lord, He will go with us as He did the Israelites and sustain us with the bread and waters of life, as He sustained them with manna and the water that came out of the rock.

God told Noah that the arch of a rainbow represented His remembrance of the everlasting covenant that He made with Enoch. When men look up to God as they look to the heavens to view a rainbow and then obey all His commandments, Enoch’s Zion will be seen returning to the earth so that righteousness and truth from above will join with that from below (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 9:21–23; Psalm 85:11; Moses 7:62). The rainbow reminds us of much more than the promise to never destroy the earth by flood (see Genesis 9:11); it fills us with hope for the time when He will “come and rain righteousness” (Hosea 10:12) and “righteousness and truth will . . . sweep the earth as with a flood” (Moses 7:62).

Ezekiel had a vision in which waters issued forth from the altar in the temple and became “a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in” (Ezekiel 47:5). These waters pass through the desert to heal the saline waters of the Dead Sea and cause trees with everlasting fruit to grow on the river banks (Ezekiel 47:12). John called this river “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1). He saw that the trees on the banks were “the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2). Christ cleanses and heals a spiritually dead world while ending mortal death through the Resurrection.

In the Book of Mormon, the fountain of living waters that Nephi saw sprang from the tree of life and produced a river along which extended the iron rod (1 Nephi 11:25). The rod, or the word of God, led to both the tree of life and the living waters, which Nephi interpreted as representing the love of God. As we follow the word of God, we are led to Him in all His goodness, love, and purity. The knowledge, joy, and righteousness that come from the “fountain of all righteousness” (1 Nephi 2:9) become as a “well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life” (D&C 63:23).

The Planting of the Lord

One of the strongest symbols in the scriptures is that of the Savior nourishing us through His word so that we ourselves bear everlasting fruit. In the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus declared Himself as the Messiah by stating that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, verses 1 and part
of 2. These verses refer strongly to His first coming to offer Himself in the Atonement. He stopped quoting Isaiah where the reference becomes relevant to the Second Coming and millennial era and which declares: “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (Isaiah 61:3).

In the parable of the sower, the word of God is likened unto a seed, sown in hearts that receive and nourish it, such as on good ground, or is devoured by fowls or is withered as a seedling because it fell on shallow, stony, or weedy ground (see Matthew 13:3–23). Alma 32 describes the process of carefully nourishing the seed of testimony as it sprouts and becomes a tree, concluding: “But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life. And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (Alma 32:41–42).

The house of Israel is considered as an olive tree within the world, or vineyard of the Lord (see Jacob 5). As the Lord and His servant tend the vineyard, some trees produce good fruit while others become corrupted and bring forth wild fruit. After so much care and labor, and in the face of corruption, the Lord asks the servant the most relevant question of the allegory: “Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard?” (Jacob 5:47). For us who live in the latter days, we need to know what caused the covenant people, throughout their history, to become corrupted and how to avoid a similar fate. The servant answered: “Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard—have not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?” (Jacob 5:48). Eventually, after much grafting, nourishing, and careful pruning, the vineyard brought forth good fruit. Both the allegory of the olive tree and the parable of the wheat and tares make it clear that the bad were allowed to grow with the good until the final harvest
The Lord plants us on the earth, as in a vineyard, that He might nourish and prune us to later “plant the heavens” (Isaiah 51:16). Obeying His commandments and doing the Father’s will, as He exemplified, is the way we continue in feeling His nourishing love and that of the Father (see John 15:10). This love flows into our lives, nourishing us through our good times and bad. The trials and tests become the pruning that cuts the weaknesses out of us as we turn to Him in humility. Then our weaknesses become strengths (see Ether 12:27). Our spiritual refinement and the godly character we may come to have are as fruit harvested from the nurturing and pruning of the Lord.

The Savior likened Himself to a seed when He said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). Not only does the Savior make it possible for us to reap the fruit of eternal life through His Atonement and Resurrection but also it is He who provides our foundation or deep roots; it is He who helps us grow through His light and living water, which nourish us. As He willingly gave up His life to bring life, we must give up the natural man to gain eternal life (see Mosiah 3:19).

Conclusion

Whether living or in the form of art, symbols such as flowers, plants, trees, fruits, and seeds continually remind us of our potential to grow in faith and to become like the Creator. These types are simple yet profound. They show the ever-present care and sustaining support of the Lord for His children. They invite us to see the Lord as a part of all that we are and do in the world and to integrate ourselves fully into His plan for us. If we have eyes to see (see Revelation 3:18; Mosiah 27:22; D&C 76:12), not only will we see Him as the Rock of our Redeemer, the Light of the World, and the Living Waters, and ourselves as the Planting of the Lord but we also will view all things in the light of the gospel with Christ at its center.

Notes

Study the Book of Mormon Online

R. Mark Matheson

R. Mark Matheson has a doctor of management degree and is a voluntary instructor at the institute serving the Utah State Prison.

It all started at the Salt Lake Temple a few years ago. I was attending a sealing for the wedding of the son of dear friends. The sealer, President Ezra Taft Benson’s son, quoted his father about reading daily from the Book of Mormon: “At present, the Book of Mormon is studied in our Sunday School and seminary classes every fourth year. This four-year pattern, however, must not be followed by Church members in their personal and family study. We need to read daily from the pages of the book that will get a man ‘nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.’”

Upon leaving the temple, I did not remember advice about becoming a better spouse as I often do after sealings. Instead, it was the impact of President Benson’s quotation that warmed my heart on that cold December day of 2002. Since then, I have read from the Book of Mormon every day except three, and answering that challenge has changed my life.

The key for me in abiding this prophet’s counsel was that I did not attempt to fulfill my resolve by starting in 1 Nephi, as I have so many times before. Instead, I fulfilled the command to read every day by studying specific subjects, using the Church’s online scriptures and the online search tools. This is when I started to see a difference between reading the scriptures and studying them. There are five primary benefits I have noticed from studying rather than just reading the scriptures:
1. If I lose interest in what I am studying, I can change subjects to jumpstart my scripture attention. Studying by topic allows more freedom to study ideas pertinent to my current situation, and this freedom results in higher concentration.

2. In topical studying, the Holy Ghost can more easily direct me to subjects or scriptures of immediate application in my life.

3. A computer-assisted study can quickly filter the scriptures for my present interest.

4. Studying topics allows for more reflection time or even for spending many days on one point instead of feeling pressure to keep to a certain page pace.

5. With a higher level of focused interest, I find that I am immersed in the scriptures for longer periods of time than if I just have a “minutes-per-day” or “number-of-pages” reading goal. Many times I must force myself to quit for the day to allow time for my other daily goals. I have become more engaged in the scriptures because I am studying what I want to learn more about.

Following are four examples of the increased understanding I have found as I study by subject. This deeper comprehension might have eluded me in my old reading practice.

**Jesus, the Messiah**

I have heard many people mention how often the Book of Mormon pages, in some fashion, mention Jesus. The actual name Jesus as a proper noun is used in 163 verses in the Book of Mormon. The uses of this special name are scattered throughout the length of the book, starting late in 2 Nephi 25 when Nephi perhaps received it from an angelic instructor. Jesus is used in seven verses in the end of 2 Nephi, once in Jacob, and four times in Mosiah (only in King Benjamin’s discourse). King Benjamin, like Nephi, received a knowledge of Christ’s name from revelation: “And the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God” (Mosiah 3:2). His father, the first King Mosiah, may already have been familiar with that sacred name from Nephi’s writings.

Jesus is named in fourteen verses in Alma, four verses in Helaman, eighty times in 3 Nephi, and nine times in 4 Nephi. The name occurs quite prolifically in the last three books authored by Mormon and his son Moroni: twenty-two verses in Mormon, eleven in Ether, and ten in Moroni. Mormon’s and Moroni’s use of Jesus’s name may be because He was a personal visitor to them. Mormon relates: “And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the
Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15).

Because of his faith, the brother of Jared had the amazing experience of seeing the premortal Jesus: “Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him” (Ether 3:20). It seems reasonable that Moroni, after translating the wondrous experience of the brother of Jared, would have sought for a similar manifestation during the many years he wandered alone. That it was granted is indicated by verses near the end of the book of Ether and then again in chapter 8 of the book of Mormon: “And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things,” and “behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Ether 12:39; Mormon 8:35).

From chronological reading, I would not have discovered the varied number of times the name Jesus is used in the Book of Mormon. Following this first insight from online topical study, I desired to know how other names or titles of the Savior are employed by Book of Mormon authors.

Seeing how different appellations of the Lord are used in various sections of the Book of Mormon has strengthened my witness of the divine origin of this book of scripture. For example, the title Messiah is used in only twenty-six verses in the Book of Mormon, and twenty-four of the twenty-six are from the small plates of Nephi. That is not a random distribution. If Joseph Smith were writing the Book of Mormon as a work of fiction, I believe he would have continued to sprinkle that title throughout his writings. The limited use of the word Messiah is appropriately concentrated in Nephi’s writings, the part of the Book of Mormon perhaps most influenced by a familiar title from the plates of brass.

“Saith the Father”

The Restoration of the fulness of the gospel provides a knowledge of the proper relationship between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. With this perspective, the phrase “saith the Father” caught my attention one day. I started to search for all its uses and found that it is used only in the Book of Mormon and nowhere else in the standard works. It appears eleven times in 3 Nephi 16, 20, and 21 and once in 2 Nephi 31. What a powerful witness of the divine sonship of Christ to have instances in His own words where He quotes the Father. Curiosity led me to explore other related phrases. For example, I found that
there is only one occurrence each of “commandeth the Father” (3 Nephi 16:10) and “the Father commandeth” (3 Nephi 11:32) in all the standard works.

**Endure to the End**

“Endure to the end” is a scriptural phrase that grows more meaningful to me as I age. I have read it many times, but not until I compiled all the twenty-one Book of Mormon verses that talk about enduring did I find little nuances that together crystallize the importance of this admonition. The standard usage we associate with this expression is found in 1 Nephi 13:37: “endure unto the end.” In 2 Nephi 9:18, it is expanded to “they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it” (emphasis added). Further enlightenment comes from 2 Nephi 33:4, “and to endure to the end, which is life eternal” (emphasis added).

I see an interesting idea chain in Alma 32:13: repent—mercy—endure—saved: “Whosoever repenteth shall find mercy, and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved” (emphasis added). Then, in Moroni, numerous new shades of meaning modified my understanding of enduring. These include “the endurance of faith” (Moroni 3:3; emphasis added), “endureth all things” (Moroni 7:45; emphasis added), and “endureth by diligence unto prayer” (Moroni 8:26; emphasis added). Thus, computer-assisted searching and intense study of this interesting phrase have helped me more deeply consider and appreciate a commandment I had previously deemed self-evident and even facile.

**The Faithful Shall Prosper**

I have always loved to read the promise “inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper” (1 Nephi 2:20). While I was a young man, this scripture became a comforting answer to a matter I had presented to the Lord in prayer. For years since then, while reading chronologically in the Book of Mormon, I have enjoyed rereading the Lord’s promise of prosperity for those who are faithful. But it was not until I made a concerted study of the phrase that I found it appeared as many as nineteen times in the Book of Mormon, including seven out of the first ten books. Even in the shorter records of Jarom and Omni, where there is little space for doctrine, this promise of the Lord is repeated (see Jarom 1:9 and Omni 1:6). Here again, studying by subject reinforced and magnified for me a beautiful concept with which
the Lord had excited my comprehension years before.

From these and other experiences I have had with computer-assisted scripture learning, I offer three more ideas that may help others adopt a successful topic study habit.

First, many times ideas from one day’s search will provide the subject for the next day’s search. For example, as I was studying the word *honesty* one day, the word *upright* was linked to it in Alma 27:27: “And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things.” This usage provided the topic for the next day’s search of the nine verses in the Book of Mormon that employ either *upright*, *uprightly*, or *uprightness*. If while we read we are vigilant for new study topics and open to spiritual promptings, we can be guided toward new subjects of study that will enrich our lives.

Second, the change of pace that comes from following a varied selection of study topics can reinvigorate our love of the scriptures. For instance, sometimes the subject I choose for my personal study is covered in as little as one day, as in a recent search on the use of the word *discern*. Other times I have spent weeks on one subject, such as what the Book of Mormon instructs about teaching or prayer. This variety of intensity and focus keeps me from becoming bored or overwhelmed by scripture study.

Finally, studying topically can uncover meaningful cross-references not available through general footnotes. For instance, one of my heroes in the Book of Mormon is Shiblon, the third son of Alma the Younger. Shiblon is the quiet middle brother. He does not get the focus of his higher-profile, righteous brother Helaman (Alma 36–37, 3,266 words) or the negative limelight of the more-visible but less-righteous Corianton (Alma 39–42, 3,875 words). I was familiar with the counsel he received from his father in one of my favorite chapters, Alma 38 (649 words). But I was not aware of other mentions of Shiblon elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. I was pleasantly surprised when I found his name mentioned in a verse that has positively impacted me. “Shiblon took possession of those sacred things. . . . And he was a just man, and he did walk uprightly before God; and he did observe to do good continually, to keep the commandments of the Lord his God; and also did his brother” (Alma 63:1–2).

“Doing good continually” is how Jesus is described in Acts 10:38. I love that description. I wondered why I had never connected that treasure in Acts 10 with the similar phrase in the Book of Mormon. I quickly turned to Acts 10:38 to see if Alma 63:1–2 was listed as a cross-
reference. It was not. Reading only the given footnotes would not have led me to a choice verse in the Book of Mormon complementing one of my favorite New Testament verses and shedding further light on one of my Book of Mormon heroes.

Elder M. Russell Ballard has said: “It is incumbent upon each of us to do everything we can to increase our spiritual knowledge and understanding by studying the scriptures and the words of the living prophets. When we read and study the revelations, the Spirit can confirm in our hearts the truth of what we are learning; in this way, the voice of the Lord speaks to each one of us.”

I have composed this article in response to President Benson’s invitation: “I challenge our Church writers, teachers, and leaders to tell us more Book of Mormon conversion stories that will strengthen our faith and prepare great missionaries. Show us how to effectively use it as a missionary tool, and let us know how it leads us to Christ and answers our personal problems and those of the world.” My testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon has deepened as I have immersed myself in studying its wonderful doctrines and themes. This is a book from God that becomes richer and more profound as we diligently and creatively study it. I will forever be grateful to the sealer who reminded me of its value and to President Benson’s words that prompted me to transform my study of this great book.

Notes

Gifts of the Spirit

Craig K. Manscill and Derek Mock

Craig K. Manscill is an associate professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU. Derek Mock is a graduate student in political science at BYU.

Several doctrines distinguish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from the other Christian denominations. Perhaps chief among these is the doctrine of continuing revelation—the reality that God still teaches and directs His mortal servants through direct communication as He did in ancient times. We believe in this gift of divine guidance, called revelation, in the lives of the Saints. We also believe in other gifts that come by that same Holy Spirit.¹ The seventh Article of Faith states, “We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.” In addition to believing in these gifts, we believe that the Holy Ghost is the purveyor of these gifts. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that “the Holy Ghost is a revelator” and that “no man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations.”² Likewise, the Holy Ghost, being a God, is a healer, a translator, a dispenser of visions, and the active administrator of every spiritual gift (see D&C 46:11).

In True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference, the First Presidency writes, “As you learn gospel truths, you will increase in your understanding of Heavenly Father’s eternal plan.”³ Within this valuable reference manual, the Church provides a definition of spiritual gifts as “blessings or abilities that are given by the power of the Holy Ghost.”⁴ These abilities given of the Spirit are meant to “strengthen” members of the Church to help them then “bless [and] . . . serve others.”⁵ Although all members do not share an equal number of gifts, to each “faithful member of the Church” is given “at least one of these gifts”—each
member being responsible for some segment of service, great or small, in the Lord’s work on the earth.

Many of these gifts are listed in the scriptures:

- Knowledge “that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world” (D&C 46:13).
- The capacity to believe the words of those who testify of Jesus Christ (see D&C 46:14).
- Knowledge of “the differences of administration” (D&C 46:15; see also 1 Corinthians 12:5).
- Knowledge of “the diversities of operations,” which helps us discern whether a teaching influence comes from God or from some other source (D&C 46:16; see also 1 Corinthians 12:6–7).
- The gift of “wisdom,” the ability to use knowledge for righteous purposes (1 Corinthians 12:8; D&C 46:17).
- The gift of “the word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8; D&C 46:18).
- The ability to teach by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Moroni 10:9–10; see also D&C 46:18).
- The gift of faith (see Moroni 10:11; 1 Corinthians 12:9).
- The gift to “have the faith to be healed” (D&C 46:19) and “to have the faith to heal” (D&C 46:20; see also 1 Corinthians 12:9; Moroni 10:11).
- “The working of miracles” (1 Corinthians 12:10; D&C 46:21; see also Moroni 10:12).
- The gift of prophecy (see 1 Corinthians 12:10; Moroni 10:13; D&C 46:22).
- “The beholding of angels and ministering spirits” (Moroni 10:14).
- “Discerning of spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:10; D&C 46:23).
- The gift to speak in different languages (see 1 Corinthians 12:10; Moroni 10:15; D&C 46:24).
- The gift of “the interpretation of languages” (1 Corinthians 12:10; D&C 46:25; see also Moroni 10:16).

Many more spiritual gifts exist than have been enumerated here. The Apostle Paul specifies three gifts that Elder Neal A. Maxwell and others have termed the “cardinal” gifts: faith, hope, and charity. He indicates that of all the gifts of the Spirit, these three are abiding. Paul
points out that faith and hope are secondary in importance, playing a supporting role to charity, which is the greatest of them all (see 1 Corinthians 13:13). Furthermore, the Lord taught Moroni that “faith, hope and charity bringeth [men and women unto Him]—the fountain of all righteousness” (Either 12:28).

**Gifts of the Spirit and the Path to Perfection**

Through the ages, righteous men and women have desired after the things of the Lord. At times the desired gift was a vision of things to come, a special ability to heal, or even the blanketing gift of wisdom. These, along with all other spiritual gifts, have been precious commodities in the spiritual commissary whenever righteousness has ruled a society.

Men and women who are striving to know Christ seek for an increase in the Spirit of the Lord. Accordingly, an increase of spiritual gifts indicates spiritual growth or progress, though it is not an indication of mortal infallibility.

Those who say that spiritual gifts no longer exist do not understand the full implications of the Atonement and its power. Moroni, concluding his father’s portion of the plates, declares that “he that denieth these things [the gifts of the Spirit] knoweth not the gospel of Christ,” imagining up unto themselves a changeable god, “a god who is not a God of miracles” (Mormon 9:8–10).

There is a great need for these gifts in the day-to-day lives of the Saints. Indeed, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, both male and female, are commanded to seek after and obtain the gifts that come after they have obtained the initial gift of the Spirit, the gift of the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. Refusing to do so, thereby leaning on the arm of flesh, is considered by some to be a manifestation of a lack of spiritual understanding. President George Q. Cannon observed that the members of the Church often rely on man when they have the right to a much more powerful ally:

> I have felt deeply impressed . . . that the members of our Church do not value as they should the means which God has placed within their reach for the relief and healing of the sick. There is too great a disposition, when sickness enters a household, to send for a doctor. . . . Instances are very common among the faithful Saints of the gift of healing being manifested in a very wonderful manner. . . . God has not forgotten His promises, and He has not withdrawn Himself from His people. But the Latter-day Saints should make use of these means more frequently than they do, and put more trust in God and less in man’s skill.
Perhaps some are at a point where they rely so heavily on man’s seeming power in technology, medicine, and other conveniences that they no longer feel a need for the things of the Spirit that are a part of receiving the Holy Ghost as a constant companion. Elder Cannon also stressed the need to seek after the blessings of the gifts of the Spirit with pertinent language:

How many of you . . . are seeking for these gifts that God has promised to bestow? How many of you, when you bow before your Heavenly Father in your family circle or in your secret places, contend for these gifts bestowed upon you? . . . Or do you go along day by day . . . without having any feeling upon the subject, without exercising any faith whatever; content to be baptized and be members of the Church, and to rest there, thinking that your salvation is secure?13

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has likewise seen a lack among Church members when it comes to actively seeking spiritual gifts. He said, “Faith is a spiritual gift. So is personal revelation. So is a testimony of Jesus Christ. And there are other spiritual gifts. We know too little about spiritual gifts. This is evident in our communications, and it is also evident in our failure to seek after and use spiritual gifts.”14 The general Relief Society presidency chose the theme “Seek ye earnestly the best gifts” for the Visiting Teaching Messages in 1997. To explain the importance of the gifts of the Spirit, they distinguished them from other types of blessings:

Our Father in Heaven offers us access to a special group of blessings often called “spiritual gifts.” These particular gifts differ from the many other blessings we may enjoy, such as talents, family associations, or perhaps specialized learning. So important are these spiritual gifts that the Savior urges us to seek them earnestly. Among them are the gifts of testimony, wisdom, knowledge, faith to be healed, and discernment. Our Heavenly Father blesses us with these gifts as we live his commandments and keep our covenants. They are given to help us lead enriched spiritual lives and to serve others, “that all may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:12).15

Being “in tune with the Infinite” in large measure is a skill that must be learned. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained that “the gift of the Holy Ghost is the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead based on faithfulness. It is the right to receive revelation, to see visions, to be in tune with the Infinite.”16 Each Latter-day Saint is commanded to seek after the gifts that help the individual become more like the perfect Exemplar. Not only is the gift itself of great value to the “humble followers of Christ”17 (2 Nephi 28:14) but also the process of obtaining a gift of the Spirit becomes


invaluable because of the spiritual refinement that occurs along the way. Its constant companionship refines the individual, and then, as the Lord sees fit, we are given the capacity to administer with spiritual or enabling gifts. Living an obedient and worthy life, which involves taking responsibility for our actions, entitles us to the constant companionship of the Spirit and allows us to access the gifts of the Spirit (see D&C 46:9). The Spirit can teach us about the particular gifts we need and then help us to obtain them.

Obtaining spiritual gifts is a key to spiritual progression. President George Q. Cannon stressed the need to seek after the blessings of the gifts of the Spirit in order to perfect us. He states:

If any of us are imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect. Have I imperfections? I am full of them. What is my duty? To pray to God to give me the gifts that will correct these imperfections. If I am an angry man, it is my duty to pray for charity, which suffereth long and is kind. Am I an envious man? It is my duty to seek for charity, which envieth not. So with all the gifts of the gospel. They are intended for this purpose. No man ought to say, “Oh, I cannot help this; it is my nature.” He is not justified in it, for the reason that God has promised to give strength to correct these things, and to give gifts that will eradicate them. If a man lack wisdom, it is his duty to ask God for wisdom. The same with everything else. That is the design of God concerning His Church. He wants His Saints to be perfected in the truth. For this purpose He gives these gifts, and bestows them upon those who seek after them, in order that they may be a perfect people upon the face of the earth, notwithstanding their many weaknesses, because God has promised to give the gifts that are necessary for their perfection.

The attainment of spiritual gifts and the gifts themselves teach individuals how to be like God. The scriptures teach us that there are greater and lesser gifts. Both Moroni and the Apostle Paul indicate that the gift of charity is foremost among the spiritual gifts in both its enduring qualities and importance. Moroni discusses the inseparability of charity from the other two cardinal or enduring gifts of the Spirit, faith and hope. Of all the gifts, these three are the most important in the progression from natural man to disciple of Jesus Christ. They are gifts that help bridge the gap between imperfection and perfection. Given their great importance, spiritual gifts require more than the work of the seeker to be obtained. This must be a process directed by heaven.

Key components of receiving gifts of the Spirit are prayer and the Holy Ghost. The more guidance we have from the Holy Ghost, the more likely we are to seek after and receive the gifts of the Spirit. If we have the Spirit with us, we will feel a desire to increase the number of
gifts that we have and to increase our efficiency in the Lord’s work; the Spirit will, accordingly, guide us in the things for which we should ask the Lord. In two sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, one dealing with the law and the other with salvation, the Lord gives the same instructions to the early Church about how to receive outpourings of the Spirit: “And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith” (D&C 42:14); and “ye receive the Spirit through prayer” (D&C 63:64). Further, the Lord gives a commandment to Martin Harris that he is not only to pray but to pray always, that the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon him (see D&C 19:38). It should be remembered that what the Lord says to one, He says to all (see D&C 92:1). Therefore, we follow the counsel outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants, which says, “He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh” (D&C 46:30). Elder Joseph Fielding Smith taught that we “should pray earnestly . . . to know the will of the Lord.”

In the Lord’s sermon to the Nephite-Lamanite nation, He teaches that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled with the Holy Ghost (see 3 Nephi 12:6).

Members of the Church who follow the Lord’s guidelines faithfully have a special endowment of power that sets them apart from their peers: a member of the Godhead who will always be with them (see Moroni 4:3). This privilege is available to each individual who is willing and worthy to take upon himself or herself the covenants that are prerequisite to the receipt of the Holy Ghost. Elder McConkie stated that the gift of the Holy Ghost opens the door to auxiliary spiritual gifts that allow us to transcend the baseness of the world to higher planes: “We have received the gift of the Holy Ghost and we are entitled to receive the gifts of the Spirit—those wondrous spiritual endowments which set us apart from the rest of the world and raise us above carnal things.”

Priesthood and Prophets: Magnifiers of the Gifts of God

Gifts of the Spirit are an inseparable part of the Lord’s kingdom upon the earth. Throughout His ministry, the Lord worked many miracles, in part because of the faith of those who surrounded Him. Surely the Lord had a fulness of the gifts of the Spirit. Even as the Savior had a fulness, so His servants on the earth have a wide variety of these gifts to help them do as He directs. A manifestation of these gifts took place in the lives of the Apostles and disciples on the day of Pentecost. Faithful bearers of the Melchizedek Priesthood have worked and still do work mighty miracles by virtue of the priesthood, which allows the righteous holder to administer in the gifts of the Spirit (see D&C 107:18–19).
Regardless of the dispensation, when the priesthood of God has been present on the earth, the gifts of the Spirit flow as a regular product of the relationship between God and those worthy members in His kingdom. We not only believe in but also depend on the gifts of the Spirit, especially in the leadership of the Church. Guidance from the Holy Ghost helps mold us into sons and daughters of Christ (see Moroni 7:19). That is, the Holy Ghost helps us take on the attributes of the Savior to the point that we become more like Him. It is the Spirit that teaches, inspires, and lifts up men and women to do the work of the Lord. Thus, through meekly submitting to His gentle voice, we are enabled to change into true disciples of Christ—which with the attributes of the Master. President Gordon B. Hinckley serves as a clear example of this principle. He is a man who has developed his spiritual capacities: he is a man of enthusiasm, patience, virtue, compassion, diligence, and love. We should look to and learn from his example to understand better these attributes of the Spirit, attributes that are ultimately held in totality by the Savior, who set the standard we need to follow. As we consistently do so, we become like Him. The Savior, who possesses all gifts, can help us develop these requisite celestial qualities.

When men and women are under the influence of the Spirit, they have the attributes of the Savior. Elder Parley P. Pratt explained the enhancements that the Spirit can and does make in the lives of the faithful:

The gift of the Holy Ghost adapts itself to all these organs and attributes. It quickens all the intellectual facilities, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections; and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens, and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being.

Not only is a change seen in their outward presentation and behavior but also the astute observer will sense an inward transformation in these individuals. There will be light where there was darkness, kindness where there was apathy, and peace where there was discontent. Instead of merely talking about the conditions and requirements of gospel life, recipients of the Spirit become doers. Those who live close to the Spirit allow the Spirit to bring out the latent good that is part of their birthright as sons or daughters of God. Thus, it may be said
that the Spirit helps us to develop the very best within us, adding to our own abilities, gifts, and talents. Through its heeded guidance and resulting constant companionship, we develop ennobling attributes—the attributes of godliness.28

**Obtaining Gifts of the Spirit**

After a need for the Spirit and accompanying gifts is seen, we can seek ways to multiply these gifts. Several simple steps can help us to receive such gifts. It should be noted that spiritual gifts are just that—gifts. Even though we may put great individual effort into obtaining a spiritual gift through prayerful supplication or other means, the comparatively slight effort that we put into obtaining the gift will never equal the immeasurable help of the Holy Ghost. The Father, knowing this, designed a plan that allows us to petition Him for spiritual blessings that we do not merit on our own. Just as the process of obtaining forgiveness of sin through the infinite Atonement requires us to fulfill a requisite law, even so it is with all blessings that come from the heavenly realms. At times, this can be as simple as sincerely asking, but more may be required. In a given instance, the reception of a precious gift of the Spirit may require a long period of pleading coupled with sincere desire (see Moroni 7:48).

Spiritual gifts from God are bestowed by God upon those “who are true followers of his Son” (Moroni 7:48). The following five points emphasize actions that members can do to increase the Spirit and accompanying spiritual gifts in their lives: Be believing. Be worthy. Be obedient. Serve diligently and selflessly. Be a wise steward.

**Be believing.** The applicable power of belief is often underestimated, and the debilitating consequences of unbelief are similarly overlooked and, therefore, left unchecked. Also, the Savior realizes the power that belief in Him evokes in His followers. In the moment of a father’s desperation over the condition of his son possessed with a foul spirit, Jesus took the time to teach a powerful lesson to the disheartened and unbelieving, saying, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23). As the cornered faithful often do, the father humbly implored the Master to reinforce his road-wearied belief.

Belief is the driving element behind faith, which is a composite of belief and action. When we develop a propensity toward actively applying belief, we unlock the doors through which the blessings of heaven pour. Having belief also encompasses another element: steadfastness (see 2 Nephi 31:20). True belief remains steady regardless of the circumstances that life presents; there is no flight risk with true belief. Though belief may be shaken, it will not break if its foundation is truly secured in
the Lord Jesus Christ (see Helaman 5:12).

In the final chapter of the Book of Mormon, Moroni warns that unbelief is the primary hindrance to obtaining gifts of the Spirit (see Moroni 10:24). These gifts will not come by unbelief; rather, the inverse is true: it is by belief that gifts of the Spirit come. John teaches us that we should “believe in the light, that [we] may be the children of light” (John 12:36; emphasis added). In other words, as we believe in Him, who is the administrator and source of light, we come to be like Him, having the qualities of light that the gifts of the Spirit bring.

The next four segments are ways to help in our readiness to obtain gifts of the Spirit, and they are principal points that, if applied, will reinforce our belief in, and understanding of, the Christ.

Be worthy. The gift of the Holy Ghost grows with worthiness. President Spencer W. Kimball said that the “Holy Ghost comes to you as you grow and learn and make yourselves worthy. It comes a little at a time as you merit it. And as your life is in harmony, you gradually receive the Holy Ghost in a greater measure.” The Lord wants to bless us. Remember also that God operates according to law, and thus “it is the privilege and the right of every member of the Church to . . . enjoy the gifts of the Spirit. . . . [But] the actual enjoyment of this gift depends upon personal worthiness.” This worthiness comes by constant effort on the part of the individual to follow more closely the commandments of the Lord, as specified in the scriptures and by the current leadership of the Church.

Be obedient. Constant obedience to the commandments of God allows for constant interaction with the Spirit of the Lord and the resulting gifts and abilities. Sometimes we make the mistake of assuming that we are entitled to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost without practicing steady obedience. In these cases, we have misinterpreted our confirmation into the Church, which does not command the Holy Ghost hither or thither but instructs us to actively receive the Holy Ghost.

Even with the Holy Ghost as a companion, we are not commanded to reach the stature of perfection in an instant; we are commanded to listen to that member of the Godhead who will tell us all the things that we should do (see 2 Nephi 32:5). Step-by-step changes can be made, and lives can be purified and refined to the point that obedience becomes a symbol of devotion. Yes, this progress may come about to the point at which the natural man is willing to “submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him” (Mosiah 3:19). Thereby, even the seemingly common man or woman, through a lifetime of
faithfully heeding the promptings of the Spirit, will have a clear sense of spiritual understanding and a life that is highlighted with the enabling gifts of the Spirit.

Serve diligently and selflessly. “Blessings . . . are never discovered in the path of selfishness.” However, when men and women serve diligently and selflessly, they are rewarded with an increased endowment of the Spirit and spiritual gifts. Furthermore, the fact remains that when we serve, we receive back more than that which we originally sent out. Therefore, as King Benjamin taught, we stay eternally indebted to Him who is the giver of all good gifts (see Mosiah 2:24).

At times, when we are in the service of God, we reap the praise of men. In these moments of sometimes subtle temptation, it is requisite that we give all glory to the Master, realizing that there is One who is the source of all good (see Omni 1:25). Accordingly, the penitent disciple accepts praise while humbly acknowledging that “we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10).

Be a wise steward. Those who are obedient to the enumerated requirements of the gospel are expected to procure good works outside of these specific commandments (see D&C 58:27). In contrast, Satan and his hosts put heavy emphasis on several points that tend to distract us from the often specific, guiding promptings and feelings given by the Holy Spirit. Dress, care of our bodies, and financial debt are important points that can either become a help or a hindrance to our spiritual receptiveness. Emphasis has been and is being given by Church leaders on these two important points.

Latter-day Saints who understand the sacred nature of the body and its potential to be a temple or receptacle of the Holy Spirit seek to keep their appearance within the guidelines of the Spirit. No one would ask a high-ranking dignitary to stay in a home that was not in good order and repair. This concept also applies with the Spirit. Those who do not appropriately clothe themselves grieve the Spirit. Under the pretense of agency without responsibility, they wear coarse and vulgar styles. As they focus on the crass things of the world, they lose the ability to feel the subtle things of the Spirit. Dress is an outward manifestation of an inward focus.

The things we put on our bodies and also what we take into our bodies are very important in our obtaining the Spirit. What we take into and how we take care of our bodies are both important considerations in seeking the Spirit and spiritual gifts. Those who understand the needs of their bodies and meet those needs within the Lord’s guidelines allow for perception of and sensitivity toward the gentle and
refined whisperings of the Spirit.

Financial debt is a burden that can cause us to focus on the things of the world to the point that we lose contact with the things of the Spirit. Indeed, debt is a type of bondage because it can consume the energies of the mind and body. Substantial debt inherently requires attention and considerable resources of time and strength for either repaying the debtor or for avoiding the debt. Those who follow a legally viable but ethically irresponsible course to erase their debts are likely to distance themselves, in some measure, from the still, small voice.

In the parable of the talents, the Lord awarded those servants who had wisely used what He had given them with a double portion. To the steward who jealously hoarded his gift, his stewardship, the master took it away from him and gave it to another. Along with sloth and selfishness, fear has a deadening effect on our quest for righteousness (see D&C 60:2, 13). The unwise steward states that he was “afraid, and went and hid [the Lord’s] talent in the earth” (Matthew 25:25). As we jealously guard our talents or slothfully observe the commandments, we receive the lesser portion; as we generously give of ourselves and diligently heed the Lord’s counsel, we are given back what we gave out, with an increase.33

The Misuse of Spiritual Gifts

The constant companionship of the Holy Ghost allows members of the Church to be guided in their use of spiritual gifts. Elder Oaks warned against the temptation to misuse spiritual gifts:

Satan will also attempt to cause our spiritual downfall through tempting us to misapply our spiritual gifts. The revelations tell us that “there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. . . . All these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God” (D&C 46:11, 26). Most of us have seen persons whom the adversary has led astray through a corruption of their spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is given to benefit the children of God, not to magnify the prominence or to gratify the ego of the person who receives it. [A] professional healer who forgot that lesson gradually lost the companionship of the Spirit and was eventually excommunicated from the Church.34

In relation to the gifts of the Spirit, two potentially debilitating mistakes may occur. First, we may not seek the best gifts of the Spirit (see D&C 46:8). Second, we may misuse the gifts of the Spirit. We become stewards over any gift we receive. Those who have received spiritual gifts may determine how they wish to use such, but they cannot determine the consequences of a gift’s appropriate or inappropriate
use. The Prophet Joseph Smith said it this way: “The gifts of God are all useful in their place, but when they are applied to that which God does not intend, they prove an injury, a snare and a curse instead of a blessing.” The recipients of spiritual gifts need to be sensitive to promptings that will guide them when and when not to use the gifts they have received.

The use of a spiritual gift contrary to the promptings of the Spirit constitutes a violation of divine directive. Elder Russell M. Nelson teaches that “it is possible to disregard or even misuse spiritual power.” Similarly, it is an error not to use a gift of the Spirit when instructed to do so by the Giver of the gift. If we ignore successive or sometimes singular promptings to act, the result is the eventual withdrawal of the Spirit of the Lord (see, for example, 2 Nephi 28:30). With this withdrawal comes a diminishment of the gift. If someone has a lesser portion of the Spirit, then that person also has less of the individual gift. The greatest concern in such a case is not the outward loss of the gift, which others see, but the inward-felt withdrawal of the Spirit, which God sees (see 1 Samuel 16:7). The Spirit cannot be separated from the gifts of the Spirit; they are witnessed as one and the same. It is this Spirit that refines, purifies, sanctifies, and eventually seals us up to eternal life (see Helaman 3:35).

Summary

President Ezra Taft Benson repeatedly taught that the Spirit is fundamental to the work of the Church. On one occasion, he said to mission presidents, “The Spirit is the most important matter in this glorious work.” It is the key to this work as a whole, as it also is principally necessary to the temporal and eternal progression of each soul. Those who follow the Spirit become truly individual by becoming more like the Savior through diligent obedience. Particular among the characteristics that set these disciples apart from the corpus of humanity are the gifts of the Spirit. Though distinguished, these disciples remember the purpose of the gifts they have received, ultimately seeking to love all humankind.

The guidelines and warnings discussed above are meant to help the honest seekers of truth to find a greater fulness of the Spirit, inviting Him into their lives through consistent righteous living and by the grace of the Father and the Son. These points are significant in the development of gospel perspective. They emphasize some of the necessary elements in the building of a righteous framework in life, which will ultimately result in great outpourings of spiritual gifts. With these
spiritual gifts necessarily comes an increase of the Spirit itself, which purifies and refines. These two elements, the Spirit and spiritual gifts, can act as a gauge for anyone’s personal standing before the Lord. The presence of the Spirit in our lives indicates a life of righteousness, and if the Spirit is continually fostered, it will bring about peace in this life and eternal life in the world to come.

Notes

1. Elder Loren C. Dunn stated, “When we speak of the Spirit, we refer to the gift of the Holy Ghost. While the light of Christ enlightens all who come into the world, the spirit of the Holy Ghost is something more. The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead; a personage of spirit, he speaks not for himself, but testifies to all that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and conveys to man the mind and will of the Lord (see John 16:13–15). He has a sanctifying and cleansing influence upon the souls of men and is the source of spiritual gifts” (“The Spirit Giveth Life,” Ensign, May 1979, 70); Elder Bruce R. McConkie observed that “spiritual gifts are endless in number and infinite in variety. Those listed in the revealed word are simply illustrations of the boundless outpouring of divine grace that a gracious God gives those who love and serve him” (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 371; see also 1 Corinthians 12:4).


7. This list is adapted from True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference because it is one of the few officially published lists given by the Church. We recommend it for everyone’s considerate review. Though this list is thorough, it is by no means exhaustive. We publish it here because of its endorsement by the Church as an official guide to the gifts of the Spirit.


9. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. gives the definition of abide as follows: “to wait for; to endure without yielding.”


11. John 10:14: “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”


15. Relief Society General Presidency, “Seeking the Best Gifts,” Ensign, Janu-
ary 1997, 55.


19. “If our lives are devoid of the vital gifts of faith, hope, and charity, we should earnestly examine ourselves and our relationship with our Father in Heaven. We should pray for those essential gifts earnestly, because acquiring them is crucial to our eternal salvation. Indeed, to have charity is to have acquired a quality vital to salvation, the Apostle Paul implies, while to lack it is to have nothing of eternal significance (see 1 Corinthians 13:1–8). Although our acquiring other spiritual gifts is certainly less urgent than obtaining the cardinal gifts of faith, hope, and charity, we do well to prayerfully and patiently seek any gifts that stand to help us magnify our callings and serve the Lord more effectively” (Arthur R. Bassett, “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, March 1994, 52–53).


22. See Mark 10:52: “Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

23. “Among the sure signs of the true church of Christ are the accompanying spiritual gifts. This has always been from the beginning. When the authority of the priesthood has been found on the earth, it is accompanied by the manifestations of spiritual gifts” (James A. Cullimore, “Gifts of the Spirit,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 27). “I will repeat again, priesthood is the power and authority delegated to man by our Heavenly Father. The authority and majesty of it are beyond our comprehension” (David B. Haight, *Ensign*, May 2003, 45).


26. Though the task seems daunting at times, we are commanded to be perfect like unto the Master. This perfection is required to reenter the presence of our Heavenly Father: “We are destined and foreordained to become like God, and unless we do become like him we will never be permitted to dwell with him” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], 276). This perfection comes bit by bit, little by little, through diligent application of the enlightening principles found in the gospel, obedient heed to the subtle promptings of the Spirit, and continuing patience on life’s road that leads to the tree of life.


32. Though the definition of *heed* found in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., is “to give consideration or attention to,” the definition of *heed* as found in the 1828 edition of the *Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language* is slightly different: “to mind; to regard with care; to take notice of; to attend to; to observe.” There is more a connotation of action in the original definition.


36. “For whosoever receiveth, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever continueth not to receive, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 13:10–11, see also D&C 60:3; Alma 12:9–11).

Revelation from the Lord to mortals requires a certain gift of tongues. In the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord explained how He gave the revelations to the early Saints “after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24). The Prophet Joseph Smith’s history says it was an “awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord,” presumably because the effects of the tower of Babel are never more regrettable than when dealing with the revealed word of God.\(^2\) Poets and prophets have often struggled for words in which to appropriately clothe the “solemnities of eternity” (D&C 43:34).\(^3\) As the epigraph above shows, Joseph Smith felt keenly what the Lord called “weakness” in writing, which seems to be a characteristic shared by some if not all prophets (D&C 1:24; see also Ether 12:23–27).

The Prophet’s lament at being imprisoned by “imperfect language” concludes a letter he wrote from Kirtland, Ohio, to William W. Phelps in Independence, Missouri, on November 27, 1832. A portion of that letter is now contained in Doctrine & Covenants 85. Verses 7–8 of that text have confused many readers. They speak about “one mighty and strong” and also warn against steadying the ark. Perhaps because their meaning is not explicit, they have been misinterpreted by deceivers who
were intent on leading the faithful astray as well as by sincere believers. In 1905, the First Presidency wrote of verses 7–8, “Perhaps no other passage in the revelations of the Lord, in this dispensation, has given rise to so much speculation as this one.” Two years later, a reader of the Latter-day Saint periodical Improvement Era wrote the magazine “asking to know the meaning of the 7th and 8th verses of section 85 of the Doctrine and Covenants.” That remains a common inquiry made by students of the revelations at all levels. This article tries to accomplish two objectives by responding to the question in three ways. First, we will situate the revelation historically, then analyze its content, and lastly review prophetic interpretations of it. Our first objective is to teach Doctrine and Covenants 85:7–8 substantively by what we say. Our second objective is to teach the verses stylistically by the way we say it, modeling how we might teach this and other revelations.

**Origin**

An effective way to introduce a revelation is to give an accurate sense of its origin. Because all revelation is conditioned by the circumstances that call it from above, specific knowledge of its context makes it more intelligible and minimizes the likelihood of misinterpretation. The seldom-read Explanatory Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants explains that the revelations “were received in answer to prayer, in times of need, and came out of real-life situations involving real people.” The more we can learn about those situations and people, the better access we have to the revelation. The origin of section 85 and others can be learned by our answering the following two questions: first, What concerns called it from above? and second, What situations and people did it address? The answers to those questions follow, put as accurately and thoroughly, yet succinctly, as historical records and our limitations allow.

The Lord established the location of Zion as Jackson County, Missouri, in 1831 and appointed Church leaders to move there and lay economic and spiritual foundations for the Holy City of New Jerusalem (see D&C 58:7). First among those called was Edward Partridge, the first bishop of the Church. In answer to his revealed call, Partridge left all his merchandise in Painesville, Ohio, where missionaries had found him just a few months earlier, and moved to Missouri to devote himself entirely to building the kingdom of God (see D&C 41). Specifically, the Lord commissioned Partridge to receive the consecrated properties of gathering Saints, to assign inheritances to them sufficient for their needs, and to use surplus to buy more property and “administer to those who have not” (see D&C 42:29–34).
Among the other early converts called to Missouri to build Zion was William W. Phelps. Phelps was a New Jersey native who converted in June 1831. Prior to his conversion, he had edited a partisan newspaper in Canandaigua, New York, not far south of the Palmyra-Manchester area. As with Partridge, the Lord called Phelps to redirect his abilities to holier ends, “as a printer unto the church” (D&C 57:11). Both men, along with others, were commanded to “be planted in the land of Zion, as speedily as can be, with their families, to do those things even as I have spoken. And now concerning the gathering—Let the bishop and the agent make preparations for those families which have been commanded to come to this land, as soon as possible, and plant them in their inheritance” (D&C 57:14–15). Like Partridge, Phelps heeded the call and relocated to Independence, Missouri.

In anticipation of the impending Millennium, Latter-day Saints began to gather to Independence zealously but not always sincerely, for some came with little or no intention of deeding their possessions to Bishop Partridge and in return receiving from him an inheritance sufficient for their needs (see D&C 42:29–33, 55; 51; 58:36). William McLellin, for example, forsook a mission call to get to Independence early enough to buy two lots on Main Street. He circumvented the bishop and the revealed law of Zion to behave individualistically, a characteristic outlawed by revelation (see D&C 1:16; 56:8; and later, 136:19).

On November 27, 1832, Joseph Smith wrote from Ohio to William W. Phelps in Independence, Missouri. Joseph discerned the question that troubled Phelps and, presumably, other leaders in Zion: “What shall become of those who are essaying to come up unto Zion, in order to keep the commandments of God, and yet receive not their inheritance by consecrations, by order of deed from the Bishop, the man that God has appointed in a legal way, agreeably to the law given to organize and regulate the Church?” As the Prophet answered that question in the letter, words came powerfully to him by “the still small voice” to forewarn the Saints about potential temptations and contentions detrimental to Zion (D&C 85:6). This warning included verses 7–9 of section 85.

Content

“Let the Lord speak for Himself to you,” wrote President Gordon B. Hinckley. Elder Neal A. Maxwell added, “If asked which book of scripture provides the most frequent chance to ‘listen’ to the Lord talking, most individuals would at first think of the New Testament. The New Testament is a marvelous collection of the deeds and many
of the doctrines of the Messiah. But in the Doctrine and Covenants we receive the voice as well as the word of the Lord. We can almost ‘hear’ him talking.” From its preface to its conclusion, from the first word to last, the Doctrine and Covenants commands us to “hearken” (seventy-one times) or “listen to the voice of Jesus Christ” (eighteen times) and to “give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth” (D&C 45:1). No theme is more emphatic or commandment more frequent than the directive to listen to Jesus speak in His first-person voice (160 times). All who teach revelation should facilitate such listening and beware of methods that inhibit it.

Because teachers cannot possibly cover all the verses in a given scripture block during class, they are required to select which verses they will highlight and discuss with the students in the allotted time. One of the first challenges for teachers, then, is to select prayerfully the content that will best meet the spiritual needs of their students.

Sometimes the content of revelation can be overshadowed by the delivery; that is, what the scriptures say can be eclipsed by the way we say it. That is why one of the most potent ways to present revelation is to simply allow the Lord to speak for Himself. Scriptural language is condensed with the Spirit, and the meaning can be diluted by careless readings, intellectual curiosity, or excessive commentary. Teachers can facilitate the spiritual development of their students by training them to ponder carefully the text itself. As students are constantly redirected to the text for answers, the Lord individually assists them to discover truth for themselves.

In that light, read the following verses from section 85, paying careful attention to the elements of the Lord’s voice. What words does He choose? what imagery does He reflect? What does He emphasize and repeat? What rationale informs His statements?

Yea, thus saith the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things, and often times it maketh my bones to quake while it maketh manifest, saying:

And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the Saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God;

While that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth
forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like
as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning. (D&C 85:6–8)

The Prophet Joseph wanted no doubt as to the source of these
words. He concluded, “These things I say not of myself; therefore,
as the Lord speaketh, he will also fulfill” (D&C 85:10). Whatever the
meaning of these verses, we may know that they are authentic and that
“the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled”
(D&C 1:37) in the Lord’s “own time, and in his own way, and accord-
ing to his own will” (D&C 88:68).

Interpretation and Application

Teaching the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants includes
helping students understand and apply them. Successful teachers are
careful in interpreting what the Lord has said, lest by their authori-
tative position they mislead trusting students. One student became
distraught upon learning that an idea taught in a seminary discussion
of section 76 was false. The teacher had explained D&C 76:89—“the
glory of the telestial, which surpasses all understanding”—by telling the
students that Joseph Smith taught that one would commit suicide to
gain admittance to the telestial kingdom. That is not what the revela-
tion says, nor is it what Joseph Smith apparently said. These methods
evoke awe that is counterfeit to the profound reverence the revelations
themselves generate when they are studied on their own terms. With
such rich texts, teachers need not resort to anything less than carefully
presented, authoritative information to help students understand and
apply what the Lord has said. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said that

philosophies of men interlaced with a few scriptures and poems just
won’t do. Are we really nurturing our youth and our new members in
a way that will sustain them when the stresses of life appear? Or are we
giving them a kind of theological Twinkie—spiritually empty calories?
President John Taylor once called such teaching "fried froth," the kind
of thing you could eat all day and yet finish feeling totally unsatisfied.
During a severe winter several years ago, President Boyd K. Packer
noted that a goodly number of deer had died of starvation while their
stomachs were full of hay. In an honest effort to assist, agencies had
supplied the superficial when the substantial was what had been needed.
Regrettably they had fed the deer but they had not nourished them.12

Over time, traditional interpretations of the revelations develop.
They are frequently based in part on prophetic statements but are
necessarily selective. As these interpretations are repeated orally and in
print, they gain credibility but may lose touch with sensitive nuances of
the original statements. Such commentary becomes food but not nourishment. “Search these commandments,” the Lord said in His preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, “for they are true and faithful” (D&C 1:37; emphasis added). Following that instruction takes determined effort to plumb the depths of the revelations.

Although the primary tool the Lord has given us to understand His words is the Spirit (see John 16:13), informed commentaries are valuable resources that aid teachers in preparation and presentation. Successful teachers use commentary merely as a means to the end of searching the commandments themselves, looking carefully to prophets for guidance while feasting on the words of revelation. Commentaries can undermine “search[ing] these commandments” if they are used as an end rather than as a means.

Oliver Cowdery and William Phelps, the recipients of the letter in which the revelation being considered here was written, may have been the first to seek commentary on the meaning of what is now Doctrine and Covenants 85:7–8. The earliest prophetic commentary we have comes to us from Joseph Smith via Oliver Cowdery. Though hearsay, there is no reason to doubt its reliability. On January 1, 1834, Oliver Cowdery wrote from Ohio, where he worked closely with the Prophet, to John Whitmer in Missouri. Specifically addressing issues raised in Joseph’s November 1832 letter to Phelps, Cowdery clarified the need to keep accurate membership records, and then he added this: “Brother Joseph says, that the item in his letter that says, that the man that is called &c. and puts forth his hand to steady the ark of God, does not mean that any had at the time, but it was given for a caution to those in high standing to beware, lest they should fall by the vivid shaft of death as the Lord had said.”

This crucial statement suggests an order of events that helps us understand the revelation better.

At the writing of the revelation in November 1832, the Lord was warning against the tendency to be officious. He did not, apparently, intend to condemn past behavior of Edward Partridge or William Phelps, which had apparently been repented of, but wanted to forewarn them against potential weakness. The Lord foresaw that Partridge and others might succumb to the temptation to steady the ark by tinkering with the Lord’s revealed will for establishing Zion. Later, in 1868, Orson Pratt emphasized the future tense of what is now Doctrine and Covenants 85:8: “He will send one ordained to this purpose, and to fulfill this particular duty, that the saints may receive their inheritances after they have consecrated everything in their possession. Then we can build up a city that will be a city of perfection.” Orson Pratt also
taught that the “one mighty and strong” would be an “immortal personage,—one that is clothed upon with light as with a garment.” He believed that the prophecy referred to a time following the resurrection when the “earth will be given to the Saints of the Most High for an inheritance to be divided among them.”

By 1905, speculation had surged through the Church as to who would fulfill the prophecy of the “one mighty and strong”—a role some assumed for themselves. An official explanation of verses 7 and 8 seemed necessary. Accordingly, the First Presidency published a letter in the *Deseret Evening News* on November 11, 1905, undersigned by Presidents Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund. The First Presidency chose to examine critically the verses by using historical and deductive methods. Though authoritative, their treatment acknowledged that “all are capable of receiving larger information, and more and more light respecting the things which God reveals.”

The 1905 First Presidency letter first addressed the problem of those “who have so far proclaimed themselves as being the ‘one mighty and strong,’” censoring them for “having manifested the utmost ignorance of the things of God and the order of the Church.” The Presidency concluded that “when the man who shall be called upon to divide unto the Saints their inheritances comes, he will be designated by the inspiration of the Lord to the proper authorities of the Church, appointed and sustained according to the order provided for the government of the Church.” By so saying, the Presidency affirmed the well-established article of faith that a man must be called of God and properly appointed by those already in authority in the Church.

Because the prophecy of “one mighty and strong” lent itself to deceivers who aspired to become prophets, the Presidency clarified that verse 7 referred specifically to the office of bishop because in 1832 it was the bishop’s duty to “arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints” in Zion (D&C 85:7). At the time of the revelation, Edward Partridge shouldered this responsibility of dividing the inheritances among the faithful in Jackson County, Missouri. Partridge became a key figure in the First Presidency’s analysis of section 85, in which their treatment of verse 7 yielded two alternative interpretations. The first interpretation made verse 7 contingent upon Bishop Partridge’s faithfulness; in other words, *if* Edward Partridge failed in his duties and fell into transgression, *then* the Lord would call “one mighty and strong” to replace him (see D&C 42:10). The second interpretation held that the prophecy may yet be fulfilled in the future. The Presidency seemed to prefer the former but allowed for the possibility of the latter interpretation. “If
there are those who will still insist that the prophecy concerning the coming of ‘one mighty and strong’ is still to be regarded as to the future, let the Latter-day Saints know that he will be a future bishop of the church who will be with the Saints in Zion. . . . This future bishop will also be called and appointed of God as Aaron of old, and as Edward Partridge was. He will be designated by the inspiration of the Lord, and will be accepted and sustained by the whole Church.”

The second issue discussed in the letter was the matter of steadying the ark in Doctrine and Covenants 85:8. In ancient Israel, a man named Uzza “put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled” (1 Chronicles 13:9). The Lord smote Uzza and he died, illustrating the fate of those who seek to manage the affairs of God without authority. The First Presidency reviewed the historical circumstances surrounding Joseph’s missive to William W. Phelps and concluded that Edward Partridge was “that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God” (D&C 85:8). Joseph Smith had reproved Edward Partridge in March 1832. But Cowdery clarified that Joseph did not consider anyone guilty of ark steadying as of November 1832. However, a March 30, 1834, letter from Joseph to Edward Partridge and William Phelps specifically rebuked them, stating that “men should not attempt to steady the ark of God!” Edward Partridge repented for presuming too much. The First Presidency stated that the Lord “forgave [him] his sins, and withheld the execution of the judgment pronounced against him.” Bishop Partridge thus avoided being punished “like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning” (D&C 85:8).

In summary, the 1905 First Presidency letter became the definitive statement on the meaning of verses 7 and 8 and later formed the bedrock for all future commentary written upon the subject. The letter was aimed at apostates who claimed to be the “one mighty and strong,” concluding that either Edward Partridge’s repentance abolished the need for the “one” or that the “one” would serve at some future day as a bishop in Zion. Finally, the letter identified Bishop Partridge as a man who had attempted to steady the ark. The Presidency did not believe, however, that their analysis of verses 7 and 8 was either comprehensive or final.

The twentieth century witnessed a blossoming of scriptural commentary and scholarship. During this period of doctrinal refinement and intellectual enlightenment, Elder Hyrum M. Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Janne M. Sjodahl published their significant commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants in 1919. In their treatment of section 85, they quoted extensively from the First Presidency
letter and reiterated the Presidency’s conclusions. Although Smith and Sjodahl did not enlarge upon the Presidency’s analysis, their work widely disseminated the 1905 letter and became the standard for all future commentaries on section 85.

In 1960, Sidney B. Sperry took up the torch in his *Doctrine and Covenants Compendium*. Referring to verses 7 and 8, he said, “In my humble opinion, the vigorous discussions in the past—and even at present—on these two questions were—and are—veritable tempests in a teapot.” Sperry quoted the same two paragraphs of the First Presidency letter as Smith and Sjodahl earlier. The edited version of the 1905 letter, quoted now in two of the most respected commentaries, thus passed to another generation.

Since 1960, dozens of commentaries have benefited scholars and students alike in their study of the Doctrine and Covenants. Although it is impossible to list them all here, it is not surprising to find that each has repeated or paraphrased the contents of the First Presidency letter. Through the years, the general integrity of the First Presidency’s analysis has been preserved. Modern commentaries declare that Edward Partridge was “that man” who steadied the ark. Yet it may be more accurate to say that Partridge was among the men forewarned by the revelation not to steady the ark, which he and others subsequently did, and that they then repented after Joseph rebuked their behavior. As for the “one mighty and strong,” alternative interpretations posited by the First Presidency in 1905 are reflected in the commentaries published since. Some scholars still leave open the possibility of a future role for the “one,” whereas others decisively declare that “all that was written by revelation in the letter was contingent upon the unfaithfulness of the bishop,” and therefore Edward Partridge’s repentance nullified the need for the “one.”

It is interesting to note that the last paragraph of the Presidency letter is usually not included in the commentaries, which is surprising because introductions and conclusions are often the most carefully crafted. The Presidency stated that “men of exceptional talents and abilities . . . will be called of the Lord through the appointed agencies of the Priesthood . . . just as Edward Partridge was called and accepted, and just as the ‘one mighty and strong’ will be called and accepted when the time comes for his services.” This, together with the First Presidency’s declaration that there is yet “more light respecting the things which God reveals,” should keep teachers of modern revelation from waxing too dogmatic when interpreting Doctrine and Covenants 85:7–8.
Conclusion

For those who study and teach the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, a key to understanding each one is knowledge of its subtext. Historical records cannot infallibly provide this, and a superficial historical background may actually distort our understanding of a revelation. Even so, the Lord’s words become more meaningful as we understand the environment in which they were spoken.

Our testimony is that accurate historical information unfailingly confirms that the Lord’s words are more prescient, penetrating, and powerful than we might have previously recognized. Moreover, prophetic statements help us interpret and apply revelations. Still, the most important thing we can teach is the revelation itself. The Lord has a distinct voice that profoundly influences all who listen to Him intently. Teachers and students should appreciate the revelations of Jesus Christ enough to spend the bulk of their time letting the Lord speak for Himself. If He needs an interpreter, His living revelators will furnish further light from time to time, always acknowledging the first rule of revelation—namely, there is more to come.

Notes

2. Smith, History of the Church, 1:226.
3. Despite mortal limitations in language, the Lord speaks unto His children “that [they] may naturally understand” (D&C 29:33). The Doctrine and Covenants is, among other things, evidence of the Lord’s ongoing effort to instruct His people “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 88:78).
5. “One Mighty and Strong,” Improvement Era, October 1907, 929–43. The Improvement Era reproduction of the 1905 First Presidency letter gives the wrong date for that letter’s publication in the Deseret Evening News. For the correct date, see note 4.


11. In 1900, Lorin Farr reported having heard Joseph Smith say something like, “If we knew the condition of the spirits in the spirit world, thousands would commit suicide to get there” (Weber Stake High Priests Quorum Minute Book, 1896–1929, series 13, vol. 1, October 27, 1900, 110). Charles Lowell Walker heard Wilford Woodruff refer to Joseph teaching “that if the People knew what was behind the vail, they would try by every means to commit suicide that they might get there, but the Lord in his wisdom had implanted the fear of death in every person that they might cling to life and thus accomplish the designs of their creator” (A. Karl Larson and Katherine M. Larson, eds., *The Diary of Charles Lowell Walker* [Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1980], 1:465–66).


13. Oliver Cowdery to John Whitmer, January 1, 1834, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.


22. “Bro Edward [Partridge] it is very dangerous for men who have received the light he has to be seeking after a sign. . . . Remember Ananias & Sophria” (Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, July 31, 1832, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 273); Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:226.


27. In 1879, John Taylor reported hearing Joseph rebuke Bishop Partridge sometime between 1837 and 1840. According to Taylor, Partridge “was a splendid good man, as Bishop Hunter is. But he got some crooked ideas into his head; he thought he ought to manage some things irrespective of Joseph, which caused Joseph to speak rather sharply to him. Joseph said, I wish you to understand that I am President of this Church, and I am your president, and I preside over you and all your affairs” (in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:36).


Reprove, Betimes, and Sharpness in the Vocabulary of Joseph Smith

Kent P. Jackson and Robert D. Hunt

Kent P. Jackson is a professor of ancient scripture at BYU. Robert D. Hunt has a master's degree in ancient Near Eastern studies from BYU.

As a prisoner in the squalor of Liberty Jail in March 1839, the Prophet Joseph Smith gave us some of the most beautiful and inspiring words contained in the Doctrine and Covenants. Among those is section 121, verse 43, which counsels the Saints of the necessity of “reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy.” Much commentary has been written and spoken on this verse, admonishing us how to reprove betimes with sharpness. In this article, however, our interest lies in the words themselves. We will attempt to discover what the words reprove, betimes, and sharpness mean—more accurately, what they meant to Joseph Smith when he uttered them in the winter of 1839.

The context of Doctrine and Covenants 121, verse 43, makes it clear that the words are Joseph Smith’s and not the Lord’s. This section of the Doctrine and Covenants begins with the Prophet’s pleading to God on behalf of the Saints (verses 1–6). The Lord then provides counsel and comfort (verses 7–25). Then in verse 26 there is a subtle shift of speakers as the first person changes to the third, and Joseph Smith resumes his own speech. This is an important observation for the analysis of the words because although Joseph Smith was inspired as he dictated this part of the text to his scribe, he apparently did so in his own language and his own vocabulary.
Dictionaries do not establish what words mean. Lexicographers collect examples of how words are used by speakers and writers, and they create definitions based on what they observe from that usage. Over time, the meaning of a word evolves, and many words today do not have the same meaning they had in the days of Joseph Smith. In a historical document, a word means not what it communicates to modern readers but what the historical speaker or writer thought it meant. Thus, the best way to understand the word is to see how the speaker or writer regularly used it.

To know best what Joseph Smith meant with *reprove*, *betimes*, and *sharpness*, we must examine his every known use of those words in their original contexts. Fortunately, we possess a tremendous record of the Prophet’s sermons, statements, journals, letters, and other writings. We also have the scriptures that he produced. We do not view the Book of Mormon or the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants as the creations of Joseph Smith, yet because the Lord communicates with people “after the manner of their language” (D&C 1:24), we see in those books a manifestation of the English vocabulary and usage of the Prophet and others of his day. Sometimes we do not have a sufficient number of occurrences to allow us to tell with absolute confidence what Joseph Smith had in mind with a word. When that is the case, we turn to other documents contemporary with him and geographically and culturally proximate to him. The cultural and geographical proximity is significant because, for example, a learned treatise published in Cambridge, England, in 1839 will likely tell us much less about Joseph Smith’s word usage than will an article published in a contemporary American newspaper.

We have found Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* to be an important tool that collects and preserves the English words of Joseph Smith’s time and place. That work provides a view of the American English language as Noah Webster perceived it in 1828, the year before the Book of Mormon was translated. Thus, it is an unparalleled resource for the dialect of the Restoration. Webster’s limitations include the fact that it records more formal than informal usage and relies on written sources (many of them old) rather than on speech. But those are the limitations of virtually all dictionaries.

The immediate context of Joseph Smith’s religious language includes the King James translation of the Bible. Even though the language of early nineteenth-century America was significantly different from that of the King James translation, much of the religious vocabulary of Joseph Smith and his contemporaries derived from, or was
profoundly influenced by, the vocabulary of the English Bible. Thus, any examination of Joseph Smith’s words must include an examination of how those words were employed by the King James translators. Frequently, the key to understanding King James Version words from the Old Testament is in the mirror-image vocabulary of parallel couplets.

An additional avenue for understanding what a word means is to learn its origin. Etymology, the study of the origin of words, is an important tool for understanding how language works and for narrowing the range of possible meanings of any given word. Etymological dictionaries, as well as dictionaries of the languages from which English words derive or are translated, contribute in significant ways to help us know what English words mean. The massive and magisterial *Oxford English Dictionary* preserves the most complete history in existence of words in our language. It provides not only detailed etymologies but also in-context citations of words from their earliest appearances to the twentieth century. For all we can learn from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, it relies to a very great degree on formal, upper-class writing, with less-than-needed representation of common speech. Moreover, the further chronologically a word is removed from its origin, the less meaningful its history is in determining what a writer or speaker has in mind when using it. Etymology tells us where a word came from, not necessarily what it means when any given person uses it.

The following brief discussions of *reprove*, *betimes*, and *sharpness* will make use of these tools. We acknowledge their limitations and the tentativeness of our conclusions. Yet we are convinced that to understand fully the thoughts of Joseph Smith, or of any other historical speaker or writer, we first must understand the words.

**Reprove**

The English word *reprove* is borrowed from the Old French *reprover*, which comes from the Latin *reprobāre*, meaning to disapprove or condemn. Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary observes *reprove* being used with the meanings “blame,” “censure,” “charge with a fault to the face,” “convince of a fault,” “refute,” “disprove,” and “excite a sense of guilt.” Common definitions today include “chide as blameworthy” or “censure,” yet the standard American English dictionary shows that the word’s semantic range is broad enough to include “seek to correct esp. by mild rebuke.”

In the Old Testament, *reprove* is typically translated from the Hebrew verb *ykh*, which usually means “rebuke” or “chasten.” The Lord said to Judah through Jeremiah: “Thine own wickedness shall
correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee” (Jeremiah 2:19; emphasis added), placing the verbs correct and reprove (yk) in synonymous parallelism. In the New Testament, reprove is translated from the Greek verb elénchō, which connotes a similar meaning of “convict,” “expose,” or “correct.”10 All of these definitions seem to fit generally within the range of the word as used by the Prophet in Doctrine and Covenants 121:43. Early Latter-day Saint periodicals show the word being used with the same meaning; for example, “It is also the privilege of the Melchisedec priesthood, to reprove, rebuke and admonish.”11

Reprove is used only three times in the Book of Mormon, and all three are in quotations from Isaiah.12 It is found in only three passages in Joseph Smith’s revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants.13 In Doctrine and Covenants 84:87, the Lord states: “Behold, I send you out to reprove the world of all their unrighteous deeds, and to teach them of a judgment which is to come.” The Lord appears to be sending His servants to reprimand, or more precisely to correct, those to whom they preach. The parallel word teach, however, may allow for an interpretation of “disprove,” meaning to disabuse the listeners of the misconceptions and false ways of the world. The attestations of reprove in Joseph Smith’s recorded sermons and writings also fit these definitions. The Prophet said: “If I did not love men I would not reprove them,”14 and “I have no enmity against any man. I love you all—I am their best friend & if persons miss their mark it is their own fault—if I reprove a man & he hate me he is a fool—for I love all men especially these my brethren & sisters.”15

Betimes

The word betimes is the most arcane word in Doctrine and Covenants 121:43 and is found only five times in the King James Bible, all in the Old Testament.16 Its only appearance in modern-day revelation is in the verse under consideration here, and Joseph Smith is not recorded as having used it elsewhere. By his day, the word was already uncommon. Despite its scarcity, however, the Prophet’s meaning of betimes in this verse presents less difficulty than either reprove or sharpness. Betimes comes from Old English and is derived from “by time” or “by the time.”17 The Oxford English Dictionary provides some illustrative definitions, including “at an early time,” “in good time, in due time, while there is yet time, before it is too late.” In the early nineteenth century, the word was generally understood to mean “seasonably,” “in good season or time,” and “soon,” as noted in Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary.18
The translators of the King James Version used *betimes* as “early” in their translation of the Hebrew verb *škm*, which means to “do early,” “get up early.” In addition, they translated the verb *šhr*, “search,” “be on the lookout for,” three times with the help of *betimes*.

When we take the evidence together, it appears that the Prophet’s counsel was to correct a person at an appropriate time, early, and before it was too late. Wisdom and experience, coupled with the history of the word itself, show that a timely correction—or a well-timed correction—will always be more successful than an immediate correction.

**Sharpness**

Of the three words we are examining in Doctrine and Covenants 121:43, *sharpness* may be the most difficult to apply an exact definition to. The *Oxford English Dictionary* observes *sharp* being used in a number of ways, ranging from “acute or penetrating in intellect or perception” to “severe, strict, harsh” or “cutting in rebuke.” Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary includes such definitions as “acute of mind; quick to discern or distinguish” but also “severe; harsh; biting.” *Sharpness* is defined as “not obtuseness” but also as “acuteness of intellect; the power of . . . discernment; quickness of understanding” and “quickness of sense or perception.” “Discernment,” “understanding,” and “perception” are most interesting, considering that the reproof is to be given only “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost.”

A few passages from the Old and New Testaments add further insights. Almost all of the passages containing *sharp* refer to sharp objects like weapons or tools. However, the Hebrew noun *hozqâ*, usually meaning “strength” or “force,” is once translated in conjunction with a preposition as “sharply” in the King James translation (Judges 8:1). As in the Old Testament, most New Testament attestations of *sharp* refer to weapons. The Greek adverb *apotómōs* can mean “severely” or “rigorously,” and a cognate noun is twice translated as “severity” in Romans 11:22. In 2 Corinthians 13:10, however, Paul writes that his sharpness was “to edification, and not to destruction,” which likely preserves the intent of Joseph Smith in using the same word.

The Book of Mormon gives us good examples of how Joseph Smith apparently understood *sharpness*. In 2 Nephi 1:26, the Prophet used it in his translation of Lehi’s words to his recalcitrant sons Laman and Lemuel. Lehi said: “Ye have murmured because [Nephi] hath been *plain* unto you. Ye say that he hath used *sharpness*; ye say that he hath been *angry* with you; but behold, his *sharpness* was the sharpness of the power of the word of God, which was in him; and that which ye
call *anger was the truth* (emphasis added). Laman and Lemuel interpreted Nephi’s sharpness as anger, yet Nephi was likely neither “harsh” nor “cutting” in his dealings with his brothers. Verse 2 in 1 Nephi 16 teaches that “the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it *cutteth* them to the very center” (emphasis added). Lehi clarified that Nephi’s words were given in plainness, without anger, and that he possessed the Spirit of the Lord. In Moroni 9:4, Mormon wrote that he labored with the Nephites “continually” and that when he spoke, he spoke “the word of God with *sharpness* [that] they tremble[d] and anger[ed] against” him (emphasis added). But when he used no sharpness, “they harden[ed] their hearts against it.” In Doctrine and Covenants 15:2, the Lord said: “I speak unto you with *sharpness* and with power,” reflecting the intent of *ḥozqā* in the Hebrew Bible—strength. That seems to be the way in which Mormon also spoke to the Nephites. The scriptures commonly record the angry reactions from the wicked when they are admonished or “reproved” for their misdeeds, and the Nephites’ reaction to Mormon was no different as he spoke to them with plainness, strength, and truth, as did Nephi.27

Finally, two examples from Church history help clarify the meaning. In 1835 Elders Orson Hyde and William E. McLellin recounted their dealing with a Church member who was teaching false doctrine: “He was shown his error and *reproved sharply*. He saw it and confessed his fault and made an humble acknowledgment.”28 In an 1834 meeting, Joseph Smith expressed his displeasure with some Church members. The minutes record that the Spirit “rebuked” them and that the correction was given “in sharpness,” even “with great sharpness.” The result—perhaps surprising to us—was that the sharp rebuke “occasioned gladness and joy, and [they] were willing to repent and reform in every particular, according to the instruction given.”29 The fact that these rebukes came from the Spirit, were specific in their instruction, and resulted in confession, humility, repentance, and “gladness and joy” once again leads to the conclusion that sharpness, in the vocabulary of Joseph Smith, meant plainness, truth, and clarity.30

Although the definitions of *sharpness* are broad enough to allow for “harshness” and “cutting,” such caustic responses are unlikely to correct a wayward person and are devoid of the spirit in which the counsel is given. Joseph Smith was explicit when he added that we reprove “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost,” which is not present when harshness and anger are used. And the subsequent “increase of love” suggests that love must already be present when the reproving takes place. The Holy Ghost inspires a person to higher degrees of
intellectual power and discernment, quickness of understanding, and quickness of perception. These are among the qualities embodied in the word *sharpness*.

In summary, our reproving with sharpness needs to be done at an appropriate, early occasion, and the reproof must come with plainness and discernment—and only when the Holy Ghost so instructs. These definitions not only fit the semantic range of the words in 1839 but also fit the spirit of Joseph Smith’s inspired teaching.

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**Notes**


2. The Lord states that “mine eyes see and know” and “I have in reserve” (D&C 121:24). In verses 26–27, the Prophet writes that “God shall give” and “our forefathers.”

3. Joseph Smith’s recorded words are preserved in not-yet-published documentary sources and in published works such as Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vols. 1 and 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92); Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*; and Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980). Early Latter-day Saint periodicals containing Joseph Smith’s words are *The Evening and the Morning Star, Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, *Elders’ Journal*, and *Times and Seasons*. The Prophet’s words are preserved in edited form in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957); Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938); Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000); and Kent P. Jackson, comp. ed., *Joseph Smith’s Commentary on the Bible* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994). Some of these sources are available in commercial gospel database software. Because the discourses of Joseph Smith were preserved by others, often filtered through their own vocabulary, and because his journals and histories sometimes contain material written by others and attributed to him, each occurrence of a word needs to be analyzed on its own merits.


11. *Messenger and Advocate*, April 1837, 487. “It certainly was pure charity that inspired Christ and his apostles to reprove the world for their sins, and corruptions; and why should it be considered an uncharitable act in the Latter-Day Saints to do the same[?]” (*Times and Seasons*, December 15, 1841, 629).

12. 2 Nephi 21:3 (= Isaiah 11:3); 2 Nephi 21:4 (= Isaiah 11:4); 2 Nephi 30:9 (= Isaiah 11:4). *Reprove* appears to have a somewhat different meaning in Isaiah 11:3–4, the source for all three Book of Mormon occurrences of *reprove*. There *ykh* is in parallel with a word that means “judge” or “dispense justice.” Isaiah’s intended meaning was probably something like “decide,” as in the New Revised Standard Version, or “give decisions,” as in the New International Version.


17. This word is first attested in English in the early fourteenth century; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “betimes.”

18. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “betimes.” The only occurrence in an early Latter-day Saint periodical is in a quote from the King James Version of 1 Maccabees 4:52, in *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 7 (February 15, 1843): 104: “they rose up betimes in the morning.”


23. Koehler-Baumgartner, s.v. “hozqâ”

24. Literally “with strength,” *béhozqâ*.


26. See also Titus 1:13, where it is translated as “sharply.”

27. See also Words of Mormon 1:17; Alma 1:7; 19:28; Doctrine and Covenants 16:2; 112:12.


Blessing the Church Worldwide: An Interview with Ross H. Cole

Randy L. Bott

Ross H. Cole, now retired, was a Church Educational System zone administrator on August 17, 2004, when this interview was conducted.

Randy L. Bott is an associate teaching professor of Religious Education at BYU.

The Religious Educator commissioned this interview with Ross H. Cole, former zone administrator for the Church Educational System.

Bott: Brother Cole, you have had some remarkable experiences as far as Church service is concerned. Would you review for us briefly the positions you have held and any insights you may have received.

Cole: Well, my first assignment that had any significance was when I was the first counselor in the mission presidency of the Korean Mission for a year before I came home.

Bott: Is that while you were a young missionary?

Cole: Yes, as a young missionary from 1964 to 1965. And the challenge was that I was with the first group of missionaries to open the Korean Mission. Until that time, Korea was a district of the Northern Far East Mission. Because of that, there was quite a drought of missionaries for about nine months, and it meant just a few of us would have heavier assignments for a little while, and I just happened to fall into that. I’ve had many experiences since then. Most of my Church service was in teaching in the quorums of the Church or Sunday School or auxiliary assignments as I worked through my master’s and doctorate. I become an elders quorum president in Fullerton, California, where I had my first institute assignment. I was a high counselor for some years and then a stake president. I was released in 1986 to come
to the headquarters of the Church Educational System as the director of the training division. I was a mission president from 1989 to 1992 in the Korea Taejon Mission. I came back and settled in Orem and was called to be a bishop at BYU for four years. The day I was released as bishop, in April of 1999, I was called to be the stake president in my home stake. I have had wonderful opportunities to serve with some of the finest in the kingdom.

Bott: You seem to have had a tremendous interest in the Far East. How did that all start?

Cole: Well, it started when I was a seminary student. In southern California back in the fifties, they were starting the early-morning seminary program. I was in high school in the latter part of the fifties, so I had an opportunity to go to early-morning seminary. My seminary teacher, Gail E. Carr, had just gotten back from a mission to Korea. He later became the first mission president in Korea. The first week or so of September in my senior year, Brother Carr brought in a Korean man, Lee, Young Bum, who was on his way to BYU to share his testimony. So he came into our early morning class, and he and Brother Carr talked about missionary work in Korea.

Sad to say, I could not have cared less. I was more interested in other things. Part of the problem I had is that he spoke in broken English, so I couldn’t understand everything he said, and I felt like, well, why try? It doesn’t matter. But at the end he bore his testimony and said something like this, “I pray to God that He will send one of you to my country to teach my people the gospel.” And when he said that I felt this warmth go through my soul. I thought, “Oh no! It’s me.” I wanted to go on a mission, but I never thought of going to Korea. All the rest of the day, I kept reflecting on all the stories he told that were so harsh. I thought, “Oh, man. How can I do that?”

So that night I was sobered, and I prayed, “Heavenly Father, please help me to be worthy to go to Korea on a mission.” I had that same prayer every morning and every night for a little over three years until I finally got to Korea in November of 1962. So it changed me. When you pray that hard to be worthy to go to a country, it changes how you feel about that country. That’s what happened. So when I got there, I didn’t worry about anything except just working hard because I felt like Heavenly Father had answered my prayer and now it was up to me to do everything. So that got me started in Korea.

Well, I learned to love the people, like most missionaries do, and when I came back from my mission, I just kept up my studies
with Korean and Asian studies and graduated from BYU in that area. I received a scholarship to the University of Hawaii, which in that year allowed people from the United States to link up with people from Asia in what they called the East-West Center. So I represented the United States in that area, and Korea was my specialty. I interfaced with many wonderful people and scholars from Asia. It just deepened my interest in and love for Asia. For my master’s thesis, I went back to Korea and did a textbook analysis of moral lessons of Korean elementary citizenship education. I had to read all the textbooks, and I got deeper into the culture. Then I graduated and was working on my doctorate at UCLA, and I was heading in the same direction when I got an answer of certitude that I should be in the seminary program, so I left it all to go teach seminary.

Bott: And you have had this fascination with Asia since then?

Cole: I have. Asia was something I never would have thought of when I was a junior in high school, but I haven’t been able to get it out of my soul since then. At Arizona State University, I was working on my doctorate, which was a further expansion of my master’s study, and I finished in Asian studies. I was teaching seminary and then institute in Fullerton, California; for years nothing happened. I thought, “Why did I bust my pick to do all this work on Korea for no reason?” Then, years later, in 1986 they asked me to come up to the headquarters of the Church and do international training for the professional development program. My assignment was to go around the world and train full-time CES educators, and that’s where my education really started coming in handy. I had learned how to look at a culture through the lens of objectivity and how to differentiate between cultural values and gospel values and things that were really significant or not significant in a culture. My education helped me in my training with our CES people around the world.

Bott: How and why did you decide to go with CES when you had that rich background in higher education?

Cole: The absolute truth is I had an answer through prayer. I was asking what the Lord wanted me to do. I thought I wanted to go into the university professorial ranks. That’s what I was headed for. Everything in my background suggested I would be able to do well. As I prayed one night, I sought to get confirmation from the Lord on my proposal for my career. One morning about dawn, after praying all night, I got an answer. I was to teach seminary. I was so thrilled that
I went to UCLA the next day and withdrew from all the education classes and financial support. I even had to have an interview with the vice president, who wanted to know why in the world I would withdraw from UCLA, especially with all the financial help. Why would I leave to go do something I didn’t even know if I would be able to do? I came into CES midyear and didn’t have a contract when I withdrew, but I just said, “I’m going to go teach seminary.”

*Bott:* So where have you taught?

*Cole:* I started in Tempe, Arizona. I taught high school there. A couple of years after that, I opened up Marcos DeNiza High School for released-time seminary while I was a coordinator for the east Phoenix area, and I also was the Scottsdale Community College Institute director. I did all that in one year while I was doing my residency at Arizona State University. I learned a little bit about stretching myself and about the blessings of the Spirit of the Lord.

*Bott:* You have been in CES for a long time now. Have you seen changes take place within the program?

*Cole:* Yes, I have seen many changes, some in how we have organized our pre-service and in-service training. Now we have it all unified. We now have a philosophy of education and a philosophy of leadership well written in handbooks. We have basic principles of teaching that are transferable to every culture. In addition, some of the changes that I’ve seen have been that our CES people are more willing, I think, to follow the patterns of the prophets. We’re interested in hiring people who have great character, spiritual character—those who love the prophets and the apostles and love to teach and model their teachings in their own lives. When you get that kind of CES employee, along with purity of heart and focus upon wanting to keep their covenants in relationship to their profession, all employees have a good basis for motivation, unity, spiritual power, personal accountability, and home behavior. The fundamental drivers in CES are the covenants that we make and then apply to our profession, which yield power. Of course, without humility and meekness we have nothing. The commission of the religious educators of seminary and institute is to live the gospel, teach effectively, and administer appropriately. We stay focused on those three areas and push forward. I am personally pleased with the direction that has been established.

Over the years some changes have occurred in curriculum. In 1980 Jay Jensen and Gerald Lund (both General Authorities now) and
David Christensen were trying to resolve a problem about the curriculum of seminary—whether to have one book for special education, one book for home study, and one book for released-time seminary or to have only one teacher manual. They went on a retreat for several days and came back with a perspective that what was most essential was to teach from the scriptures, to walk the students through them instead of teaching on a conceptual basis. That was the most dramatic philosophical change I know of in curriculum, training and teaching in CES. That was in 1980.

Twenty-five years later we have had two revisions of the seminary manuals, but they just keep going the same direction, only better and deeper. The institute courses are more scripturally inclined by nature, so it didn’t require quite as much change in those courses. Our teaching, our training, and our assessment work and refinement in effect are based upon that change that occurred back in 1980.

Bott: Are there any other experiences that you have had, maybe in your travels or as you have interfaced personally with students or faculty, where you felt the hand of the Lord literally moving you in a certain direction?

Cole: I have on many occasions. In fact, I’ve hardly ever traveled internationally without feeling something akin to a mantle. Now that’s not to say that religious educators have a mantle. We don’t want to say that, because we don’t. But there is a power and an assistance from a divine source that gives you insight, understanding and confidence as well as the questions to ask that will reveal what needs to be known in order to make wise and strategic decisions. Some years ago we went to Mongolia. We didn’t know who we were even going to talk to over there. We interviewed several couples and ended up hiring a man who had a doctorate from Moscow University and had been the dean of the school of agronomy at the Agricultural University of Mongolia. He was a bright man whom the Lord had prepared to be a seminary and institute teacher.

We went to Cambodia on the same trip and found a man who had also been trained in Moscow. He had twice evaded the Pol Pot regime’s effort to take him to the killing fields. This man married a woman of royalty and was suspected of being educated or of being one of the literati; twice they came to take him. One time they gave him a book in French and said, “We’d like you to read this.” So he took the book and turned it upside down and spoke to them in gibberish. It so disgusted the people that they slammed the book down and said, “Get rid of him; he doesn’t
know anything.” So he was able to escape. His buddies who were with him on that occasion boarded a bus and never came back.

You interview a man like that with three or four other brethren, and you see that there is a depth of character and power of faith, and that is what makes a huge difference in employee selection.

I just got back from Asia in June with Brother Brad Howell. Brad is my replacement in Asia. We needed to hire three people; we went to Taiwan and hired two brethren who have been in training. Then we went to Indonesia. The institute director in Indonesia is going to be retiring, so we needed to find a replacement. The man we interviewed was currently serving in his fourth year as a mission president. When we interviewed him, I had an impression that he was the Lord’s choice. So I talked to him about other priesthood leaders and potential CES employees in Indonesia and, at the behest of the area president, I even asked him if he would be interested in CES. I showed him the salary schedule, and he said, “Oh, we couldn’t live on that.” That night I was frustrated because I’d had that impression. As I prayed through that sleepless night, I had a feeling that I should call him in the morning. When I called him, I said, “President, somehow I feel that I should invite you to please pray about Church education as a career.” He said, “Well, I’ll do that. I’ve had thoughts since yesterday too that at least I ought to ask the Lord if He has an interest in it. I’m going with my wife today out of the area to do a zone conference, so I’ll talk to her and we’ll pray about it.” He sent me an e-mail when I got to Mongolia that said, “We’re very interested in the job.” I was thrilled. That kind of help and inspiration has attended me through my experiences in Asia. Every time we need to hire someone, I figure the Lord will tell us who it is. I believe that the Holy Ghost is working throughout the world in every phase of Church operation. All we are trying to do is please Heavenly Father and do His will, and I have experienced His help.

**Bott:** Over the years, you have been busy, you have been educated, and you have traveled. How do you still maintain balance with your family, the Church, and everything else that you have done?

**Cole:** Well, first of all, I consider myself a 24:7 servant of the Lord. I figure that comes with the covenants. You can’t sidestep that. So the job is to find what Heavenly Father would have me do and what things are most important to Him. The most helpful key is to communicate well with my wife and to learn from her perspective what is most important as far as family and other obligations that hit us as parents and grandparents. We find that there is enough time to prioritize and
handle the crucial matters. We have found that if we counsel and plan well together, we can get to the most important things and bless where we need to bless or minister. Sometimes we have to miss opportunities, but people know that we are willing even though it’s not always possible to be with them under our circumstances.

**Bott:** *If you had to start all over again, are there things that you would do differently?*

**Cole:** Well, one thing I would do differently is that I wouldn’t be so tough on myself the first year. I got neural fatigue the first year of teaching and had to spend part of the summer recuperating, but it taught me balance. It taught me how to organize. I had a dumb idea that every lesson I taught had to be better than the previous lesson. That only took me one semester to realize that I was either going to die or change my philosophy, so I changed my philosophy. Another thing I would do earlier in my life is listen sooner to my wife and bring her in as part of my planning. It took us several years to learn how to balance our family’s needs with my Church service and CES responsibilities. Starting over again, I would bring in my wife as a team member who could help me and teach me and coach me. Charlene has been the source of my refinement of character and spirituality and common sense, but I did not listen to her early on in the first couple of years as I should have. I would have been better off if I had. It is my personal opinion that wives have the strongest influence of any individual in giving feedback to teachers. I learned that early on. I was grateful for that, but I did not bring her in to a full partnership with me as early as I should have.

**Bott:** *You have seen so many changes take place. As you look toward the future, what do you see some of our major challenges being as we move into the twenty-first century?*

**Cole:** Well, one obvious thing is the largeness of the task. The Church going in so many countries in the world; CES follows right behind and tries to provide seminary, institute, and weekday training for the young people. That’s a tremendous task. Another one that comes right along with that is the requirement of finding people in a relatively short gospel-living experience to step up and be teachers who model and teach the gospel of Christ from their souls. Finding those who teach the gospel by the Spirit using effective principles of teaching on a daily basis is the miracle of the seminary and institute program worldwide.
Bott: And what about the same challenges as far as being priesthood leaders?

Cole: It is the same. The world is growing in greater disregard for righteousness and goodness, purity and virtue, love and caring, and seems to foster secularism and a social culture that opposes gospel principles. Those influences are everywhere, but because our new converts are meek and humble, and the Spirit of the Lord functions—the Saints seem to rise above the world. The biggest challenge I see is getting everybody to align their hearts and minds with the prophets and apostles. If they yield their hearts not to their own intellectual genius but to the words and the instructions of the prophets, walking in meekness and humility with the Spirit of the Lord, everything is going to be fine.

Bott: How do you take young, upstart teachers and temper them enough so that they don’t become so abrasive to the world that they are automatically rejected?

Cole: Well, that’s a challenge. It seems to me that if you have a religious educator who is not full of meekness, humility and integrity, you haven’t really got a true religious educator; you have got a person posing as one, or a “want-to-be.” If you have someone whose character is based upon covenants, who is meek, humble, and pure in heart, such will become the very finest teachers of this time.

Bott: What advice would you give to someone who is just now beginning their career?

Cole: Well, I suppose if they could learn, number one, that the Holy Ghost is the teacher. Therefore, all they need to do is to foster the capacity of the young people to desire and work for the influence of the Holy Ghost—that would be the best thing they could possibly do. Another thing is that they need to understand that when they receive the ordinances of salvation and make covenants, those covenants are the basis of relationships—relationships with themselves and Heavenly Father, relationships with themselves and their wives, themselves and their students, themselves and priesthood leaders, themselves and the CES administration. If a person could see that they can integrate their basic covenants with all that they do and in all their relationships, there would be no problem. Everybody would be successful. They would have power and influence. And finally, it seems like to me if a young teacher could just learn that the curriculum that’s given to them has been prepared by and has gone through Church correlation—it is what the prophets and apostles expect us to teach—it would be so much easier than all the other
things they may be tempted to bring into a class that may not be as pro-
ductive to drawing the Spirit of the Lord in the lives of their students.

**Bott:** Over the course of your lifetime teaching, have you seen any
change in the youth? Is there a difference in the youth today than there was
when you first started teaching?

**Cole:** Well, of course the world in which they live is now more
abrasive to the Holy Ghost. There’s so much more of the natural man
that’s identified and underscored and praised and regarded in our cur-
rent society that it makes it look like it’s an awful lot worse. Now, the
world is worse, but I have a hunch that students are just about the
same. Every time I see a young person, whether it was when I was just
starting to teach or even as late as a few weeks ago when I was with a
group of students, I see that when they hear the gospel and they want
to please Heavenly Father, they have enabling power and really do well.
I do feel that today’s youth are much more scripturally literate; they are
more gospel-principle-based and more savvy about prophetic teachings
as a group than I noticed before. But I still feel that a young person
living in any decade who tries to please Heavenly Father will be about
the same regardless of the time he or she lives.

**Bott:** How has being a CES employee impacted your life, your parents,
and your family? I guess I’m asking in behalf of those who are either think-
ing about starting or just starting and saying, “Is it all worth it?” The
financial compensation, although adequate, is not anything that would
lure you away from the bigger dollars in the future here, but what is in it
for you?

**Cole:** Well, Church education is an awful tough profession if you
don’t expect to be refined and honed and deepened spiritually in having
trials and tribulations that try your character and your heart frequently.
If you feel like you don’t want that, CES is not the profession for you. If
you want to refine yourself and move forward, please the Lord, make a
difference in the lives of many, realizing that the cost is going to be your
own personal sacrifice of the natural man, and of glory, of honor, of being
praised, and of being noticed, then CES is a perfect profession because it
allows you to give your very best every day—it allows a reflective mirror
in your life. You cannot teach the principles of the gospel with power
and have the influence of the Spirit of the Lord in the class without living
those gospel principles, and that is the grist of Church education’s honing
and refining process. Church education invites one to apply the covenants
he or she has made to the daily work in the classroom.
I believe my marriage has been greatly enriched by CES because I find that if I want to teach something, if I’m not living it, I don’t have the confidence to teach with power, so I have to change; I have to repent before I can teach with the Spirit. Repenting before you can teach gives you better insights and ideas, but it also allows you to teach with testimony and power. It’s part of that same refining and honing process. My wife has been very careful to help me see the difference between what I thought I was doing right and what I should be doing right to see principles in place, not that she is on my case, but in her tender, refined spirituality, she seems to see a little deeper than I see, especially in matters of personality and personal issues.

**Bott:** Have your children been resentful at all, or even teased at all, about you being a seminary man?

**Cole:** I don’t know. I’ve never asked them that. But I do know that my children have been greatly blessed by the influence of the students. Early on, the youngsters in high school in my seminary classes would come over to our home. Occasionally I would take my children along, when we’d have an activity at the beginning and end of the year. My children just loved the seminary students. Then, when I was at the university level teaching institute at the university, the students were wonderful. They loved our children, and our children were influenced by them, lifted, and encouraged. I think that they had wonderful models of great young people in their lives. I don’t feel like anything has happened poorly in CES. I think what has happened for me is that I had to grow a lot more than I was planning to.

Our family has been blessed another way. Teaching in CES and having for my employment something that of immeasurable value with our remuneration being relatively modest, my wife and I have had to focus on the essentials, the absolute essentials. Family home evening wasn’t just good to do; it was an imperative. On Sunday and Monday night every week, we had our family together. We realized that when we took a vacation, it would take a good portion of a year’s savings to be able to go and do and invest in our children—so we really made it a teaching experience, a growing experience, a wonderful experience for each of our family. Our children talk about those things frequently now. The construct and the circumstances of our employment gave us a tremendous opportunity to focus on the most essential parts of the gospel.

I have a daughter who is married to a CES man, and she was asked to speak in a conference by Elder Boyd K. Packer. Later with her CES group, one of the things that she bore her testimony about was
that one of the greatest blessings is that our family didn’t have much money, that we had to be more careful, so the most essential things were the elements that we focused on. So reading the scriptures is not a casual matter; it is crucial. Family prayer is not a choice; it had to be absolutely the heart and core of our home.

**Bott:** What do you plan to do after you retire?

**Cole:** Well, I want to learn how to live a consecrated life. I am being paid a good salary and being blessed in many ways, but I want to turn it back to the Lord. I am looking forward to serving missions. Right now I am serving as a stake president, so when the Brethren decide that that has been long enough, then my wife and I are in a situation to go on missions. We’ve downsized our home, and we’re ready to do whatever the Brethren want us to do under whatever circumstances. We are excited about living a consecrated life.

**Bott:** But in the meantime, until the Brethren release you, how are you going to do it?

**Cole:** I need to write the second volume of my personal history, we have a lot of family history research to do, and I hope to do a better job as stake president. I want to learn more about the temple, and I want to be a better husband, father, and grandpa.

**Bott:** What would you like to be remembered for?

**Cole:** I’d like to be remembered as a man who had the heart and mind of a religious educator, who loved his students and associates, and who loved to mentor them, but I don’t think that is what I will be remembered for. I’m probably more remembered honestly for the associates I’ve had with the CES professional development program.

**Bott:** Why don’t you talk a little more about that program. What was it, and what was your role?

**Cole:** In 1980 there was a pivotal decision that we would teach the scriptures sequentially rather than teach concepts out of the scriptures. In 1984 there was another meeting with now-Elder Jensen, now-Elder Lund, and Dave Christensen, where they talked about what kind of instructional support we give to teachers to be able to teach out of the scriptures with power. And in 1985 we had a group of brethren who went through all the talks of the prophets to CES, including the summer schools that used to be held at BYU, and identified the most frequently talked-about principles that seem to be most fundamental
for CES educators to do. We formalized those principles as the ethics of CES; we developed a philosophy of teaching and leadership based upon principles of edification as taught in the scriptures and the words of the prophets. It took almost ten years to work through the entire CES population.

**Bott:** Have you ever encountered culture interfering with the gospel?

**Cole:** Well, daily. Let me give you an example. It’s a very great challenge for our people here in the United States to set aside all the things they want to teach to young people. But the best thing may be to select what things are most essential for the young people to know or to feel in order for them to identify, incorporate, and apply gospel principles and then let them teach each other. In the United States we have an intellectual culture that militates against that particular perspective.

It is axiomatic that most people will teach as they have been taught in their own educative years. My experience is that there is no national culture whose educational philosophy perfectly squares with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every culture has some elements which blend easier with gospel principles and also elements which are in direct contrast to gospel values. I am pleased that the gospel of Jesus Christ is truly “supracultural”—it contains the finest elements of any culture, but at much higher levels and degrees. One thing I learned about teaching and training internationally is that the very best thing to do is to get someone behind closed doors, give them the principles, and then work with them for maybe four, five, eight hours. Whatever it takes until they really get it. Let them train the faculty; they understand all the nuances. They also understand the principles of the gospel. Then when you leave; you haven’t taken anything with you. You leave it all right there.

**Bott:** So instead of you teaching the masses there, you teach the one and let them teach.

**Cole:** That is what I learned. I learned that generally you do not teach much unless the heart and mind are softened and in tune with Heavenly Father and the teacher is willing to be meek and humble. Once that occurs, then we can do anything.
Kathy K. Clayton is a seminary and institute teacher in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she is serving with her husband, Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Seventy.

Our experiences in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay while my husband serves in the South America South Area Presidency are varied and engaging. None, however, has been quite so thought-provoking for me personally as the first visit we made early in our tenure here during a tour of the Asunción Paraguay North Mission to a remarkable community of Nivaclé Indian Saints living in the sparse wilderness of northwestern Paraguay called the Chaco. The village of approximately three hundred Nivaclé residents is ironically named “Abundancia,” or “Bountiful.” The community is not abundant in any material regard, but inasmuch as all the residents of Abundancia are members of the Church, they live with the fullness of the gospel, even in the absence of modern conveniences like running water and electricity. Their material possessions are sparse; their spiritual willingness of heart is abundant.

Mistolar, Paraguay: The Predecessor to Abundancia

A then-member of the Area Presidency of the South America South Area, Elder Ted E. Brewerton of the Seventy, wrote of the beginnings of the community of Abundancia by recounting the origin of its ancestor, the village called Mistolar:

Mistolar had its beginnings in 1977. At that time, the Paraguayan mission president, Merle Bair, saw Walter Flores, a man from the deserts of the Chaco in Paraguay, on a television program in Asunción. President Bair felt impressed to find the man and share the gospel with
him. In 1980, the missionaries located Flores. He was very receptive to the gospel message, and was soon baptized. Brother Flores’ testimony was so profound and clear, he knew he had to share the gospel with his fellow Indians. Several hundred joined the Church.

One group of some 214 Nivaclé Saints (formerly Chulupi), wanted to be free from worldly influences and settled a large piece of land in an uninhabited, remote area of Paraguay. They named their settlement Mistolar. At first, they were totally self-sufficient in their gardening, hunting and fishing, and had little communication with other people.

But the massive Pilcomayo River, between Mistolar and the northern border of Argentina, challenged their self-sufficiency and their faith.

One year as the snows of the Andes Mountains melted, the swollen Pilcomayo overflowed its banks and flooded Mistolar. The Saints were forced to move and they relocated ten kilometers away from the river’s edge. But even there, they were not safe. Another disastrous flood left their land more than knee-deep in water for a month. They lost the beautiful chapel they had built, their homes, their gardens, their clothing—almost everything they owned. But they still had their faith.1

**Walter Flores, the First Convert**

Walter Flores, that pioneering convert, recorded his recollections of the story of his conversion in a written testimony he prepared in January 2002:
President Bair, or President Oso, as he called himself, saw me in a television program. Immediately he said, “This has got to be a man who will work with me.” It was three days before he ended his mission. He was the first president here in Paraguay. He went right to my business (I worked with the Indians), and he left me his card and told me that he was the president of the mission. I didn’t know what that meant, so I just kept working.

Three days later, I was in my office. I was restless, so I decided to look at the business cards I had from people. I had a lot of them. The first card I saw was from President Bair. The card said “Mission President” and I wondered what kind of a calling that was. So I grabbed the phone and I called him. The president told me that I could go to his office anytime I wanted to. I found the office easily, and the president let me in. I saw a lot of people all dressed nicely in white shirts and ties. It made a big impression on me, so I said to myself, “It looks like I put my foot where few people come.” The president was a friendly man, and we spoke with one another for some time. He told me that he was going to send the missionaries to come visit me.

The missionaries came and they spoke to me about the gospel. I asked so many questions [see photo #4]. I felt that I had found the truth, and I made my decision immediately. Ten days later I was baptized. I started to think about my brethren, the Nivaclé, because the gospel hadn’t arrived to them in the Chaco. Taking the gospel to them was a great goal of mine. We went to my people in Mistolar, and I gave my first testimony. They didn’t want to believe me at first, but they spoke with the missionaries, we worked together, and in fifteen days there were more than 160 who were receiving the discussions.

The first baptism was on Christmas Day, at an early hour. We dug a little pool, put a tarp inside it, and there was a long line waiting to be baptized. One baptism after another after another. They kept changing their baptismal clothes. The river wasn’t so white, so their white clothes turned brown. It was a very special day. This was in December of 1980. Four days later we had another sixty who were baptized. Then we baptized another forty. There were only a few left to be baptized, and then it would be everyone.

The Creation of Abundancia

The new Saints in Mistolar were perpetually subject to natural disasters. When the river overflowed its banks and flooded their village
yet again, the Church helped them to relocate. Mistolar is a difficult two-day drive from Asunción. Concerned for the welfare of this faithful tribe of Church members, the Church purchased a plot of land near the pitted, two-lane Trans-Chaco Highway to allow the Nivaclé to establish a community in a locale that would be more accessible to Church leaders traveling from Asunción. Although still a difficult drive, the new village, called Abundancia, is seven to nine hours nearer to Asunción than Mistolar.

Eventually, approximately a hundred people, about half of the residents of Abundancia, returned to their original home of Mistolar to reclaim the distance from worldly influences. The rest, approximately 150 people, remained in Abundancia to benefit from the increased access to more leadership, as well as to receive educational and medical help from the Church and government personnel in Asunción. Because of the influx of neighboring Nivaclé and improved health care, the population of Abundancia has grown to approximately three hundred.

Today, Abundancia exists as a dramatic contrast of a nearly unchanged tradition juxtaposed with modernity. The original community of Abundancia consists of a single mile-long dirt road lined on either side by primitive dwelling places made from mud, sticks, metal sheeting, and straw. The quiet community includes occasional armadillos and assorted stray dogs seeking to escape the stifling heat in the rare shade of a rusty, donated picnic bench. Barefoot children of all sizes are dressed
in colorful, secondhand clothing with bold labels representing the donations of a globalized world.

At the east end of the road is the growing site of the tidy, beautiful buildings erected by the Church. Among the structures are the old chapel now remodeled to serve as a school, a simple brick dormitory to house the teachers imported from Asunción by the government, a small health center, and the Church’s humanitarian project 20031178—a promising new bakery. Most stunning is the magnificent orange brick chapel with its stunning white steeple dedicated last year. Those few buildings have the only electricity or running water in the village. On Sundays and Wednesdays, without either the bother or the benefit of clocks to prompt them, nearly all the residents of Abundancia walk, parade like, down the single road to worship together and, in the process, to indulge in the wonder of videotapes and flush toilets.

Issues Facing Abundancia

While the community of Mistolar has remained nearly entirely self-sustaining, the community of Abundancia has required and received more assistance. That increasing connection to a more modern world has introduced into the community compelling and complicated issues.

The Trans-Chaco Highway brings commodities and conveniences to the people of Abundancia from Asunción. That modernity clashes with their simple tradition and creates a cultural dissonance as they live with the gap. As the Nivaclé in Abundancia receive formal education from the Paraguayan teachers provided by the government in facilities constructed by the Church, the students are taught in Spanish. The preservation of their original Nivaclé language for future generations is uncertain. Furthermore, considering the formidable task of securing a dependable water source in that arid land and given the absence of a tradition of commerce among the Nivaclé, promoting self-reliance for the community is challenging. The concepts of money, commerce, and even farming are foreign to the hunter-gatherer people of Abundancia.

On May 9, 1991, Elder and Sister L. Vernon Cook were assigned to serve in Abundancia as Church welfare missionaries to help the Nivaclé develop clean drinking water and learn to cultivate the soil. They described the challenge in a personal reflection paper Elder Cook wrote in May 1992: “We had thought that shouldn’t be too hard, for we had spent the past forty-two years developing irrigation water and putting new land under cultivation. We thought, ‘Let’s get started before dark.’ That afternoon was quite a day for us. Sure enough, there was a chapel at the edge of the road, and there was a trail which was
shown on the survey sheet as a straight road but in reality was a trail that was somewhat straight but very rough in that you had to dodge deep ruts, tree stumps, and roots. What a challenge.” The Cooks’ service in Abundancia was a first step in a long, complicated journey to identify the best, most enduring ways to help the Nivaclé toward material self-reliance.

The physical conditions of that dry land continue to prove daunting obstacles to sustained and successful farming. According to Elder Cook, the average annual rainfall in Abundancia is only about twenty-three inches. Both during the tenure of the Cooks’ service and later, much has been done to seek to provide the community of Abundancia with water, but the problem continues to prove elusive. A basic system of collecting rain from roofs is impossible in a community where there are nearly no roofs. Commercial pumps have been difficult to maintain because of the minerals and salt in the well water. The quest for a dependable source of water continues to be paramount.

**Abundancia and the Asunción Paraguay Temple**

Elder and Sister Cook brought their vision and expertise to the people of Abundancia as well as their lasting love, a commitment that would eventually bless the lives of the Nivaclé Saints in an unanticipated way. Reflecting on their early service in Abundancia, the couple later wrote: “There we were, and they didn’t need our soil probe, plastic bags, etc., but what they needed was our love. Looking back, I must say, that element of love has set deep, both our love for them and theirs for us.”

A decade later, Elder and Sister Cook were called to serve in the Asunción Paraguay Temple. Their persistent love for the people of Abundancia motivated them to seek ways to bring those faithful Saints to the temple to receive their endowments. Prompted by the encouragement of Elder and Sister Cook, the district president has been accompanying worthy members and families on trips to the temple, a few at a time each week, in a bus provided for by budget funds. Because few Nivaclé people read and because they have only the Gospel Essentials manual published in their native language, the Nivaclé have no need for extensive purchase of printed materials. They also have no interest in regular branch social events, so the district president has elected to commit some of their budget allowance, accrued from nearly 100 percent sacrament meeting attendance every week, to temple trips for first endowments.
The Abundancia School

Among the triumphs during the Cooks’ missionary service was the opening of a small school in March 1992, the first month of the school year in the Southern Hemisphere. Initially, the children shared the space for their academic instruction with Church services in the meetinghouse. With the completion of a beautiful new chapel, 161 Nivaclé children, ages five through twenty-five, have had exclusive use of the old church building remodeled to serve as their school. The government of Paraguay sends pioneering young teachers to instruct the students and live in the dormitory built by the Church. In the context of the sparse Chaco, the school complex is famous. Other Nivaclé students walk or ride their bicycles up to eight kilometers daily to benefit from the well-organized program that includes the distinction of offering classes up to the ninth grade.

On my visit to Abundancia in February 2004, I admired both imported and Nivaclé workers putting the finishing touches on the refurbished church building with recycled windows, reused lumber, and discarded fixtures brought from other church buildings in Paraguay. Javier Vitale, the Church’s Paraguay Country Service Center manager, had committed his remarkable vision and expertise to providing worthy, functional facilities for the children. Everything looked promising, but
I was struck by the conspicuous absence of desks and chairs. Consistent with Southern Hemisphere calendaring, classes were scheduled to begin the following Monday, with the humble expectation that the students would simply sit on the floor. Furniture was promptly assembled from other locations and delivered to Abundancia to enable the grateful students to begin their school year seated at desks.

Later that Monday, I wandered down the single dirt road lined on either side with multigenerational residents of Abundancia and their assorted shelters. I stopped to visit with a bevy of smiling, shy, teenaged young women who were sitting shoulder to shoulder on a rusty picnic table in the dusty summer heat with their bare feet resting on the bench. They had been watching me with sidelong looks, evidencing friendly curiosity. With the help of one of the few Abundancia residents who spoke Spanish, I sought to engage those pretty, giggling girls in conversation. After years of both formal and informal association with young women, I felt immediately close to those young women, who were in so many ways like all others. Their beaded necklaces, donated Old Navy t-shirts, and girlish whispering were familiar, but the translation from my imperfect Spanish to a Nivaclé interpreter’s imperfect Spanish to their exclusive language of Nivaclé created a gap between us. Nevertheless, I sought to supplement our connection with the nonverbal help of eye contact and a smile and proceeded to trust my earnest interpreter to provide us a linguistic bridge. I learned that the young women had come from Mistolar, the parent community of Abundancia, to stay in Abundancia Monday through Friday to benefit from the unique ninth-grade class offered at the new school.

I began, “What do you like most about school?” Having previously spoken with the engaging young teachers who were already on location and moving into the dormitory from Asunción, I had been assured that all the students liked school. “Why wouldn’t they?” those teachers asked me. “They are learning.” The students likely didn’t understand the potential ramifications of their educational opportunities, but their lack of discipline problems and eager interest in learning revealed a desire to be in class.

The shy young women avoided my eye contact and exchanged glances and giggles. I suspect they expected and probably hoped I would go away and allow them to observe me from afar, but I outlasted them. I was eager to learn from their response. The bravest among them, as a spokesperson for the group, finally offered a single, certain answer in a voice that was quiet but confident: “Spanish.” Perhaps that reluctant spokesperson revealed in her sure answer her own sense that learning Spanish may be, for her and for others like her, a key to the future.

For the young people who function as the first bridges to new cul-
tures, there is always the profound challenge to embrace a new, dominant language and culture without parting entirely with the old. Young people like her are in a difficult position that requires extraordinary balance and flexibility to enable them to welcome a new way of speaking and living without losing the precious expressions and traditions of the past.

“Who Is My Neighbor?”—Abundancia as a Community

An unusually tall Nivaclé man with a welcoming grin beckoned me next door to chat with his family group, who were seated in a casual circle outside their home on assorted second-hand aluminum lawn chairs and small blankets spread on the dirt. His wife was meticulously spinning fiber from local cactus into thread and then weaving the scratchy fibers on a handmade loom into intricate patterns in baskets and small bags. The determination and ability of women to create beauty seem to be persistent and universal. Her husband had lived for a season in Argentina in an attempt to earn money for his family and had learned some Spanish. He was eager to practice. Besides the children of all ages who were surrounding us, the family includes an older son who served a mission in Uruguay and is now working on a neighboring farm to help provide for the family. When I asked the father how many children they had, he
was slow to answer. Trying to be more specific, I pointed to the amused young faces encircling us and asked which were his sons and daughters. He was slow to distinguish his family from the rest.

The district president, and later Nelson Dibble, the CES director for Paraguay and a thoughtful student of the community of Abundancia, explained to me that the Nivaclé concept of family is very inclusive. They care for each other—literally. As a close community, they all belong to each other. It’s not that their ability to do arithmetic is halting, but they seem to think in terms of geometry rather than arithmetic. Their notion of a family is not a family line but rather a community circle with everyone having a space within. If a baby cries, the nearest nursing mother feeds the baby; if a child needs disciplining, the nearest attentive parent offers the correction. The residents of Abundancia don’t seem to engage in any self-scrutiny regarding “Who is my neighbor?” They tend whoever needs tending with no apparent regard for whether that person appears on their home teaching list as a formal assignment.

**Convergence of the Past, the Present, and the Future**

Among the few residents of the community fluent in Spanish is the young district president, Crescencio Lopez, one of five recently returned missionaries in Abundancia. President Lopez spoke almost no Spanish before his service in the Paraguay Asunción Mission. The father of President Lopez was among the original converts with Walter Flores. The family lived in Mistolar until the time of the flooding. At age five, President Lopez moved with his family of four brothers and two sisters to settle and remain in the newer community of Abundancia. President Lopez will complete his ninth grade and final year at the Abundancia school this year.

When I asked President Lopez if it had been difficult to return to Abundancia after his mission, he hesitated and looked at me with a puzzled expression. Assuming I had asked the question poorly, I rephrased it and tried again, “After you had lived two years with things like electricity and running water and box springs and mattresses, was it hard to leave those conveniences?” He understood linguistically but not emotionally. “Sister,” he patiently responded, “when missionaries complete their service, they are happy and eager to return home. Abundancia is my home.”

My next question was obvious. “President, what do you especially love about Abundancia?” I could hardly write quickly enough to record his enthusiastic response. “We have a church and a school. I want to teach in that school. My parents, my family, my people live here. Most of the children who are born here live here their whole lives. Our life is peaceful.” Having affirmed enthusiastically his affection for Abundancia
as it has been for years, President Lopez proceeded to express something of the complicated tension that inevitably exists between preserving the status quo and embracing growth, which implies change.

He continued in another vein: “Our community is becoming more beautiful still. We have a health center now, with a member of our group who has traveled to Asunción to study medicine. The Church has built for us a bakery and taught us to bake bread. Others come to Abundancia to buy our bread and to enjoy our beautiful new buildings.”

The President proudly took me to tour the bakery recently com-

![Recently trained Nivaclé bakers at the Church-owned bakery in Abundancia.](image)

pleted as a Church Humanitarian Service project. I opened the door adjacent to the bright plaque that read “Servicios Humanitarios Proyecto No. 20031178” to find a calm Nivaclé man patiently awaiting the arrival of local residents and occasional customers who would wander in from surrounding villages. The bakery is an impressive curiosity and attracts, via word of mouth through the Chaco, interested and hungry neighbors. That young man carefully accepts Paraguayan coins in exchange for baguettes cut into six-inch segments, bagged in plastic, and displayed on metal shelves.

The adjoining room houses a multishelved electrical baking unit with its racks perpetually filled with uniform loaves of French bread. In a third room, newly trained bakers, dressed in white outfits from tall bakers hats
to rubber-soled shoes, all hover over a grand lump of elastic dough and pound it into the proscribed shape. All of them pool their physical resources to pummel that massive lump of promising dough. Formal matters of modern commerce are new considerations for the Nivaclé, who have been hunter-gatherers for generations. Unfamiliar with any concepts of formal commerce, those workers simply wait patiently for more supplies to be delivered when the flour runs out. With no previous experience with business management, they have no understanding of the relationship between profit and expense.

I concluded my February visit to Abundancia where I had begun—in the tidy, tiled office of the district president in the magnificent new meetinghouse. In response to my prompting, President Lopez, that characteristically peaceful Nivaclé leader, offered his final comments regarding his remarkable community. Protected under the glass covering of his simple desk were photos of members of his community in front of the Asunción Temple. President Lopez noted, “They return from the temple happier. Of course we have challenges, but before our people had been to the temple, we suffered more. With the help of the temple endowment, we understand the purpose of life much more fully. Most of these people will likely attend the temple only once in their lives, but it is enough. They accept callings to serve in the Church, and they work at them. They feel happy.” The community of Abundancia is a complicated but promising microcosm of the meeting of the old and the new, the past and the future.

I left the impressive Church building followed by a family of kittens, a few stray dogs, and several constantly curious children. With one last look at that promising edifice, President Vaughn R. Anderson of the Paraguay Asunción North Mission appropriately noted, “This chapel has served as a symbol of godliness.” Like the spires on the church, the Nivaclé of Abundancia will continue to reach heavenward.

Note

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*
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

Sperry Symposium Classics: The Doctrine and Covenants
Edited by Craig K. Manscill

“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
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 enhance understanding of revealed 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.

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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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“...the very creation of the earth and our experience here would be utterly wasted but for the eternal union of families that family history and temple work make possible."