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The Narrow Neck of Land

THE  
RELIGIOUS  
EDUCATOR

PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESTORED GOSPEL

VOL 9 NO 3 • 2008

# The Dangers of Priestcraft

Elder Paul V. Johnson

*"I know that it is crucial that we keep our lives pure so that we can teach the youth of the Church and they can have the truths of the gospel witnessed to their souls through the power of the Spirit."*

THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR • PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESTORED GOSPEL • RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER • BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • VOL 9 NO 3 • 2008

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

PROVO, UTAH

VOLUME 9 NUMBER 3

2008



**ON THE COVER:**

The jagged rocks represent the dangers of priestcraft, while the water symbolizes the purity of our lives.

*“I know that it is crucial that we keep our lives pure so that we can teach the youth of the Church and they can have the truths of the gospel witnessed to their souls through the power of the Spirit.”*

*Elder Paul V. Johnson*

## Editor’s Note

We end 2008 with our annual Church Educational System special issue containing several articles focusing on the upcoming 2008–9 academic year curriculum, the New Testament. This important contribution is facilitated through the efforts of Thomas R. Valletta, who heads the CES committee; Karen Peisley, CES secretary; and Aaron L. West, editor. Additional members of the committee are Brett T. MacDonald, Bruce L. Andreason, Bruce G. Stewart, Douglas J. Geilman, Brian C. Theurer, Carl D. Grossen, Robert E. Lund, Mark D. Ellison, and Paul E. Spackman. We are grateful for their efforts.

We begin this issue with a timely and thoughtful essay that all teachers will want to consider by Elder Paul V. Johnson, “The Dangers of Priestcraft.” Blair G. Van Dyke, Jared M. Halverson, Sidney R. Sandstrom, and Eric-Jon K. Marlowe follow with their insights to a variety of New Testament topics. John Hilton III concludes the CES segment of this issue with his essay, “Helping Students Ask Questions.”

We jump from the world of the New Testament and issues relating to teachers and teaching to former Utah State Representative Jordan Tanner, who tells the story of his effort to make a difference in “Smoking and Health: Showdown on Utah’s Capitol Hill.”

We redirect our attention to the classroom with an important discussion on the internationalization of the Church. This aspect of the Restoration is manifest not only in the increasing number of missions beyond English-speaking nations, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States, and United Kingdom, but also in the internationalization of the Church in those nations. Nick Eastmond’s “Beneath the Surface of Multicultural Issues” will raise some questions that every teacher will want to consider.

We then move to a series of articles on various topics by Clyde L. Livingston, A. Paul King, Casey Paul Griffiths, Stephen J. Fleming, and Andrew H. Hedges. This section is topped off with an interesting interview with H. Curtis Wright, “Evidence of Ancient Writing on Metal.”

Fittingly, we conclude this year-end issue with Donald Q. Cannon’s “Lessons Learned at BYU.” A well-known historian and important BYU professor, Don muses on his university experience at the time of his retirement from the Church History and Doctrine Department in 2007.

We hope 2008 has been a year of blessing to you. Enjoy!

Richard Neitzel Holzzapfel  
Editor

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Elder Paul V. Johnson

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# The Dangers of Priestcraft

*Elder Paul V. Johnson*

*Elder Paul V. Johnson, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, is a former Church Educational System administrator.*

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*This address was given at a Church Educational System conference on August 12, 2002, at Utah Valley State College.*

I want to focus today on some safety training.

Before I went into the mission field, I worked in a manufacturing plant welding farm equipment. They taught us safety in the plant and around the machinery. There were certain safety standards and practices that were observed, which even included what type of footwear we had to use.

I have been in a few mines as a visitor. It is interesting that even visitors receive safety training and are equipped with safety equipment before entering the mine. Modern mines have devices to monitor air quality so that if there is a problem, the miners have some warning and can quickly leave the mine. Before modern monitoring systems were developed, miners used to take canaries down into the mines with them. Canaries are more susceptible to the poisonous gases and would be asphyxiated before the miners were affected. If the canary died, the miners knew to get out of there. It was a type of early warning system.

The goal for safety training in manufacturing and mining and other industries is to eliminate dangerous situations, cut down on accidents, and save lives. I have never really thought of Church education as being a dangerous profession, at least in regard to physical accidents. We do, however, have spiritual dangers.

When Jeffrey R. Holland was the commissioner of education, he gave us a message in which he referred to the care employers in industries take for the safety of their employees: “Our own occupation has unique hazards, if I may call them that; and our employers have some of that same loving concern. I hope that these rather constant reminders that we put before you are not seen as any lack of faith or trust. They are clearly not that. They are, like the signs on the shack where the blasting powder is kept, a reminder. They are always there—for our good—and I suppose they must always be there.”<sup>1</sup>

There are several occupational hazards we face. Some are not specific to our occupation but can affect our employment. For example, failing to keep current on financial obligations can lead to loss of employment in CES.

There are many divorces and marital problems in the world today. In most occupations an employee’s marriage and home life wouldn’t make any difference in whether the employee could keep a job. But because of the importance the Board of Education places on having good role models in the classroom, it does make a difference in CES.

Another hazard could be failing to maintain proper relationships with students. Every year we lose people because they are not careful and haven’t followed counsel. This has been talked about many times, so I won’t spend any time on it today. Just once more, please be careful in your conduct with your students.

Another challenge we have is to maintain doctrinal purity. Commenting on this hazard, Jeffrey R. Holland said:

Brethren and sisters, please be cautious and restrained and totally orthodox in all matters of Church doctrine. This is, as you might suppose, of great concern to the Brethren, our employers in this great work. And while they love us and help and trust us individually and collectively—and they do—they cannot fail to respond to some anxiety expressed by a member of the Church who feels that some inappropriate doctrinal or historical position has been taken in the classroom. It is in light of this rather constant danger always before us . . . that I give you these cautions and reminders. . . .

With this appropriate restraint, what we then teach must be in harmony with the prophets and the holy scriptures. We are not called upon to teach exotic, titillating, or self-serving doctrines. Surely we have our educational hands full effectively communicating the most basic and fundamental principles of salvation. . . . Continue to study for the rest of your life, but use caution and limit your classroom instruction to what the Brethren prescribe. Listen carefully and see what they choose to teach at general conference—and they *are* ordained.<sup>2</sup>

There is another concern we are facing. We are now getting Internet access on our computers at our seminaries, institutes of religion, and administrative sites. Brothers and sisters, as we open this door, we need to be very careful. The Church, not just CES, has a zero-tolerance policy on pornography and Internet use for pornography with Church equipment. You can lose your job in one day. And we just hate to see that happen and hope that you understand how serious this is. As a matter of fact, the filtering system that is used at the present time can generate reports that include every Internet site visited from every CES computer. We hope that you will be very careful. In the future, if you display a personal addiction or pattern of pornography use, whether it involves CES equipment or not, it will result in the loss of your job. This great plague is rampant in the world, but we can’t have it in our ranks. We must have the Spirit when we teach these precious youth. The prophets have warned us of this evil, and we must be examples of cleanliness in this area.

### The Dangers of Priestcraft

There are a number of other hazards that may be unique to our type of occupation, but I would like to focus on only one of these today. It is the danger of priestcraft. I don’t know how much time we have spent in the past on training in this area—not much under that title.

There are particular pitfalls with priestcrafts to which we as paid professionals are most susceptible. If we are aware of the dangers, we can more easily avoid them.

What are priestcrafts? Nephi gives us a very succinct and helpful definition: “He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion” (2 Nephi 26:29).

Nephi explained that they “set themselves up for a light unto the world” in order to “get gain” or to get “praise,” and they do not “seek . . . the welfare of Zion.” There are various manifestations of priestcraft, including setting up churches or even becoming anti-Christ, as we see in the Book of Mormon. But let’s focus on manifestations that we are more likely to see in our profession as CES educators. These are probably a lot more subtle than cases like Nehor or Korihor, but they still fit under the definition of priestcraft as given by Nephi, and they will damage the work. They will damage our students. They will damage us.

## Getting Gain

From Nephi's definition we see that setting oneself as a light seems to be central to the problem of priestcraft. The reasons for setting oneself up as a light include getting gain and praise. Let's look a little bit closer at each of these areas. A few weeks ago, I had a conversation with a man who said he had a brother who taught in CES for a few years and then left the system. He could never reconcile in his mind that he was teaching the gospel for money. This man asked me how I reconcile it in my mind. It is a great question. How do we reconcile that? Most of us have probably contemplated it, probably before we were hired and I suspect many times since then.

Elder Spencer W. Kimball, who was then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, gave the best explanation I have heard: "I want our youth never to be taught by mercenaries. Should any of you be teaching in this program merely as an occupation, almost wholly for the compensation, then I hope you will be assigned to one of the other areas. But if your salary is incidental and your grand and magnificent obsession is our children and their growth and development, then I hope you will be teaching in New York and Michigan and Wisconsin and Utah where my loved children are."<sup>3</sup>

That is a great key for us. Where is our heart? If it is for the welfare of Zion and its youth, I think we are in good shape.

The desire to get gain can be manifest in our regular duties and our salary. It can also be manifest with outside related interests such as publishing or continuing education. I ask a question: Can a person receive a salary in CES and not be involved in priestcraft? Yes, definitely. Can a person publish, get paid for continuing education, or take advantage of other opportunities and not be involved in priestcraft? Yes, they can. It is a matter of the heart. What is the motivation? What President Kimball said is a key in this area. When our hearts are set on money, it clouds our view and leads to bad decisions.

## Praise of the World

Nephi tells us that, besides getting gain, people set themselves as a light for the praise of the world. Some teachers have a strong desire for praise. In order to obtain that praise, they might begin to set themselves up as a light. When people look to them as a light, they are willing to give the praise they desire. This may increase their desire for more praise, and the cycle continues. It becomes dangerous because it can lead to teachers changing the doctrine or teaching things that

shouldn't be taught or using teaching methods that shouldn't be used in order to appear as a light.

In 1987, Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

Be careful, be aware, be wise when people speak well of you. When people treat you with great respect and love, be careful, be aware, be wise. When you are honored, pointed out, and recognized, it can be a cross, especially if you believe what is said about you. . . .

Praise of the world can be a heavy cross. How often I have heard it said over the years, "He was great until he became successful, and then he couldn't handle it." I'm not talking about money and position. I'm talking about recognition, even in Church responsibilities. . . .

I would pray that we would avoid being carried away by praise, success, or even achieving goals that we have set for ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

We are in an occupation that many times brings praise and adulation. It can come from students, from parents, from priesthood leaders, from other teachers, and even from the Brethren. But, as Elder Ashton said, we need to be careful, aware, and wise.

The First Presidency, in a letter to stake presidents and bishops in 1952, referred to the harmful effect notoriety can have on new converts: "Too much attention and commendation frequently have a tendency to dull the edge of the faith and works that carry us to the exaltation we all seek."<sup>5</sup>

I think the principle applies to anyone who receives too much attention and commendation. In our endeavor, we can receive a lot of commendation and a lot of praise. If that becomes our goal or if we become intoxicated by it, we begin to set ourselves up as a light.

## The Words of the Brethren

The Brethren through the years have addressed the danger of setting ourselves up as a light. Let's review a few of their comments. In 1992, Elder Dallin H. Oaks said:

Another illustration of a strength that can become our downfall concerns the charismatic teacher. With a trained mind and a skillful manner of presentation, a teacher can become unusually popular and effective in teaching. But Satan will try to use that strength to corrupt the teacher by encouraging him or her to gather a following of disciples. A Church or Church education teacher or LDS university professor who gathers such a following and does this "for the sake of riches and honor" (Alma 1:16) is guilty of priestcraft.

“Priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion” (2 Nephi 26:29).

Teachers who are most popular—and therefore most effective—have a special susceptibility to this form of priestcraft. If they are not careful, their strength can become their spiritual downfall. They can become like Almon Babbitt, with whom the Lord was not well pleased because, as the revelation states, “He aspieth to establish his counsel instead of the counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church; and he setteth up a golden calf for the worship of my people” (D&C 124:84).<sup>6</sup>

In 1989 in the Assembly Hall, President Howard W. Hunter, who was then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, addressed us at our annual Evening with a General Authority. He said:

Let me give a word of caution to you. I am sure you recognize the potential danger of being so influential and so persuasive that your students build an allegiance to you rather than to the gospel. Now that is a wonderful problem to have to wrestle with, and we would only hope that all of you are such charismatic teachers. But there is a genuine danger here. That is why you have to invite your students into the scriptures themselves, not just give them your interpretation and presentation of them. That is why you must invite your students to feel the Spirit of the Lord, not just give them your personal reflection of that. That is why, ultimately, you must invite your students directly to Christ, not just to one who teaches his doctrines, however ably. You will not always be available to these students. You cannot hold their hands after they have left high school or college. And you do not need personal disciples. . . .

Please make sure the loyalty of these students is to the scriptures and the Lord and the doctrines of the restored Church. Point them toward God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and toward the leadership of the true Church. Make certain that when the glamour and charisma of your personality and lectures and classroom environment are gone that they are not left empty-handed to face the world. Give them the gifts that will carry them through when they have to stand alone. When you do this, the entire Church is blessed for generations to come. . . .

Let me offer a word of caution on [the subject of teaching with the Spirit]. I think if we are not careful as professional teachers working in the classroom every day, we may begin to try to counterfeit the true influence of the Spirit of the Lord by unworthy and manipulative means. I get concerned when it appears that strong emotion or free-flowing tears are equated with the presence of the Spirit. Certainly the Spirit of the Lord can bring strong emotional feelings, including tears, but that outward manifestation ought not to be confused with the presence of the Spirit itself.<sup>7</sup>

In our Evening with a General Authority last February, Elder Robert D. Hales spoke to us. You will remember his words:

Each of you who teach seminary and institute has the desire of the heart to be an angel. This is good, but it is a great temptation to play the part of the Pied Piper and to figure that you’re going to gather them all around you and love them into a testimony; or to feel that if you can become very popular, you can lead and be the role model and make a difference in the lives of your students. . . .

There is nothing more dangerous than when a student turns his or her love and attention to the teacher the same way a convert sometimes does to a missionary rather than to the Lord. And then if the teacher or missionary leaves or conducts his life contrary to the teachings of the gospel, the student is devastated. His testimony falters. His faith is destroyed. The really great teacher is careful to have the students turn themselves to the Lord.

Once we have touched the lives of the youth, we have to turn them to God the Father and His Son, our Redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ, through prayer, study, and the application in their lives of the gospel principles.<sup>8</sup>

In April conference of 1997, Elder Henry B. Eyring said, “One of the ways we may know that the warning is from the Lord is that the law of witnesses, authorized witnesses, has been invoked. When the words of prophets seem repetitive, that should rivet our attention and fill our hearts with gratitude to live in such a blessed time.”<sup>9</sup> We have just reviewed one of those repeated warnings from the Brethren given specifically to us.

### Recognizing the Signs

One of the challenges in recognizing and avoiding priestcraft is that it is a matter of the heart. It is like pride. In fact, pride is the root of the problem. If there is an accident in a manufacturing plant, usually there are visible signs, such as blood or hysteria. Most people immediately recognize that there has been an accident. But it is not that way with injuries of the heart. We need to be more sensitive in order to recognize the early signs of spiritual problems.

These signs may be a little like the canaries they used to take into the mines. If you were mining and saw that the canary looked really woozy, I guess you could take two approaches. One would be to leave immediately. The other would be to assume the canary had the flu. That second approach could be fatal to a miner. The same type of approach in our occupation could also be dangerous.



It might be useful to think about the following symptoms and review our own behaviors and what happens in our classrooms. These symptoms wouldn't be conclusive proof—they are just symptoms. But it could be that the canary really has more than just the flu.

- In relation to gathering a following, one of the symptoms is that we base our self-worth on praise from others for our lessons or talks. As I noted before, this is dangerous ground to be on because the accolades become the touchstone and then we can compromise ourselves in what we teach or how we teach it so that we can get more accolades.
- Another symptom is that we feel there would be a huge hole in CES if they changed our assignment; we feel a little irreplaceable. Even if this were true, it might be better to allow those who make the changes to worry about that. If you really are irreplaceable, I'll bet they know about it already.
- Sometimes our students may get to the point where they refuse to take seminary or institute unless they can get one particular teacher.
- Sometimes the numbers in some teachers' classes are unbalanced with the rest of the faculty. We can even get focused on the competition of having more students than the other teachers in the building.
- Sometimes a teacher may actually get a following of other teachers in a faculty or in an area. People might even have a stronger allegiance to that teacher than to their appointed leaders.
- There may be an unusual number of demands to speak or teach different groups.

I'm sure there are other symptoms of a teacher gathering a following that you might want to ponder.

Let's consider some symptoms of setting ourselves up as a light in the area of knowledge or scholarship.

- Perhaps some of us feel we teach a deeper doctrine—more pure and plain than is found in any curriculum or than what any of the other teachers teach.
- Maybe we have special sources that others don't generally have access to or we have some special study regimen that we feel puts us above the others.
- What if we feel that CES or the Church is not emphasizing a certain doctrine enough, or even that they misunderstand it? In

fact, there have been a few who feel the Brethren don't understand a particular doctrine clearly. When it gets to that point, the canary has dropped over and is not breathing anymore.

- Some of us have gospel hobbies that are taught in all of our classes, no matter what course we are teaching.
- We may feel as if we have to know the answer to every question. We are embarrassed if a student asks us a question and we don't know the answer. We might look to certain General Authorities or CES teachers as the ones with the pure gospel, and discount or put down other General Authorities or other teachers.
- We might teach our own philosophies about the doctrines.
- There might be questions that have arisen from parents or priesthood or CES leaders about some of the things we have been teaching in our classes.
- We might teach our own opinion strongly and try forcefully to sway the students to side with us.
- Another symptom, not directly related to the CES classroom, is establishing ourselves as the expert in our own wards and stakes in gospel matters. If there is ever a difficult question in Gospel Doctrine class, do most of the people look to us for the answer? We may be subtly setting ourselves up as a light.
- Do we feel frustrated with others because they don't seem to understand the gospel as well as we do? In the Book of Mormon there was a time when "the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning" (3 Nephi 6:12). We, as religious educators, probably have greater chances for learning the gospel than anyone in the world. Our employment includes studying and teaching the gospel. We need to be careful not to look down on others who don't have the same opportunity.
- Sometimes in-service presentations can become an unspoken competition about who has done the most in-depth research and come up with points that no one has heard before.
- Sometimes we promote an "insight addiction syndrome," in which the students just have to come to our class because we have the true insights into the gospel. One of the dangers with that, whether they are emotional insights or scholarly insights, is that the insight becomes an end in itself. It doesn't necessarily translate into living the gospel.

- We may become a so-called expert in a certain area of the gospel and may chafe at the policy of teaching different courses in institute.
- We can get so focused on publishing or other scholarship that our own pursuit of knowledge takes priority over the students and over our teaching.

Now let's take a look at a few symptoms where we may be setting ourselves up as a light in an emotional or spiritual sense.

- We may become dependent on finding strong emotional stories to use in our classes, or we may use stories that focus unduly on ourselves and on our personal lives.
- We may stretch stories so that they are not totally true.
- We may be very free with how often we tell the students the Spirit "told me to do" something. Or, as President Hunter mentioned, we may manipulate emotions and label it as the Spirit.
- We may become too involved with personal counseling with students.

### The Results

So if there are priestcrafts in our system, what are the results? I think the great danger is that we don't have power in our teaching. Or our teaching may be powerful, but it may not be the power of God (see D&C 50:13–23). Maybe it is emotionally powerful, or scholastically powerful, but it doesn't help with the lasting changes that need to happen in a student's life. And as you know, the Brethren have asked us to take a hard look at how we can get the scriptures and gospel knowledge from the head to the heart so that our students will do the right things in their lives.

We can also teach a wrong message if we are involved in priestcraft. The students might worship the teachers but not get the true connections with the gospel doctrine. It is like a father who forcefully teaches his children about honesty but cheats on his taxes. The words are there, but the power isn't there. A student may not realize exactly what is going on, but something doesn't click. It doesn't click because the Spirit isn't there like it could be there.

What if teachers can remain free of priestcraft? Well, then we have a powerful situation. They can teach the doctrine and the gospel simply and unadorned, and they can teach with the Spirit. In fact, if we can't teach with the Spirit, we can't accomplish what we have been asked to

do. The only way to learn spiritual things is by the Spirit. It is the only way our students can have the power to live the gospel in these latter days.

If our teachers are free of priestcraft, the students will love them, but they won't be dependent on them. They will love you, and they will be grateful for what you taught them, but they will be turned to the Lord. They will be turned to their parents and their priesthood leaders. There will be miracles in the lives of the students, and we will be able to witness them. We can do it.

Priestcraft is an occupational hazard. It can affect us, but it doesn't have to if we are careful and humble. We can do the right things. We can have powerful classrooms because we have great people—you. You have great attitudes. You work hard. You have allowed the Lord to be a powerful influence on so many. I am grateful for the teachers I have had in Church education.

Recently I was involved in a question and answer session with some employees. One person made a comment to the effect that sometimes it seems the administration uses a shotgun when it should use a rifle. In other words, we may have a concern with a few people and instead of talking directly to those few people we take a shotgun to everyone in the system. Please know I intentionally wanted to talk with all our full-time employees about this topic. It is aimed at all of us. It is for me, for the zone administrators, and for every teacher in the system. It would be a mistake to make a little list in your mind of people you hope are listening very carefully to this message. Each of us faces this particular occupational hazard.

Since priestcraft is a matter of the heart, it is best battled and eradicated at a personal level. It is so much better to be self-regulating in these matters before they cause concern for priesthood leaders and supervisors. It is a matter that we must watch closely in our lives. It has a tendency to creep in if we are not diligent.

As we regularly reflect upon the dangers associated with our profession, we must continually think of the students. To quote Jeffrey R. Holland once again: "For your sake and theirs, go carefully and modestly and cautiously amidst the hazards. We thank you for letting us nail this sign to the wall of the powder shed one more time. We will undoubtedly do it again for your safety and ours."<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

I want to conclude with a scripture from the New Testament. The Apostle Paul is reviewing with the Thessalonians how he taught them

the gospel. I think this is a beautiful example of a teacher who is not infected with priestcraft. As we read through this, I would like you to notice what Paul did, what he didn't do (especially in light of the priestcraft concept), why he did it, and what the results were:

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

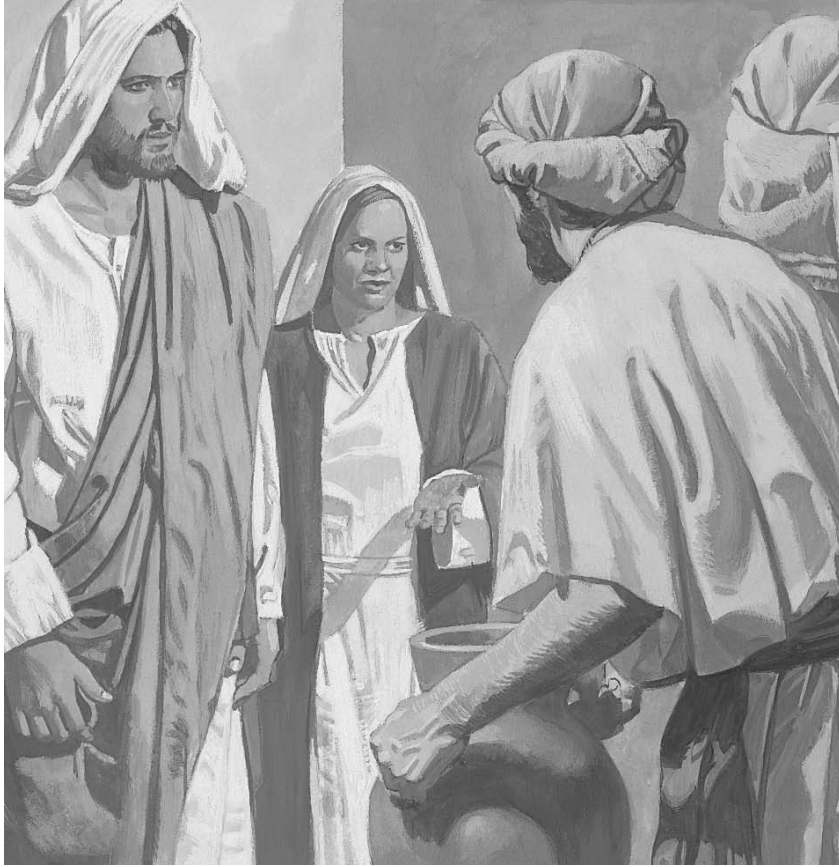
For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:3–13)

I know the gospel is true. I know that we are involved in a very important work. I know that it is crucial that we keep our lives pure so that we can teach the youth of the Church and they can have the truths of the gospel witnessed to their souls through the power of the Spirit.

I know that President Gordon B. Hinckley is a prophet and that the scriptures are the word of God. It is a great privilege we have to teach from the scriptures and the words of the prophets. I pray for you good teachers. I express my gratitude for all you do. I am grateful for your spouses too. I am grateful for my wife, Jill, and am so glad to have her with me. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

## Notes

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Pitfalls and Powder Sheds," *The Growing Edge*, November 1978, 1.
2. Holland, "Pitfalls," 1.
3. Spencer W. Kimball, "What I Hope You Will Teach My Grandchildren and All Others of the Youth of Zion," address to religious educators, Brigham Young University, July 11, 1966, 8.
4. Marvin J. Ashton, "Carry Your Cross," in *Brigham Young University 1986–87 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1987), 141.
5. First Presidency Statement, June 30, 1952, 4.
6. Dallin H. Oaks, "Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall," *Brigham Young University 1991–92 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1992), 111.
7. Howard W. Hunter, "Eternal Investments," address to religious educators, February 10, 1989, 2–4.
8. Robert D. Hales, "Teaching by Faith," address to religious educators, February 1, 2002, 7.
9. Henry B. Eyring, in Conference Report, April 1997, 32.
10. Holland, "Pitfalls," 1.



The miracle of turning the water to wine demonstrates that Christ has power to alter substance.

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# Miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of John

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The opening lines of the Gospel of John introduce Jesus Christ as the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The phrase “in the beginning” echoes Genesis 1:1, suggesting John’s intent to depict the power of Jesus Christ by hearkening back to the omnipotence of the Creator of the world. On the surface, the title or name “Word” suggests divine communication. To be sure, Christ is the means through which the will of the Father is communicated.<sup>1</sup> From John’s perspective, then, he is introducing Jehovah of the Old Testament—a being of such power, might, and dominion that words cannot fully capture His magnificence. Furthermore, John writes, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). That is to say, Jehovah was born as Jesus Christ and grew to adulthood possessing all of His power in the flesh. In essence, John’s Gospel is centered on the omnipotence of Jesus Christ.

John’s Gospel has been reasonably viewed as a two-part document. Chapters 2–11 are frequently referred to as the “Book of Signs” and treat the public ministry of the Master as He traveled to and from Galilee and Judea performing miracles, teaching, and publicly engaging His adversaries.<sup>2</sup> Chapters 12–20 are sometimes called the “Book of Glory” and capture the private ministry of Jesus as He taught His disciples in closed settings and progressed toward the atoning sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> The focus

of this article will rest upon the miracles found in the first section of the Gospel of John.

Beginning with Jesus turning water to wine (John 2) and ending with Him raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11), John the Beloved leads his readers through a series of seven miracles performed by Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Since John's Gospel is generally understood to have been directed toward an audience that already believed that Jesus is the Christ, we may reasonably conclude that the purpose of these seven miracles (commonly referred to as signs of power) is to deepen faith in Christ.<sup>5</sup> This article will explore each of these miracles, hoping to elicit a clearer understanding and richer appreciation of how sharply John's Gospel focuses on the divine power of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

### Water to Wine

A wedding feast was held at Cana of Galilee, and Jesus was invited to attend with His disciples. During the course of the celebration, the wine supply ran out. Mary approached her son Jesus and said, "They have no wine" (John 2:3). He answered, "Woman, what wilt thou have me to do for thee? that will I do; for mine hour is not yet come" (Joseph Smith Translation, John 2:4).<sup>7</sup> In essence, He said, "Mother, this matter is not my concern. Nevertheless, your faith is such that I will fulfill your request even though the time that I will completely reveal my divinity has not yet come."<sup>8</sup> Jesus directed the servants to fill six large stone waterpots with water. Each large pot was ritually cleaned and held approximately eighteen to twenty-seven gallons apiece (see John 2:6).<sup>9</sup> Each pot was filled "to the brim" (John 2:7). Jesus then commanded the servants to "draw out" some of the contents of the jars and serve it to the governor of the feast (see John 2:8). At some point between the filling and the drawing out of the jars, the Savior miraculously changed the water to wine of high quality, which was acknowledged by the governor (see John 2:10).<sup>10</sup>

John refers to this sign of power as the "beginning of miracles" (John 2:11). However, it was performed in private and witnessed only by the servants and the disciples. One of the Savior's intentions seems clear: He desired to manifest His glory and bring His disciples to a deeper belief in His divinity through this glorious act (see John 2:11). The fact that Jesus performed this miracle almost exclusively for the benefit of His disciples beckons the question, what would He have them learn from the experience? We cannot know the answer to this question for certain; however, two basic elements of this miracle deserve further consideration.

First, we learn that Jesus has power to alter substance. We trust that if He can turn water to wine, He can also turn wood to stone and stone to liquid all in an instant to fulfill His purposes. While Jesus is subject to natural laws, He is not limited by the chemical and physical boundaries as they are perceived and described by mere mortals.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps John is also showing that Jesus has power over time. The process of making wine takes years—one must plant a vine, nourish it to a point where it bears fruit, harvest the fruit, crush and press it, and gather and store the juice. But Jesus is not limited by time as we understand it in mortality (see D&C 38:2) and possesses the power to create wine instantaneously.<sup>12</sup>

This sign of God's power has ramifications that are more personal in nature. For example, Christ's power to alter substance makes His ability to heal the human body an immediate reality. Similarly, healing an emotional wound, easing remaining ache over sins that have been repented of or pain associated with a broken family—these disappointments and others that might require years from which to recover can be healed with far greater expediency, even an instant, if Jesus Christ deemed it so.

Among other things, this miracle manifests that Jesus possessed power over substance and time. Acknowledging this power and its relationship to significant doctrines such as Christ as Creator and Redeemer may lead to greater and deeper faith in the Messiah and His role in our lives.

### Healing the Nobleman's Son

Following the first Passover feast of His public ministry, Jesus returned to Galilee from Jerusalem, stopping in Cana, where He previously turned water to wine. There He encountered a nobleman whose son was sick to the point of death at Capernaum, about twenty miles away.<sup>13</sup> The meeting between the nobleman and Jesus was not happenstance. The prominent man heard that Jesus was back in the region and actively sought Him out, finally finding Him at Cana (see John 4:47). Despite this effort, Jesus deemed it necessary to test the man's faith. He said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48). The nobleman was not fazed by the challenge; instead he more fervently submitted his faith in the power of Jesus to heal his son. He urgently pled, "Sir, come down ere my child die" (John 4:49). Jesus rewarded the man's faith by healing the child at that moment, saying, "Go thy way; thy son liveth" (John 4:50).

The nobleman's faith was explicit; he "believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way" (John 4:50). One gets the impression that he took his time returning to Capernaum, possibly taking care of business or other interests on the way (see John 4:50–51).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, his servants met him the next day to notify him that the dying child had been healed. When the nobleman inquired after the time of the healing, he was informed that it occurred at the precise moment that Jesus proclaimed, "Thy son liveth" (John 4:53). John then added, "This is again the second miracle that Jesus did" (John 4:54).

One compelling lesson is that Jesus was not limited by geographic distances. It was not necessary for Him to travel to Capernaum. His word was efficacious regardless of physical location. This power is particularly comforting since unknown distances exist between mortals on earth and God in heaven. Even so, our prayers are heard, gains and losses acknowledged, and priesthood blessings honored as though He were present with us. This miracle verifies that Christ's physical location is not the fulcrum upon which the power of God rests in our lives—our faith in Christ is.

#### **"An Infirmity Thirty and Eight Years"**

Near the temple at Jerusalem there was a pool with five porches that was called Bethesda. The porches were shaded by covered colonnades and accommodated "a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, [and] withered" (John 5:3).<sup>15</sup> A tradition of the day claimed that the waters in the pool possessed curative powers. Specifically, the tradition stated that an unseen angel went to the pool at certain times and stirred the water. The invalid that was first to enter the water after it was moved by the angel would be healed of whatever malady he suffered (see John 5:4).

While in Jerusalem for a feast, Jesus came to the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. There He encountered a man laid out on one of the porches "which had an infirmity thirty and eight years" (John 5:5). John's narrative suggests that he suffered from paralysis of some kind that made it impossible for him to reach the waters of the pool without assistance. The connotation is that the malady may have been the result of sinful behavior committed earlier in his life (see John 5:14). Whatever the case, Jesus looked upon the man and said, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5:6). The invalid said, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me" (John 5:7). At that moment Jesus

proclaimed, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk" (John 5:8). Immediately, strength surged into his body sufficient to allow him to gather up his mat and walk after almost four decades of infirmity. This miraculous sign of power caught the attention of all present and soon thereafter garnered the ire of the Jewish religious leaders.

While this miracle negated disease, stirred Jesus's enemies, and likely caused some to believe, it also served a very public purpose of the ministry of Jesus. It invited people to look to Christ and His power rather than to trust in superstition or false traditions of the day. A brief discussion related to the waters of the pool of Bethesda and Sabbath observance will serve to illustrate this purpose.

First, Christ's power dispelled the tradition that waters of the pool possessed miraculous capacities. Before Christ's intervention, this view was accepted by many in Jerusalem—nevertheless, it was false. The waters were as impotent as the man who hoped to be cured by them. Ultimately, yielding to prescribed dictates associated with this tradition could lead only to disappointment. However, in a very public way Christ exercised His power and turned the eyes of the impotent man to the only legitimate source of healing. For believers prone to be persuaded by the claims of this tradition, this miracle nullified any reasonable semblance of efficacy associated with the waters and pointed them instead to the Living Waters, Jesus Christ (see John 7:37–38; Zechariah 13:1).

Second, because this miracle was performed on the Sabbath, Christ's manifestation of power led to a public clarification regarding false traditions associated with appropriate Sabbath observance. The healing and the fact that the man carried his bedroll were both serious breaches of tradition that the religious establishment had elevated to the stature of divine law regarding the Sabbath. More to the point, there were thirty-nine "laws" regulating what could or could not be done on the Sabbath, the last of which prohibited the carrying of a load from one home to another.<sup>16</sup> Under this tradition, the formerly crippled man was condemned. Similarly, these traditions painted Jesus's use of power as an unlawful labor for the Sabbath, and the Jews sought to kill Him (see John 5:16).

When confronted by these prominent religious leaders, Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). Put another way, "God the Father's labors do not cease because it is the Sabbath, and neither do mine." He further explained, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19). The question

posed here is straightforward: does God break the Sabbath when He oversees the rising of the sun, the rotation of the earth, and other conditions essential for sustaining life on His holy day?<sup>17</sup> The answer is obviously no. From this we may conclude that God's rest and therefore our rest on the Sabbath is not a rest from all labor but a rest from worldly pursuits. It is a rest reminiscent of what we may someday experience in the celestial kingdom. Regardless of the day of the week, life is precious, and every effort should be made to sustain it. In the minds of believers, Christ's miracle at Bethesda negated false tradition promoted by the prominent religious leaders of the day.

One aspect of the miracle at the pool of Bethesda illustrates that Jesus possessed power to eclipse and correct a variety of false religious traditions. Regardless of the great multitudes that may embrace them, Jesus consistently moved to publicly expose and dispel false traditions.

### Feeding Five Thousand

At some point after the miracle at Bethesda, Jesus returned to Galilee. The fame of His miraculous powers continued to follow Him in that region (see John 6:2). The throngs of people were so persistent that it became necessary for Jesus to take His disciples to a secluded area on a mountaintop east of the Sea of Galilee that He might instruct them in private. Their privacy was short lived, however, because a multitude of five thousand men (plus women and children) found them. Jesus proposed to feed the throng, but only "five barley loaves, and two small fishes" could be secured from a young boy in the company (John 6:9). It was all the boy had. The food was likely the boy's lunch: the small fishes were probably cured with salt or were pickled.<sup>18</sup> Jesus commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass. He took the meager amount of food, blessed it, and commanded His disciples to serve the fishes and the bread to the throng. When the entire multitude had eaten to their satisfaction, the disciples were commanded to gather the leftover food, which filled twelve baskets. With what began as a meager portion of bread and fishes, Christ fed thousands (see John 6:11–13).

Among other things, this miracle is a sign of Christ's power to multiply. It is reminiscent of the Creation of the earth, wherein anything Jehovah touched was increased, organized, improved upon, and was good (see Genesis 1). It is also reminiscent of the manner in which Jehovah fed Israel manna in the wilderness (see Exodus 16:15). It is significant that leftovers from this sign of power filled twelve baskets. Jesus easily could have multiplied the "exact" amount necessary to feed the throng but chose to multiply an excess of food. From this it

is evident that He wanted to convey at least one principle to His first-century audience that is stated clearly in latter-day revelation: "And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine. . . . For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare" (D&C 104:15, 17).

Ultimately, Jesus Christ is a God of bounty. Examples of Christ's power to multiply abound today. For example, the impact of heartfelt worship on the Sabbath is multiplied in a way that those few hours spent at church result in spiritual growth throughout the week. Blessings associated with paying an honest tithe are multiplied to the point that "there shall not be room enough to receive [them]" (Malachi 3:10). A faithful member's capacity to love is multiplied as he or she serves and teaches, and so forth.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes illustrates that Jesus possessed power to multiply. It highlights the fact that our smallest offerings are significant and may be multiplied beyond our mortal comprehension. Because this is true, we may trust that if we invite Christ into our lives we may humbly expect our spiritual capacities (such as faith, love, trust, willingness to forgive) and, occasionally, temporal interests to be multiplied (see D&C 104:2, 23, 25, 31, 33, 35, 38, 42, 46).

### Walking on the Sea

After Jesus fed the multitude, they rose up to force Him to be their king. He refused their demands and immediately left the throng and His disciples. He retreated to a mountain to be alone. At evening His disciples boarded a ship and rowed toward Capernaum, about five miles away. As they rowed in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, darkness fell across the water and a great wind blew, tossing the ship about in the resulting waves. They rowed through the night, making little progress toward Capernaum (see Mark 6:48). Exhausted and weather-beaten, they looked out over the waves and saw a man walking upon the water. This caused fear to sweep over them because they thought it was a spirit (see Mark 6:49). Their fears increased the closer the man got to the boat. However, it was Jesus who greeted them, saying, "It is I; be not afraid" (John 6:20). With this greeting the disciples immediately received Him into the ship. We learn from Mark that the moment He entered the ship the winds ceased (see Mark 6:51).

This miracle is a sign of Christ's power over the elements. While there is definitely room for other interpretations of this miracle, several Old Testament prophecies stated that the Messiah would have power over elements, with a particular dominion over water. For example, the Psalmist wrote: "Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains;

being girded with power: . . . Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people” (Psalm 65:6–7; see also 89:9). Furthermore, water in antiquity was often used to figuratively depict chaos and instability associated with the fallen world. The great flood of Noah’s day and the waters of the Red Sea that hindered the path of Moses and the Israelites to the promised land are two examples. In this light, Jesus walking on the water suggests that He rose above the chaos and instability of this world and placed it under His feet.

The miracle of walking on water, including calming the sea, illustrates that Christ possessed power over the elements. The raging waves of this world are beneath Him. Nature’s display of power found in thunder, lightning, mighty winds, earthquakes, floods, and so on need not cause undue distress because Christ has overcome the world spiritually and physically and controls the destiny of the earth and can therefore calm “the tumult of the people” (Psalm 65:7; see also John 16:33).<sup>19</sup>

### Healing the Man Blind since Birth

In the fall, approximately six months before Jesus’s death and Resurrection, He traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of Tabernacles. There, on a Sabbath day, Jesus encountered a man who was blind from his birth. His disciples asked, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:2–3). This man had experienced only darkness since birth. In response to the man’s condition, Jesus spat on the dusty ground and created a small amount of mud with which He anointed the eyes of the blind man. Next Jesus commanded him to go to the pool of Siloam (Shiloh) and wash the clay from his eyes. When the blind man washed the clay from his eyes, he came forth seeing (see John 9:1–7). Christ brought him from darkness into light.<sup>20</sup>

We can draw multiple meanings from this miracle. Among them is Christ’s power over the physical body. This sign of power was different from the healing of the impotent man who suffered for thirty-eight years. In that circumstance, Jesus brought the man to a condition of health he previously enjoyed (see John 5:14). In the case of the man born blind, it seems reasonable to conclude that a new creation was essential. The miracle likely necessitated the creation of cells, tissues,

and nerves that were either present but had never functioned or were altogether absent due to birth defects.

It is also significant that Jesus commanded the man to go to the pool of Siloam to wash the clay from his eyes. The word *Siloam* in Hebrew is rendered *Shiloh* and is one of the ancient titles of Jehovah (see Genesis 49:10). The word means “a messenger sent forth with authority.”<sup>21</sup> In the end, the blind man was able to see only after he submitted his will to Christ, the authorized messenger sent from the presence of God.

The miracle of healing the man who was blind since birth indicates that Christ possessed power over the physical body. To be sure, each of us lives with some physical defect, perhaps even since birth. Furthermore, we are all in decline growing physically older and weaker by the moment. Of course, the process of mortality will end where Job proclaimed it would end—with worms destroying our flesh (see Job 19:25–26). These sobering facts beckon us to look at the account of the man born blind more carefully. If Jesus has power to re-create his useless eyes to make them whole, we may rest assured that He has power to restore our physical bodies from conditions of decline and decay to conditions of wholeness in this life and the next.

### Raising Lazarus from the Dead

It was the Sabbath when Jesus healed the man who was blind since birth. As had happened before, this healing on the Sabbath raised the ire of religious leaders to a fevered pitch. Additionally, Jesus taught plainly on this occasion that He was the Son of God. Ultimately, there was a call for His life among the leading Jews for uttering such “blasphemy” (John 10:33).

The danger was real, and Jesus took His disciples out of Jerusalem. They traveled eastward to Perea beyond the Jordan River where John the Baptist had ministered. They stayed there for some time teaching many who gathered to Him (see John 10:31, 40–41). While in Perea, Jesus received word from Martha and Mary that Lazarus, their brother and Jesus’s close friend, was sick at Bethany (see John 11:3). Jesus waited two days and then announced to His disciples that they must return to Judea. They responded in disbelief: “Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?” (John 11:8). “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11:14).

They traveled to Bethany, where Jesus would perform the seventh miracle in the Book of Signs. Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, made their home in Bethany on the eastern slope of the



Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. Martha met Jesus and His disciples as they approached the village. There she exclaimed, “If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee” (John 11:21–22). Martha notified Mary of the Master’s arrival. When Mary stepped into the company of Jesus, she fell at His feet and cried out, “If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:32). Obviously, Mary and Martha possessed deep faith in Christ’s power to heal the sick. However, by this time, the body of Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. It seems apparent that while Mary and Martha exercised mighty faith in Jesus, they saw no way that the death of their brother could be reversed. Alfred Edersheim notes a common belief among the Jews of the day that the spirit of the deceased lingered near the body for three days. On the fourth day, “the drop of gall, which had fallen from the sword of the Angel and caused death, was then working its effect, and that, as the face changed, the soul took its final leave from the resting-place of the body.”<sup>22</sup> Even so, Jesus asked to be directed to the place of burial. Once there, He commanded that the stone covering the entrance to the tomb be removed. Martha warned that the decaying body of Lazarus would likely stink, but Jesus was not swayed (see John 11:39). The stone was moved, and after Jesus prayed He “cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43). The spirit of Lazarus returned to his body, “and he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44).

As related by John, the purpose of this sign of power was at least twofold. First, it deepened the faith and belief in Christ held by the disciples (see John 11:15, 45). Second, this miracle allowed the disciples to see the glory of God through Jesus’s power over death (see John 11:40). Furthermore, it is interesting that the name Lazarus means “helped of God.” This sign communicated our outright dependence upon Christ. He alone is our sole source of lasting help when facing death.

It is significant to note that Lazarus was not resurrected. He was still mortal and would eventually die again. Perhaps this is why John carefully described Lazarus exiting the tomb wrapped in His burial clothing. Literally, this image communicates that Lazarus was actually dead and properly buried. Figuratively, it conveys to the reader that he was not leaving death behind permanently but would one day be dressed in grave clothes a second time. In contrast, when Christ was resurrected, John carefully describes how Jesus’s burial clothes were

left in the tomb, never to be worn again since He had conquered death (see John 20:6–8).<sup>23</sup>

This miracle shows that Christ possessed power over death. Earlier, He brought light to the world of the man born blind. In the case of Lazarus, He brought life to a dead man. Taken together, Jesus is the light and the life of the world.<sup>24</sup> Because Lazarus was raised from the dead, we know more securely that death (as well as life) is part of the stewardship of Christ. Passing out of this life and into the next is not a random action dictated by statistical probability. Quite the opposite—we can establish deeper faith through experiences with death, and we may detect the glory of God couched in the encounter as well.

Finally, the words of Jesus to Martha on this occasion, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26), indicate that Jesus had power not only to raise Lazarus from the dead in an instant but also to resurrect him for eternity. This miracle serves as the pinnacle of the Book of Signs (see John 2–11) and provides a fitting transition to the Book of Glory (see John 12–20), wherein Christ overcame death forever.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

The Gospel of John unveils the majesty and power of Jesus Christ. The Word was made flesh, dwelt among us, and manifested His glory to the world. As we have just seen, the first half of John’s Gospel describes seven major miracles performed by Christ. These chapters are occasionally referred to as the Book of Signs. These seven miracles (or signs of power) constitute a general construct upon which the first half of the book rests. These miracles confirm that Jesus Christ is a God of power and that His ministry was complete, whole, and perfect. He can alter substance and has power over time. He is not limited by geographic distance, can terminate disease and dispel false tradition, multiply good things, control the elements of nature, re-create the body, and bring the dead back to life. This part of the Gospel of John clearly depicts the omnipotence of Jesus Christ, who is worthy of our explicit faith and trust. **RE**

## Notes

1. James Richard Mensch, *The Beginning of the Gospel According to Saint John* (New York: Peter Lang, 1966), 17–20; see also F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 29–30.

2. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Maloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 300.

3. John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 279. John 1 is generally viewed as an introductory chapter—a preface to the Gospel, if you will.

4. There are eight miracles if one counts calming the Sea of Galilee *and* moving the ship to shore as completely separate events (see John 6:21).

I express appreciation to S. Kent Brown, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, who, while teaching at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in 1988, introduced me to the role that miracles play in the structure of John's Gospel.

5. Indeed, the English word *miracle* is somewhat misleading in that the associated action caused one to wonder in awe. That was not the purpose of the miracles Jesus performed. Brown suggests that a better designation would be “sign” of power. Simply, the miracle was not external proof of the truthfulness of Jesus's ministry; rather, it was the power by which the kingdom was actually established (see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* [New York: Paulist Press, 1994], 63–65; see also Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 339–40n15; James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977], 147).

For additional reading on the intended audience of the Gospel of John, see C. Wilford Griggs, “The Testimony of John,” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 111; Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 1:65; Alexander B. Morrison, “‘Plain and Precious Things’: The Writing of the New Testament,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 5.

Furthermore, the number seven in John's writings suggests completion, wholeness, and perfection. Of course, Jesus performed more miracles than seven. It is commonly accepted that John's use of seven miracles is a literary device that communicates to his audience that the ministry of Jesus was whole, complete, and perfect.

6. When offering possible interpretations of the significance of the miracles of Jesus in the first half of John, I frequently use a phrase like, “Among other things, this miracle is a sign of . . .” and then proceed to suggest *one* way of viewing the event. I do this because the scope of this article does not allow me to explore multiple interpretations, and I in no way suggest that my interpretation is final or comprehensive. Each of the seven miracles is richly imbued with figurative types and literal elements that, if treated thoroughly, would fill volumes. In that spirit I invite the reader to use this article as a springboard from which to launch into deeper and more comprehensive studies of the miracles found in this part of John's Gospel.

7. Jesus's reference to His mother as “woman” was a title of respect for the day (see Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 144; see also Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 268–69).

8. See Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 145.

9. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 247–48; see also Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 29.

Before partaking of food, guests at the feast would ritually cleanse themselves with water provided by the host. This would require many water pots and much water. Stone pots were preferable to ceramic because if a ceramic pot came in contact with an unclean person or substance the law required that it be destroyed (see Leviticus 6:24–28; 11:29–30; 15:12). A stone vessel, on the other hand, could be ritually cleansed and used again. Griggs explains: “A Jew was not to pray, worship, or eat, even at a public wedding banquet, without first washing off the filth and corruption of the world around him, and thus arose the necessity for having a number of large vessels available for the guests invited to this feast. . . . At an earthly feast for a bride and bridegroom, then, the Heavenly Bridegroom provided the necessary and desired wine from jars in which water was placed for the cleansing and purification of the mortal body. When his hour came, however, this Bridegroom would provide through the shedding of his blood the wine of eternal life and the means for cleansing the spiritual being. The number seven signifies perfection and completeness in John's writings (and elsewhere, to be sure), and some suggest that only Jesus can compensate for the incompleteness or imperfection of the *six* water vessels” (Griggs, “Testimony of John,” 113–14; emphasis in original).

10. Lightfoot explains that the governor of the feast was likely a religious leader that pronounced blessings at feasts like the wedding celebration at Cana. He writes: “The *bridegroom's blessing*, recited every day for the whole space of the seven days, besides other benedictions during the whole festival time, requisite upon a cup of wine, . . . (for over a cup of wine there used to be a blessing pronounced;) especially that which was called . . . *the cup of good news*, when the virginity of the bride is declared and certified. He, therefore, who gave the blessing for the whole company, I presume, might be called . . . *the governor of the feast*. Hence to him it is that our Saviour directs the wine that was made of water, as he who, after some blessing pronounced over the cup, should first drink of it to the whole company, and after him the guests pledging and partaking of it” (John Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997], 3:255; emphasis in original).

Furthermore, wine was emblematic of life, fertility, and health in the ancient world. Jesus turning water to wine at a wedding feast further substantiates this idea (see Griggs, “Testimony of John,” 113; see also Jo Ann H. Seely, “The Fruit of the Vine: Wine at Masada and in the New Testament,” in *Masada and the World of The New Testament*, ed. John F. Hall and John W. Welch [Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1997], 207–27). Ancient scripture and apocryphal writings identified the messianic age as a time wherein wine in great quantities would be present. Figuratively, this imagery suggests that physical and spiritual abundance is made possible by the Messiah (see Proverbs 9:4–5; Amos 9:13–14; Genesis 49:10–11; Joel 3:18; 2 Baruch 29:5–8; 1 Enoch 10:17–22).

11. Elder Talmage wrote: “Miracles cannot be in contravention of natural law, but are wrought through the operation of laws not universally or commonly recognized. . . . In the contemplation of the miracles wrought by Christ, we must of necessity recognize the operation of a power transcending our present human understanding” (*Jesus the Christ*, 148–49). Similarly, Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “A miracle is not, as many believe, the setting aside or overruling of natural laws.

Every miracle performed in Biblical days or now, is done on natural principles and in obedience to natural law. The healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, giving eyesight to the blind, whatever it may be that is done by the power of God, is in accordance with natural law. Because we do not understand how it is done, does not argue for the impossibility of it. Our Father in heaven knows many laws that are hidden from us” (*Man: His Origin and Destiny* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954], 484; see also Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], 86).

12. A similar manifestation of power is evident in the multiplication of bread (see John 6:11). Jesus did not plant seed, water, fertilize, harvest, thresh, grind the grain to flour, mix the dough, allow it to rise, and cook the dough in order to provide bread for thousands. He was able to circumvent this lengthy process and produce bread immediately. In a way that we do not understand, He has power over time (see Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994], 131).

On a related vein, Jesus Christ can also carve deep canyons in the earth’s surface or create beautiful beaches of fine sand without the passage of millions or billions of years that many scientists recommend are essential to create such geographical formations. Brigham Young taught: “Geologists will tell us the earth has stood so many millions of years. Why? Because the Valley of the Mississippi could not have washed out under about so many years, or so long a time. The Valley of Western Colorado, here, could not have washed out without taking such a length of time. What do they know about it? Nothing in comparison. They also reason about the age of the world by the marvelous specimens of petrification that are sometimes discovered. . . . How long did it take to make this tree into rock? We do not know. I can tell them, simply this . . . [Jesus can] make a tree into rock in one night or one day, if he chooses, or he can let it lie until it pulverises and blows to the four winds” (in *Journal of Discourses* [Liverpool: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1873], 15:126).

Finally, the above examples (wine, bread, geological formations) illustrate Jesus’s power to expedite processes that normally take time. It should be noted that He also possesses power to halt time or even turn time back. The sun standing still in the valley of Ajalon to ensure Israel’s victory over the Amorites (see Joshua 10) and causing the sundial to turn back ten degrees as a sign that Hezekiah’s life would be lengthened by fifteen years (see 2 Kings 20; Isaiah 38) are two examples that illustrate this power (see also Helaman 12:8–15). Perhaps this power was employed by Jesus when He raised Lazarus from the dead—the four days that his dead body lay in the tomb should have resulted in some decomposition but it did not—the normal effects of time in mortality, as we understand them, had no impact on his physical remains. Time possibly stood still or was turned back in conjunction with this miracle.

13. The nobility ascribed to this man likely stems from an attachment to the entourage of King Herod Antipus—tetrarch of Galilee from 4 BC to AD 39 (see Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 117; Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 177).

14. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 178; see also Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 118–19. Jesus healed the nobleman’s son at the seventh hour of the day (see John 4:52). The Jews reckoned their day beginning at 6:00 a.m. The seventh hour, then, would be 1:00 p.m. This would have given the nobleman ample time to travel from Cana to Capernaum in that day to confirm the validity of Jesus’s words. His faith

was secure, however, and he did not rush home. Rather, he was met by his servants over twenty-four hours later and learned for certain that his son had been healed by the power of Jesus Christ (see John 4:51–53).

15. John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 186–88; see also Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28–30.

16. Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 125; see also Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 215–16.

17. See Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 126–27.

18. Magdala, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, was an important fishing village and exported salt-cured fish throughout the region. The Greek name was *Tarichae*, which means “salted fish” (see Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* [New York: Macmillan, 1977], 231–33).

19. Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 180–83.

20. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 55–58.

21. See Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 3:1330–34.

22. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 699; see also Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 480; D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse the Four Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 452; Jo Ann H. Seely, “From Bethany to Gethsemane,” in *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior’s Final Hours*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 42.

23. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 65. Concerning the grave clothes of Jesus, Elder McConkie wrote: “What a picture John has left us of this unique moment in history. Fear fills the hearts of Peter and John; wicked men must have stolen the body of their Lord. They race to the tomb. John, younger and more fleet, arrives first, stoops down, looks in, but does not enter, hesitating as it were to desecrate the sacred spot even by his presence. But Peter, impetuous, bold, a dynamic leader, an apostle who wielded the sword against Malchus and stood as mouthpiece for them all in bearing testimony, rushes in. John follows. Together they view the grave-clothes-linen strips that have not been unwrapped, but through which a resurrected body has passed. And then, upon John, reflective and mystic by nature, the reality dawns first. It is true! They had not known before; now they do. It is the third day! Christ is risen!” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:841–42).

24. Robert Kysar, “John, The Gospel Of,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 917; see also Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 64.

25. James D. Purvis, “The Fourth Gospel and the Samaritans,” in *The Composition of John’s Gospel*, comp. David E. Orton (Boston: Brill, 1999), 183–84.



The parable of the sower ranks first among the parables in many respects.

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# Of Soils and Souls: The Parable of the Sower

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*There are certain stories which are not so much the heritage of the scholar and the material of the theologian as the possession of every man; and such are the parables of Jesus. Even in an age when men know less and less of the Bible, and care less for it, it remains true that the stories Jesus told are the best known stories in the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Among the parables of Jesus, in some respects the parable of the sower ranks first. Chronologically, wrote Elder James E. Talmage, the sower comes “first in the order of delivery,” and literarily, he added, it deserves “first place among productions of its class.”<sup>2</sup> The primacy of this parable, however, goes beyond chronology and composition. Significance also comes from the story’s repetition and explanation. It is one of only three parables repeated in all three synoptic Gospels. Similarly, it is one of the few parables for which the Lord Himself included a detailed interpretation, which all three synoptists made sure to include.<sup>3</sup> As Jesus later explained to His disciples, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:10). Evidently the Master considered this particular parable a mystery the disciples could ill afford to misunderstand (see Matthew 13:51).

Moreover, the Prophet Joseph Smith interpreted the parable of the sower at length, connecting it to the other parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 and placing them all in specific historical context. Like the Savior before him, the Prophet saw in the sower a topic of immense importance for his hearers, one they could not fail to

comprehend would they “but open [their] eyes, and read with candor, for a moment.”<sup>4</sup>

Today’s disciples should be no less concerned with understanding this parable—to find, in Elder Talmage’s words, “the living kernel of gospel truth within the husk of the simple tale.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, paradoxically, students of the scriptures seem to spend less time deciphering this “parable of parables” than many of its counterparts. Why? Perhaps because in the case of the sower, the teacher already seems to have done the students’ work.

Almost without exception, a parable is narration without explanation, “arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps because the Gospels include a rather “precise application” from the author Himself, the parable of the sower does not tease as much active thought as it should. Yet should not the opposite be true? The fact that the Savior (and the Prophet Joseph Smith) specifically interpreted this parable should lead students of the scriptures to pay *more* attention to the sower, not less.

In that light, this essay invites readers to examine (1) the parable’s content and (2) the Savior’s objective in telling it. With such an understanding, today’s disciples—especially those teachers and leaders who go “forth to sow” (Matthew 13:3)—may then achieve a third objective: a wider perception of the parable’s intended application, one that will affect their ministry in the same way the Savior originally intended it to affect that of His disciples.

This insight can come only by looking through the lens of Joseph Smith’s inspired explanation of the parables of the kingdom. His comprehension facilitates our own. By connecting the sower to the parables that immediately follow, the Prophet allows today’s reader to go beyond simple classification (seeing the parable solely as a description of separate types of individuals) and to approach the parable historically (as a depiction of the preaching of the gospel in the apostolic age) and linearly (as one soul’s progression through varying degrees of discipleship).

### The Sower and the Parables of the Kingdom

For the Prophet Joseph Smith, parables were often firmly rooted in history. He saw in them large-scale historical developments, not simply timeless truths or ethical abstractions. To him, parables were as much about prophecy as they were about principles, and in nothing was this more true than in the parables of the kingdom found in Matthew 13.

Specifically, Joseph saw in these parables—beginning with and in large part growing from the sower—“as clear an understanding upon the important subject of the gathering, as anything recorded in the Bible.”<sup>7</sup> The Prophet explained that when the Savior first taught the parable of the sower, it had “an allusion directly, to the commencement, or the setting up of the Kingdom *in that age*.” The chapter’s remaining parables likewise concerned the kingdom, the destiny of which, Joseph said, could be “trace[d]” in those sayings “from that time forth, even unto the end of the world.”<sup>8</sup>

In stunning sequence, Joseph applied each parable to a specific scene in the progress of the kingdom of God—the sower to the establishment of the kingdom in the time of Christ; the parable of the wheat and tares to the corruption of the Church in the age of apostasy; the mustard seed to the growth of the kingdom in the last days; the leaven to the expanding testimony of truth that was first granted to the Three Witnesses; the treasure hidden in the field to the gathering of the Latter-day Saints in their lands of inheritance; the pearl of great price to the Saints’ search to find places for Zion; and the gospel net to the gathering of people “of every kind” to the kingdom before their separation on the Day of Judgment.<sup>9</sup> Joseph Smith took his audience through the parables the way a historian takes his readers through the past, pointing out parallels with a fixed fulfillment in time.

By explaining—and connecting—these parables in this way, the Prophet showed them to be one cohesive narrative rather than a collection of separate stories. In so doing, he affirmed that the sequence of parables in Matthew 13 was a deliberate teaching tool of the Savior, not merely an organizational technique considered typical of Matthew.<sup>10</sup> Jesus wanted the disciples to see these particular parables not as seven stories but as one story in seven parts, each part relating to the others and proceeding in a definite sequence. As if in summary, Jesus asked His disciples at the conclusion of this discourse, “Have ye understood *all these things?*” (Matthew 13:51; emphasis added). In answer to this question, Joseph Smith responded for the Saints in his day, “Yea, Lord; for these things are so plain and so glorious, that every Saint in the last days must respond with a hearty Amen to them.”<sup>11</sup>

Joseph’s unified view of the parables of the kingdom finds further evidence in the Master’s words as recorded in Mark 4:13. When the disciples “asked of him the parable” of the sower, the Lord responded: “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” (Mark 4:10, 13). Some have cited this verse to suggest that the sower was meant merely as a model to illustrate and elucidate this new way of

Soil	Result	Explanation	Seed	Plant	Satan's Strategy	How to Help
The wayside	Fowls came and devoured them (Matthew 13:4); trodden down (Luke 8:5)	Heard word but didn't understand; wicked one caught away the word (Matthew 13:19); Satan came immediately (Mark 4:15); devil took away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved (Luke 8:12)	Good—"his seed" (Luke 8:5); the word of God (Luke 8:11)	None	Keep them from obtaining the word; keep them from understanding; keep them from believing	Teach the word; make it understandable; help them believe
Stony places; "a rock" (Luke 8:6)	Sprang up, scorched (Matthew 13:5-6); heard word, received it with joy (Matthew 13:20); endured for a time (Mark 4:17); believed for a while (Luke 8:13)	Not much earth; no deepness of earth; no root (Matthew 13:5-6); no root in itself; endured for a while; tribulation→offended; persecution→offended (Matthew 13:6, 21); affliction→offended immediately (Mark 4:16-17); temptation→fell away (Luke 8:13); lacked moisture (Luke 8:6)	Good	Withered (Matthew 13:6)	Restrict knowledge and testimony; rob them of desire; keep them from gaining their own testimony; keep them from the Living Water; attack with tribulation, persecution, affliction, and temptation	Help them gain their own testimony and help it grow; increase their desire; give them the Living Water to protect them from offense
Among thorns	Thorns sprang up, choked (Matthew 13:7); became unfruitful (Matthew 13:22); thorns sprang up with it (Luke 8:7)	Care of this world; deceitfulness of riches (Matthew 13:22); cares of this world; lusts of other things (Mark 4:19); pleasures of this life (Luke 8:14)	Good	Alive but unfruitful (Matthew 13:22); yielded no fruit (Mark 4:7); brought no fruit to perfection (Luke 8:14)	Can't kill the plant, so seek to keep it unfruitful; on good ground, so direct the strength of the soil toward other things; if any fruit appears, keep it from reaching perfection	Help them focus on God instead of the world and its riches, lusts, and pleasures; show them that worldly things bear no worthwhile fruit
Good ground	Brought forth fruit: 100-fold, 60-fold, 30-fold (Matthew 13:8); sprang up and increased: 30, 60, 100 (Mark 4:8)	Heard and understood; bore fruit (Matthew 13:23); endured (JST, Matthew 13:23); heard and received (Mark 4:20); honest and good heart; heard and kept it; brought forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15)	Good	Fruitful; sprang up and increased (Mark 4:8)	Keep them from enduring; attack their honesty or goodness; encourage pride in or complacency with fruit; stifle testimony until word is lost; engender impatience with their growth	Seek continual growth and progress—never complacent; stay humble and be patient in growth; endure to the end in honesty and goodness

teaching. Typical of this view, one scholar labeled it “a parable about parables” constituting “the key to understanding the rest.”<sup>12</sup>

However, the Prophet’s panoramic interpretation shows the sower to be much more than a practice parable; its link to the stories that followed was one of substance, not merely of style. Indeed, if the overarching theme of the Lord’s parables “was the kingdom of God and especially its eschatological significance for the chosen people living in his day,”<sup>13</sup> then Joseph’s understanding of the sower (as a direct allusion to the establishment of that kingdom in Christ’s time) affirms its placement as the first of the parables. Clearly, when Jesus based the

understanding of “all parables” on the understanding of “this parable” (Mark 4:13), He asserted the foundational character of the sower. His other parables, particularly the parables of the kingdom, were outgrowths of the story of seeds and soils.

This was especially true in the two parables that immediately followed—the parable of the wheat and tares and the parable of the mustard seed. Based on Joseph’s view of a continuing historical narrative, it is not surprising that the Lord employed similar symbols in these three stories. In fact, just as the history described in the two later parables grew out of the history described in the first, the symbols of

the first may have given rise to the symbols of the others. The parable of the wheat and tares thus parallels the seed that fell among thorns, left to grow amid the weeds; and the mustard seed mirrors the seed in good ground, which grows to a miraculous maturity. If, as the Prophet explained, the sower showed “the effects that [were] produced by the preaching of the word” in the time of Christ, then the two subsequent parables followed the fate of such seeds: choked by tares through the age of apostasy, yet eventually nurtured, “securing it by . . . faith to spring up in the last days.”<sup>14</sup> Within the elements of the sower, the Savior provided a summary statement from which He revealed to His disciples the destiny of the kingdom of God.

Thus informed, the disciples understood what the Savior was doing at that exact moment—sowing seeds in the very act of speaking about them. However, Christ was not to be the only sower in the story; they had been called to sow as well. Therefore, an understanding of the *what* behind the sower was insufficient. The disciples also needed to comprehend the *why*.

### Content in Context

The audience that first heard the parable of the sower consisted of a sampling of “soils” that varied from barren to fertile, with every grade between. Moreover, in the parable itself the number of soil types was *four*, a number that often symbolizes completeness.<sup>15</sup> The gospel seed was intended for all people, and the Savior’s immediate audience embodied a representative sample. The parable was being fulfilled as it was given, with the audience spreading itself across the spectrum with each word the Savior spoke. Because the disciples were to participate in this planting, they would likewise need to know about the soils in which they sowed.

This was especially true considering the prevalence of less-than-fertile ground, or, as one writer noted, “the amount of attention that is given to the variety of ways in which the seed may come to nothing.”<sup>16</sup> Mark placed the sower “immediately after a direct challenge by the Jerusalem religious authorities concerning the nature of Jesus’ authority,” making it a symbol of “Israel’s response to and rejection of Jesus.”<sup>17</sup> Edersheim argued that such underlying opposition was “common to all the Parables. . . . They are all occasioned by some unreceptiveness on the part of the hearers.”<sup>18</sup> As Matthew recounted, the accusations of the Pharisees (see Matthew 12:2, 10, 14, 24), the sign seeking of the scribes (see Matthew 12:38–39), and the pronouncement of these parables all occurred on “the same day” (Matthew 13:1).

Aware of the mounting opposition, Jesus told His disciples that He taught in parables “because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matthew 13:13). Citing the same verse, Joseph Smith explained that the Lord taught people parables “because their hearts were full of iniquity”—the same phrase the Prophet used immediately thereafter to define those who received seed “by the way side.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus spoke *of* the wayside when speaking *to* the wayside, whereas He gave the good news plainly to those on good ground.

This meting of the message based on the receptivity of the audience is evident in Jesus’s clear differentiation between the multitudes who *would not* understand and the disciples who at first *could not* understand but who desired to. To the latter group, “it is given . . . to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” To the former, “it is not given” (Matthew 13:11).<sup>20</sup> Jesus may have “withdraw[n] verbally into the veiled speech of parables, just as he [withdrew] physically” from the multitudes, but in both cases He brought His disciples with Him—physically “into the house” apart from the masses (Matthew 13:36) and symbolically into an understanding of the parables He had taught.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, whereas the sower was meant for the many, its interpretation was intended for the few. According to Joseph Smith’s inspired translation, Christ did not explain the parable until “he was alone *with the twelve, and they that believed in him*” (Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 4:10; emphasis added). Therefore, the Lord had a separate purpose in explaining the seeds and soils to them. As discussed, Christ was revealing to His fellow sowers a prophetic view of the kingdom they were working to establish. Even before He taught these parables, Christ had called upon His disciples to preach that kingdom (see Matthew 10:7), and after He explained His stories, He would send them forth to do more of the same (see Luke 9:2; 10:9). They needed to know that in spite of seeds that never sprouted or weeds that choked the word, the kingdom of God would eventually find good soil and bring forth “an hundredfold” (Matthew 13:8, 23).

The disciples, once they truly “understood all these things” (Matthew 13:51) as Jesus hoped, would recognize their roles during the critical opening scenes of the kingdom of God during the meridian of time. Taking these parables as a whole, they would anticipate their efforts’ mixed results in the short term (the sower), expect a corruption of their work in the long term (the wheat and tares), and be assured of eventual triumph in the end (the mustard seed). They would know of

the kingdom's powerful potential (the leaven), its priceless value (the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price), and its two-edged effect (the gospel net). Furthermore, they would know that not all seeds would bear fruit but that they were still to be sowed.

From the parable of the sower, they would receive great reassurance and hope: rejection was inevitable, but so was an eventual harvest. There would be waysides, stones, and thorns to confront, but there would be good ground and plentiful yields as well. They would face Pharisees, unwilling to plant the word themselves and intent on trampling down whatever seed might possibly be planted in others (see Matthew 23:13). They would find curious sign seekers, eagerly following one who might miraculously provide bread but “[going] back” at the first “hard saying” (see John 6:60–66). They would meet the otherwise obedient who would not loosen their grip on lesser things (see Matthew 19:16–22). Nevertheless, they would also find themselves among the faithful who would “go and bring forth fruit, and [whose] fruit should remain” (John 15:16).

### To Plow in Hope

How were the disciples to respond to the grades of soils described in the parable? Obviously classification was intended, for it was inherent in the Savior's interpretation. Yet how firm were those dividing lines, and how fixed were they meant to remain? Were they to pass final judgment or determine present conditions? Were they to classify individual hearers *of* the word or initial reactions *to* the word? Depending on their response to these questions, the disciples may have limited their classification of hearers to a mere four categories, when real reactions were more numerous and nuanced. Worse, they may have pigeonholed people who might otherwise have been amenable to change. If the Savior taught and interpreted the parable to give hope to those who would be preaching His word, He must have intended it as a continuum upon which hearers were in constant motion, not merely as a dresser with four unchangeable drawers.

Elder James E. Talmage made these same two allowances in his analysis of the parable. First, he referred to the soil not as different types but as varying “grades” described “in the increasing order of their fertility.” Even the good ground was of “varying degrees of productiveness, yielding an increase of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred fold, with many inter-gradations.”<sup>22</sup> Thus the sower was not meant to compartmentalize listeners but rather to depict “the *varied grades* of spiritual receptivity existing among men.”<sup>23</sup>

Second, Elder Talmage refused to see in this parable what other scholars had tried to advance: “evidence of decisive fatalism in the lives of individuals.” He did not accept the interpretation—rooted in Calvinism—that individuals were either “hopelessly and irredeemably bad” or “safe against deterioration and . . . inevitably productive of good fruit.” In his opinion, the Savior “neither said nor intimated that the hard-baked soil of the wayside might not be plowed, harrowed, fertilized, and so be rendered productive; nor that the stony impediment to growth might not be broken up and removed, or an increase of good soil be made by actual addition; nor that the thorns could never be uprooted, and their former habitat be rendered fit to support good plants.”<sup>24</sup> After all, Jesus had come—to paraphrase His words to the Pharisees—“not . . . to call [the good ground], but [the wayside] to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). He had sent forth His disciples to till the earth, break up stones, weed out thorns, and help others “bring forth . . . fruits meet for repentance” (Matthew 3:8). He taught that souls, like soils, could change.

After all, in explaining the sower to His disciples, how could the Savior promise that by listening and understanding, the unbelieving “should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15) if such conversion was impossible in the first place? Moreover, how could He give “more abundance” to “whosoever receiveth” and take away from those who “continueth not to receive” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 13:10–11) if movement across the spectrum was never possible?

Under such confining categorization, how could the disciples “plow in hope” (1 Corinthians 9:10) if wayside soil could never be plowed in the first place? How could God give “an heart of flesh” if the “stony heart” (Ezekiel 11:19) could not be taken out at all? How could the fir tree take the place of the thorn (see Isaiah 55:13) if thorns were a permanent condition? Christ's fellow sowers needed to know this foundational truth in order to continue their labors on less than fertile soil. Otherwise, they would have simply turned their attention to the good ground, leaving the fowls, stones, and thorns to do as they may.

But such was not the way of the Lord of the Vineyard. Jesus refused to give up on the seemingly barren soil that surrounded Him, as shown in the parable of the barren fig tree: after waiting for fruit in vain for three years (an allusion to the Savior's mortal ministry), when even the owner of the vineyard was ready to give up on the unproductive plant, his servant pleaded, “Lord, let it alone this year also, till I



shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down” (see Luke 13:6–9). In an even more dramatic example, the allegory of the olive tree portrayed a Master who was willing to prune and pluck, dig and dung, nourish and graft—and involve His servants in the same untiring efforts (see Jacob 5:41, 47). Eventually the harvest and judgment would come, but until then, there was hope for every soil. Jesus had not come merely in search of good ground but in hopes of calling “sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

### Soils across the Spectrum

In interpreting the parable of the sower, the Master was preparing His disciples for the wide range of soils they would encounter in their preaching, not that they might make final decrees but preliminary diagnoses. By identifying a soil’s existing state, the disciples would be able to decide how best to treat it for more successful sowing in the future. In this regard, the Savior’s explanation of the soils was of immense value—an explanation He gave only to those who would be sowing and nurturing the seed. Theirs would be the work of plowing hardened earth, removing stones, or uprooting thorns, depending on the soil before them.

However, what of the sowers of today? What of those who live in the days of the ever-expanding mustard seed and the quickly filling gospel net? As timely as the sower was in fitting the historical context of Jesus’s day, it is also timeless in teaching the spiritual truths needed to successfully sow the seed in our own day. Thus today’s sowers should feel twofold appreciation for the parable of the sower. First, we can rejoice in seeing the fulfillment of yesterday’s ultimate hopes (as if in echo of Matthew 13:17). Second, in our own sowing we can identify existing soil types and tailor our teaching to the soils that sit before us, with proximate hope that each plant can come to bear fruit. To this end, the soils themselves—and the Savior’s descriptions of them—deserve particular attention.

*The wayside.* The most striking characteristic of wayside soil is its total absence of plant life. Yet the real problem is not the lack of vegetation but the absence of fruit. John the Baptist called for “fruits meet for repentance” and warned that “every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:8, 10). Christ Himself echoed this warning (see Matthew 7:19; John 15:2) and left a striking reminder when He cursed the fig tree for having “leaves only” (Matthew 21:19). Similar emphasis on “bringing forth fruit” appears in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (see Matthew

21:33–43) and is the core of the parable of the barren fig tree (see Luke 13:6–9). Clearly the word of God, as symbolized by the seed, is of no real worth unless fruit is forthcoming.

If fruitfulness is the chief goal of the Master, fruitlessness must ever be the adversary’s aim. And there can be no fruit where there is no plant. This is precisely the condition of the wayside. In the parable, the moment the seeds left the hand of the sower, “the fowls of the air came and devoured them up” (Mark 4:4; see also Matthew 13:4), “lest a grain of it perchance find a crack in the trampled ground, send down its rootlet, and possibly develop.”<sup>25</sup> Any seeds that escaped the birds’ eager advances were “trodden down” (Luke 8:5), lest they sprout. Such soil is reflected in Jeremiah’s lament over Israel: “The birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour. Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness” (Jeremiah 12:9–10).

Such is the state of the soul who “heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not” (Matthew 13:19), the Savior explained. Satan comes—“immediately,” inserts Mark—to take away “the word that was sown in their hearts” (Mark 4:15), “lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). The combined details provided by the three synoptists outline the process of spiritual growth the word is meant to accomplish: hear, understand, believe, and be saved. With reason, therefore, the adversary seeks to disrupt this process, and the earlier the better. Consequently, the adversary’s initial opposition usually consists in restricting the word. Insofar as he is able, he keeps people from hearing; if they hear, he tries to keep them from understanding; if they understand, he attempts to keep them from believing. Christ described the process using Isaiah’s words: the people would not “hear with their ears” and therefore would not “understand with their heart” and therefore would not “be converted” (believe) that He should “heal them [be saved]” (Matthew 13:15).

The Savior, meanwhile, invites all people in the opposite direction—away from the wayside—sending His servants forth to make the word accessible and understandable and helping His listeners believe what they are taught. Appropriately, in explaining good ground, the Master listed these two essential conditions first: hearing and understanding the word (see Matthew 13:23).

*Stony ground.* If a seed perchance escapes the pecking of birds and the trampling of feet, it at least has some chance to germinate, but Satan is not easily deterred. Seeds may sprout and plants may grow, but things

that live can also be made to die. This best occurs “on stony ground” (Mark 4:5).

Unlike the seeds that are “immediately” taken away from the wayside (Mark 4:15), those that fall on stony ground “immediately” spring up to life (Mark 4:5) only to wither away just as quickly (see Luke 8:6). They have “no deepness of earth” (Matthew 13:5), only a thin layer of soil covering the rock just beneath it, a geological condition common in Israel. Without room to grow downward, the upward growth is momentary at best, leaving these plants, which have “no root,” to wither away once the sun comes up to scorch them (see Matthew 13:6; Mark 4:6).

Less concerned with the depth of the soil, Luke recorded that the reason the plant withers is not primarily because it lacks earth but “because it lack[s] moisture” (Luke 8:6). Yet this lack of moisture is not due to lack of rain, which God promises will always come “in due season, [for] the land [to] yield her increase, and the trees of the field [to] yield their fruit” (Leviticus 26:4). The lack of moisture results when such rain is wasted as runoff, unable to penetrate the rock beneath the scant layer of soil. Unable to send forth roots that might reach a more permanent (but deeper) source of water, these plants depend on what little they might first catch from the clouds.

Unlike those by the wayside who refuse to hear, understand, and believe, those with stony ground “heareth the word” (Matthew 13:20), “receive it with gladness” (Mark 4:16), and “believe” (Luke 8:13). Unfortunately, this step—a step up from the wayside—is short-lived. They believe, but only “for a while” (Luke 8:13); they endure, but only “for a time” (Mark 4:17).

The reasons that they wither are fourfold: “tribulation” (Matthew 13:21), “affliction” (Mark 4:17), “persecution” (Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17), and “temptation” (Luke 8:13), each represented by the scorching heat of the sun. Ironically, the heat that causes them to wither could also cause them to grow, for seeds require sunlight. When these opposing forces arise “because of the word” (Matthew 13:21), and “for the word’s sake” (Mark 4:17), the two-edged effects of the sun depend completely, as Luke records, on the amount of moisture. If individuals “have no root” (Luke 8:13) or, more specifically, “no root *in themselves*” (Mark 4:17; emphasis added; see also Matthew 13:21), they become “offended”—whether “immediately” (Mark 4:17) or “by and by” (Matthew 13:21)—and eventually “fall away” (Luke 8:13).

Knowing of people’s need for continual spiritual sustenance, Satan tries to restrict its availability, confident that even the good word of

God will not last long without the Living Water. Tribulation and affliction are inevitable in life, temptation is common, and persecution is certainly not rare, but their effect upon us will be harmful only if we fail to “draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). At such times, surface spirituality no longer suffices, and disciples whose faith is not deeply rooted are unable to draw upon the more profound sources of moisture. Furthermore, if they “have no root *in themselves*” (Mark 4:17; emphasis added), they will eventually find themselves unable to survive in thin soil on someone else’s water.

Jesus, on the other hand, seeks the opposite course (see Psalm 80:8–9). Knowledge and testimony are given room to grow. The scorching heat of the sun is not necessarily lessened, but to offset it, the true disciple is given “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” And unlike the plant with no root in itself, this disciple’s well of water is “in him” (John 4:14).

*Among thorns.* Even when a person’s “soil” is free of the stones that would confine the seed’s growth, the adversary attempts to divert the sunlight and redirect the rain so that the strength of the soil might be leached by lesser plants. Such is the case when a seed falls “among thorns.”

In this instance, the ground produces an abundant yield—but of the wrong crop. Unfortunately, because of the plentiful thorns, the growing plant is “choked” and becomes—though still living—of no worth at the harvest. As Mark records, it yields “no fruit” (Mark 4:7). According to Luke, the thorns spring up *with* the sprouting seed (see Luke 8:7). Apparently the thorns were not there previously; the seed and the thorns grow together in ground that was ready for planting. Even in Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, the thorns do not “spring up” until after the seed has been sown. Accordingly, the third type of soil seems no different from the fourth type of soil before its planting. Only after the seeds begin growing do the thorns appear.

Originally, thorns were a product of the Fall (see Genesis 3:18), as are the vices these thorns represent in the parable: “cares and riches and pleasures of this life” (Luke 8:14), “the care[s] of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19), and “the lusts of other things” (Mark 4:19). When the word is preached to the honest in heart (good ground), it begins to germinate within them. And “when they have heard, [they] go forth” (Luke 8:14), intent on bringing forth fruit. Meanwhile, however, Satan ensures that worldly distractions begin “entering in” (Mark 4:19) as well, until they sap the

strength of the growing seedling and keep it from bearing fruit—fruit which is likely already in the bud when the thorns begin to appear.

Luke does mention fruit, but the plant he describes, in its depleted condition, could “bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). In Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, the plant “*becometh* unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; emphasis added), suggesting that earlier at least some fruit had grown. In either instance, the plant remains alive, but, as the Lord lamented in a later parable, only to cumber the ground (see Luke 13:7).

Satan works quickly on this type of soil, alarmed when conditions exist that are conducive to growth. Once-eager listeners pass through his preliminary attempts to sabotage the soil, but as soon as they shift from mere membership to true discipleship, the adversary begins to offer alluring alternatives to divert the person’s time and strength. If he succeeds, individuals of great potential will have “changed their glory for that which doth not profit” (Jeremiah 2:11). Their “strength shall be spent in vain: for [their] land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits” (Leviticus 26:20). God will have “sown wheat, but shall reap thorns” (Jeremiah 12:13).

Worst of all, because the plant has not yet withered, a person with such soil may have a false sense of accomplishment, having achieved at least something, and a false sense of security, seeing that the plant is at least marginally alive. Such a person is present but not productive, living but not lively, honorable but not valiant (see D&C 76:75, 79). Like the foolish servant in the parable of the talents, those among thorns thought subsistence would do, when the Master expected increase (see Matthew 25:14–30).

*Good ground.* The sower’s final soil—and ultimate goal—is described simply as “good ground,” good not merely because it is able to support seeds but because those seeds “sprang up, *and bare fruit*” (Luke 8:8; emphasis added). In fact, in some cases the harvest is miraculous: the seed in Luke’s version “bare fruit an hundredfold” (Luke 8:8).

“But even here,” wrote Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “crops of equal value are not harvested by all the Saints. There are many degrees of receptive belief; there are many gradations of effective cultivation.”<sup>26</sup> This gradation is inherent in the accounts of both Matthew and Mark—in Matthew “some [produce] an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold” (Matthew 13:8)—but growth is most evident in Mark, in which the fruit “sprang up *and increased*” (Mark 4:8; emphasis added). Thus, when Mark listed the same quantities as Matthew

but in *ascending* order, perhaps he was underscoring an ever-increasing productivity, not merely a differentiation of yields. As Christ later told His Apostles, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear *much fruit*” (John 15:8; emphasis added). Wherefore, “every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth *more fruit*” (John 15:2; emphasis added).

These ever-increasing yields obviously take time. Thus, in Luke’s account, whereas the plant “sprang up” (Luke 8:8) quickly, achieving the hundredfold harvest only comes “with patience” (Luke 8:15; see also James 5:7). Fortunately, in contrast with others on the spectrum, those with good ground are willing to devote that time to nurture the seed as it grows. Unlike the wayside, they “heareth the word, and understandeth it” (Matthew 13:23); unlike the stony ground, they “endureth” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 13:23); and unlike the soil with thorns, they “keep [what they hear], and bring forth fruit” (Luke 8:15). The sowing is successful because of the current nature—or ongoing preparation—of the soil: the scattered seed has fallen “in an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15).

### Pulling toward the Poles

Analyzing the enemy’s tactics through the different soils—from wayside to good ground—is like watching an army in retreat: it fights, then falls back, only to regroup and renew attacks elsewhere. Meanwhile, in hope, the Lord and His fellow sowers draw their hearers in the opposite direction. They know, as the parable of the sower suggests, that the word of God leads to understanding, belief, acceptance, and fruitfulness; to patience, goodness, endurance, and salvation. They also know the final destiny of the kingdom they are laboring to build.

In this tug-of-war, hearers of the word can alone decide their direction, edging toward the wayside or progressing toward good ground. The sowers of the seed, as Jesus and Joseph both taught, can but rest in the ultimate triumph of the kingdom and work for the proximate progress of those they serve. Such is always the case when God’s children come in contact with His word—in Christ’s day, in Joseph Smith’s day, and in our own. The fowls, stones, and thorns are once again poised to take their positions, as each individual decides what type of soil he will be. This is not a single decision, resulting in our permanent placement amid the soils. Rather, it is an ongoing process—with continual motion across the continuum until the wheat is harvested, the mustard seed grown, the meal leavened, the pearl found, and the fishes gathered.

Until then, the sower still goes forth to sow, hoping to find in us “faith, and . . . diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit” (Alma 32:43). **RE**

## Notes

1. William Barclay, *And Jesus Said: A Handbook on the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 9.

2. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 263, 265.

3. Many modern scholars wrongly assume that the interpretation of the parable was an insertion made later by the Christian community; however, Elder Talmage (and a host of others, including Joseph Smith) credits it to “the divine Author” Himself, which makes the parable, in Elder Talmage’s words, “particularly valuable” (Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 263).

4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 96.

5. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 277.

6. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961), 5; quoted in James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 106.

7. Smith, *Teachings*, 94.

8. Smith, *Teachings*, 97; emphasis added.

9. Smith, *Teachings*, 94–102.

10. Giving voice to the accepted contemporary view of the Gospel of Matthew, John P. Meier wrote of the “monumental remodeling of the gospel form in the direction of lengthy discourses” (David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 4:628, s.v. “Matthew, Gospel of”).

11. Smith, *Teachings*, 102.

12. Morna D. Hooker, “Mark’s Parables of the Kingdom,” in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 87.

13. Richard D. Draper, “The Parables of Jesus,” in *Studies in Scripture: The Gospels*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 266.

14. Smith, *Teachings*, 97–98.

15. “The number four symbolizes geographic completeness or totality. In other words, if the number four is associated with an event or thing, the indication is that it will affect the entire earth and all its inhabitants” (Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003], 119).

16. Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 335.

17. Hooker, “Mark’s Parables of the Kingdom,” 89.

18. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (n.p.: Hendrickson, 1993), 400.

19. Joseph taught, “This is he which receiveth seed by the way side. Men who have no principle of righteousness in themselves, and whose hearts are full of

*iniquity*, . . . and have no desire for the principles of truth, do not understand the word of truth when they hear it. The devil taketh away the word of truth out of their hearts, because there is no desire for righteousness in them” (Smith, *Teachings*, 96; emphasis added).

20. See Matthew 13:10–16. The Prophet made it a point to provide the antecedents of the pronouns in these verses (Smith, *Teachings*, 94–95).

21. Meier, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 629.

22. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 265.

23. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 266; emphasis added.

24. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 265–66.

25. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 264.

26. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 2:253.

# Nicodemus: Coward or Convert?

*Sidney R. Sandstrom*



Nicodemus

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Nicodemus is often portrayed as a cowardly or vacillating person. One commentary, for example, states that Nicodemus sought out “Jesus in ‘the night’ which has suggested to most of the interpreters that he was hesitant and afraid to be seen with Jesus, coming as he did in secrecy out of regard for his reputation and to protect himself.”<sup>1</sup> Because John, after Nicodemus’s first visit, identifies him as one who “came to Jesus by night” (John 7:50; 19:39), his every action thereafter seems to be colored by the timing of this first visit.

Besides cowardice, there are other possible explanations why Nicodemus would seek an audience with Jesus at night. He may have had a sincere desire to have a serious private conversation away from the crowded, county-fair atmosphere of the Passover-choked streets and temple precincts. He may have pursued an honest though cautious investigation of one who was reputed to possess miraculous powers, possibly the long-awaited Messiah. Or he may have been responding to the initial spiritual stirrings of a mighty change of heart.

## **Biblical Setting**

The meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus occurs at the very beginning of Christ’s public ministry, at the first Passover of that ministry. Before this meeting, the scriptural record gives the account of Christ’s birth, His visit to the temple at age twelve, His baptism, the temptations, His turning water to wine at Cana, a short visit to

Capernaum, and the first cleansing of the temple. Elder Bruce R. McConkie sets the scene: “Our Lord has driven from the Temple Court the sacrificial animals, probably numbering in the thousands; has used a scourge of small cords upon the carnal men who made merchandise in his Father’s House; and has extended his own arm of healing to bless and cure many—and all Jerusalem is aware of the miracles he has done.”<sup>2</sup>

Because of the carnival atmosphere in Jerusalem during Passover, it might have been difficult to have any kind of meaningful personal or private conversation with Jesus in the crowded streets or in the din of the temple courtyards. If we were able to walk the streets of Jerusalem at Passover in Jesus’s day, we would see ample reason for any sincere individual to seek a secluded setting in which to have a private, serious conversation:

The streets were blocked by the crowds from all parts, who had to make their way to the Temple, past flocks of sheep, and droves of cattle, pressing on in the sunken middle part of each street reserved for them, to prevent contact and defilement. Sellers of all possible wares beset the pilgrims, for the great feasts were, as has been said, the harvest time of all trades at Jerusalem. . . .

Inside the Temple space, the noise and pressure were, if possible, worse. . . . Sellers shouted the merits of their beasts, sheep bleated, and oxen lowed. It was, in fact, the great yearly fair of Jerusalem, and the crowds added to the din and tumult, till the services in the neighboring courts were sadly disturbed. . . . The rents of the sheep and cattle pens, and the profits on the doves, had led the priests to sanction the incongruity of thus turning the Temple itself into a noisy market. Nor was this all. Potters pressed on the pilgrims their clay dishes and ovens for the Passover Lamb; hundreds of traders recommended their wares aloud; shops for wine, oil, salt, and all else needed for sacrifices, invited customers, and, in addition, persons going across the city, with all kinds of burdens, shortened their journey by crossing the Temple grounds. The provision for paying the tribute, levied on all, for the support of the Temple, added to the distraction. On both sides of the east Temple gate, stalls had for generations been permitted for changing foreign money.<sup>3</sup>

Elder McConkie adds perspective to the crush in Jerusalem during Passover: “In the days of Jesus, the walled portion of the city encompassed some three hundred acres of houses and streets and markets and shops. . . . Tacitus speaks of a population of 600,000; at the time of the Passover this number rose to between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000. . . . At Passover time great numbers of Jews camped outside the city proper, but within the limits of a Sabbath day’s journey.”<sup>4</sup>

In the crowded Passover confusion, and following a very public clearing of the temple, Nicodemus would have been faced with the problem of arranging a meeting with this Galilean at a time and place favorable for his purposes. At night, when the masses of humanity had settled into whatever places of abode they could find, there might be some hope of privacy. The problem would be to locate this one person among the millions in and around Jerusalem.

Much later, after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter and John followed the arresting party to the palace of the high priest. Because John “was known unto the high priest,” he seemed to have little trouble gaining access to the palace (see John 18:15–16). Obviously John was no stranger to the high priest and perhaps to others in power. Apparently John was, if not walking in the same circles, at least comfortable among those who wielded power in Jerusalem. Add to this Elder McConkie’s speculation about the possible location of Nicodemus’s dialogue with Jesus: “We are left to assume the meeting took place in a house owned or occupied by John in Jerusalem. If so, the interview may well have taken place in the guest chamber on the roof, which would have been accessible via outside stairs.”<sup>5</sup> If Elder McConkie is correct, it may have been fairly easy for an official with standing and influence in Jerusalem like Nicodemus to find Jesus, who was staying with an apparently well-known and well-connected John.

Certainly Christ’s actions at the temple had struck a nerve among members of the Sanhedrin, particularly the Sadducees, because of their intimate involvement in and their responsibility for the temple. The Sadducees “consisted of old high-priestly families who came to the front during the Maccabean war. They formed the Jewish aristocracy, and were powerful though quite small in numbers.”<sup>6</sup> This act was a direct frontal attack—if not challenging their authority, challenging at least their conduct in regard to their responsibilities for the temple. One would expect that the cleansing of the temple was most certainly a topic of discussion among members of the Sanhedrin headquartered in the heart of the temple complex in the Chamber of Hewn Stone.<sup>7</sup>

Nicodemus was not the only one who sought a private audience with Christ. His own disciples often queried Him privately, seeking clarification following His public teaching or seeking doctrinal understanding (see Matthew 24:3; Mark 9:28–29).

*Miracles.* Nicodemus states his reason for seeking an audience with Jesus by referencing the miracles Jesus had performed. John describes two distinctly different reactions that Jesus had on this occasion to those who claimed belief based on His miracles. John says that “many

believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all [men], and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (John 2:23–25). The word *commit* is translated from the Greek verb πιστεύω (pistēō). Strong suggests some alternative translations such as: “to *have faith* (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing) . . . to *entrust*, . . . [or to] believe.”<sup>8</sup> A number of other translations use the word *trust* in place of *commit*.<sup>9</sup> Put succinctly, Jesus did not trust the people’s professed belief.

Jesus’s response to Nicodemus’s declaration of belief that He was “a teacher come from God” based on those same miracles was quite different. Nicodemus, having either seen or heard of these same miracles, approached Jesus with a virtually identical declaration: “We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). Yet rather than discount the faith of Nicodemus as He had done with the many others who believed, Jesus entertained that faith and patiently taught and bore strong personal witness of Himself as the Son of God and of His atoning mission. Apparently Jesus’s measure of the man, though Nicodemus came by night, was different from His measure of the masses who professed belief based on the same evidence. It appears that Jesus did believe Nicodemus’s belief.

*A Pharisee and ruler of the Jews.* Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, would have been among those who were watching for the promised Messiah. As a member of the Sanhedrin, who derived their political power from the Roman government, political activists with a messiah complex could only mean trouble both politically and religiously. There was no dearth of self-proclaimed messiahs. Gamaliel mentions just two, Theudas and Judas of Galilee, who had gathered followers with claims of messiahship, only to be killed and have their movements fade away (see Acts 5:34–40). With Jesus’s public challenge to the Jewish aristocracy in cleansing the temple, with so little known about the man and His intentions, with other messiah figures having come and gone, caution could be seen as a wise approach, especially for a person of position. It would seem to be wise for one to “come and see” (John 1:46) for oneself as Philip suggested to Nathanael.

*He came by night.* An opportunity to have that personal conversation with Jesus in or around Jerusalem during Passover would likely have been available only at night especially after the very public cleansing of the temple. Elder James E. Talmage observed:

Apparently [Nicodemus] was impelled by a genuine desire to learn more of the Galilean, whose works could not be ignored; though pride of office and fear of possible suspicion that he had become attached to the new Prophet led him to veil his undertaking with privacy. . . . We must accord him credit for sincerity and honesty of purpose. . . .

Nicodemus was not the only one among the ruling classes who believed in Jesus; but of most of these we learn nothing to indicate that they had sufficient courage to come even by night to make independent and personal inquiry. They feared the result in loss of popularity and standing. We read in John 12:42, 43: “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”<sup>10</sup>

Edersheim notes the compromising position in which Nicodemus knowingly placed himself by meeting with Jesus:

We can scarcely realise the difficulties which he had to overcome. It must have been a mighty power of conviction, to break down prejudice so far as to lead this old Sanhedrist to acknowledge a Galilean, untrained in the Schools [see John 7:15; 8:41; Deuteronomy 23:2], as a Teacher come from God, and to repair to Him for direction on, perhaps, the most delicate and important point in Jewish theology. But, even so, we cannot wonder that he should have wished to shroud his first visit in the utmost possible secrecy. It was a most compromising step for a Sanhedrist to take. With that first bold purgation of the Temple a deadly feud between Jesus and the Jewish authorities had begun. . . . Nevertheless, Nicodemus came.<sup>11</sup>

*Rabbi.* Considering the standing of Nicodemus, and the standing of the people with whom he associated, such as the revered Gamaliel, we expect that Nicodemus was not haphazard in addressing Jesus as Rabbi. His was more than a simple greeting of courtesy, such as “sir.” Nicodemus put himself in a subservient position, as Elder McConkie notes: “Different degrees of honor were intended as people used the term *Rab*, meaning master; *Rabbi*, my master; and *Rabboni*, my lord and master.”<sup>12</sup>

*We know.* “Nicodemus speaks to Jesus in the first-person plural (‘we know’). Nicodemus does not speak to Jesus simply as an individual, but as a leader of his community. The first-person plural implies that Nicodemus’s community shares in his positive acknowledgment of Jesus.”<sup>13</sup> As noted, “among the chief rulers also many believed on him” (John 12:42). It would seem that Nicodemus, if his visit was indeed an act of cowardice, was nevertheless the bravest of his associates.

Eighteen years earlier, Jesus, then twelve years of age, was also in the temple. On that occasion, He sat “in the midst of the Doctors, and

they were hearing him, and asking him questions. and all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers” (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 2:46–47).<sup>14</sup> We know from Walter M. Chandler’s research that some of the members of the Sanhedrin served many years. Some of their tenures in office would span not only Christ’s three-year ministry but also the period including His visit to the temple at age twelve. A few could even trace their service back to or near Jesus’s birth.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that some of those earlier “doctors” were among the current “chief rulers” who these many years later are said to have also “believed on him”—part of the “we” to which Nicodemus referred.

*A master of Israel.* Jesus’s rebuke of Nicodemus in pointing out his ignorance of spiritual things could have received a much different response in other settings or with other members of the Sanhedrin. One need only read of the occasion when Christ was brought before Annas for questioning about “his disciples, and of his doctrine.” After Jesus pointed out that His ministry and teachings were a matter of public record, He suggested, “Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.” Then, “one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?” (John 18:19–23).

The reason for such a reaction becomes clear when one understands the pharisaic reasoning and laws which they themselves had established. The Pharisees “had created new law, an oral law—the portion of the Talmud called the Mishna or ‘second law’; it is a law founded on tradition instead of revelation, a law that they esteemed to be of greater worth than the Torah, or law of Moses itself. A digest of Jewish traditions as well as a compendium of the ritualistic performances of the law, it was made up of formalistic minutae.”<sup>16</sup>

[On one occasion] twenty-four persons were excommunicated for having failed to render to the rabbi the reverence due his position. . . . Punishment was mercilessly inflicted wherever there was open violation of any one of the following rules established by the rabbis themselves:

“If any one opposes his rabbi, he is guilty in the same degree as if he opposed God himself.

“If any one quarrels with his rabbi, it is as if he contended with the living God.

“If any one thinks evil of his rabbi, it is as if he thought evil of the Eternal.”<sup>17</sup>

It seems clear that Jesus saw Nicodemus as a receptive listener. One would have thought that under the circumstances, Nicodemus, with

his position, learning, and wealth, if his coming were motivated by idle curiosity or timid discipleship, would have ended the conversation at this point. One has to wonder what was happening or what motives were driving this interview, for if Nicodemus were the least bit open to offense, this would have given him ample reason to feel injured.

*They testify of me.* John records Jesus’s testimony to Nicodemus as follows: “He who believeth on him is not condemned; but he who believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the Only Begotten son of God, which before was preached by the mouth of the holy prophets; for they testified of me” (Joseph Smith Translation, John 3:18).<sup>18</sup> Elder McConkie explains, “Our Lord is speaking in the early days of his ministry. He is using plain, simple, and forceful language. The doctrine is strong. No parables are involved; nothing is hidden with imagery or in similitudes. He is saying plainly that men must believe in him; that he is the Son of God, the Promised Messiah, the Only Begotten of the Father, the One of whom Moses and the prophets testified. . . . It is plain and clear beyond question.”<sup>19</sup> For a person in Nicodemus’s position, that plain, open declaration by Jesus, if not true, was unmistakable blasphemy and this Galilean was worthy of death by stoning (see Leviticus 24:11–16; John 10:30–33). It will be remembered that blasphemy was the very charge the Sanhedrin would use three years later to justify Christ’s death (see Matthew 26:63–68; Mark 14:61–65; Luke 22:66–71; John 19:7).

*The Jews sought to kill Him.* Two and one-half years after Nicodemus’s visit, Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. He had skipped the previous Passover in the spring. A year before that, while at Passover, He had healed an invalid on the Sabbath, “and therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him” (John 5:16). Having missed the opportunity to arrest Him at the most recent Passover, “the Jews sought him at the feast [of Tabernacles]” (John 7:11). On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus finally made His appearance. John continues, “Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught” (v. 14).

*Never man spake like this man.* When the Sanhedrin heard that Jesus was teaching nearby in the temple courts, “the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him” (v. 32).

When the officers returned without Jesus, the chief priests and Pharisees demanded, “Why have ye not brought him?” (v. 45). The officers’ only recorded response was, “Never man spake like this man” (v. 46). The Jewish leaders then chastised the officers for being “deceived” like the common people. After all, they reasoned, “Have



any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” (v. 48). This must have caused some uneasiness among those whom we know were or may have been in this meeting of the Sanhedrin—people such as Nicodemus (himself a Pharisee), Joseph of Arimathea, and “others among the chief rulers” who also “believed on him.”

Nicodemus knew from personal experience what the officers meant when they said that “never man spake like this man.” On that night years earlier, Jesus had used phrases like “I say unto thee,” “we speak,” “we know,” “we testify,” “I tell you,” and “we have seen.” His authority derived not from quoting others but originated from Himself. Matthew confirms this principle, “for he taught them as one having Authority from God and not as having authority from the Scribes.” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:29).<sup>20</sup> Nicodemus had personally heard Jesus say in unmistakable language that He was the Only Begotten of the Father, the Son of God.

At this Feast of Tabernacles the scriptures next mention Nicodemus as he sits in this meeting of the Sanhedrin. A lone voice spoke in Jesus’s defense in that hotbed of hatred. That lone voice was Nicodemus’s, “he that came to Jesus by night.” Only Nicodemus dares to ask, “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” (v. 51).

*Art thou also of Galilee?* It was an open secret in the streets of Jerusalem spoken in hushed voices behind Jesus’s back, “Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?” (v. 25). In spite of the loathing the Sanhedrin had for this Galilean and their determination to arrest, condemn, and put Him to death, Nicodemus’s defense of Jesus in that setting is characterized by some authors as “cautious” and as a “voice of mild protest.” Being a Pharisee himself and a member of that esteemed council, he probably would have been privy to their planning. The plan to kill Jesus had begun a year and a half earlier in reaction to His healing a man on the Sabbath (see John 5:2–16). With eighteen months of plotting against Jesus, the conspiracy was an open secret in the streets of Jerusalem. It is hard to imagine that someone in Nicodemus’s position could have been ignorant of what was afoot. He had to know the vitriolic rebuke he would receive if he said anything in Jesus’s defense. The reaction was so predictable that John informs us that those of the Sanhedrin who “believed on him” did not dare to have it known “lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42). Yet Nicodemus spoke. He knew he was not alone among members of the Sanhedrin in his belief in Christ. There might have been some furtive glances at fellow believers before Nicodemus asked his question. Would those other believers,

some of the “we” spoken of in his interview with Jesus, follow his lead in as innocuous defense as a point of order?

Talmage describes the reaction by members of the Sanhedrin: “Maddened with bigotry and bloodthirsty fanaticism, some of his colleagues turned upon him with the savage demand: ‘Art thou also of Galilee?’ meaning, Art thou also a disciple of this Galilean whom we hate? Nicodemus was curtly told to study the scriptures, and he would fail to find any prediction of a prophet arising in Galilee.”<sup>21</sup>

*Joseph of Arimathea.* Nicodemus is next mentioned following the Crucifixion of Christ as he comes to the aid of a fellow Sanhedrist, Joseph of Arimathea. We hear nothing of Joseph during Nicodemus’s defense of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles. He may have been absent. He may have been present but remained silent. The scriptures are silent about Joseph until the Crucifixion of Christ. John does tell us that he was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38). When he comes forward to beg the body of Jesus, he is portrayed as “a good man, and a just man,” one who was “bold.” Nicodemus, on the other hand, though he was earlier the lone voice of protest and provisioned the burial with a gift of royal magnitude, is even on this occasion portrayed as somewhat reluctant, coming forward only after Joseph “boldly” goes to Pilate.<sup>22</sup>

Not only did Joseph own a tomb convenient to Calvary but, among the believers, he was uniquely suited to the task of obtaining the body from Pilate because of the office he held with the Roman government. Chandler writes, “Joseph of Arimathea is called in the Vulgate, or the Latin version of the Bible, ‘noble centurion,’ because he was one of the ten magistrates or senators who had the principal authority in Jerusalem under the Romans. His noble position is more clearly marked in the Greek version.”<sup>23</sup>

Commenting about Nicodemus and Joseph on this occasion, Farrar writes:

However much he had held back during the life of Jesus, now, on the evening of His death, his heart was filled with a gush of compassion and remorse, and he hurried to His cross and burial with an offering of truly royal munificence. The faith which had once required the curtain of darkness, can now venture at least into the light of sunset, and brightened finally into noonday confidence. Thanks to this glow of kindling sorrow and compassion in the hearts of these two noble and wealthy disciples, He who died as a malefactor, was buried as a king. . . . The fine linen (*sindón*) which Joseph had purchased was richly spread with the hundred *litras* of myrrh and perfumed aloe-wood which Nicodemus had brought, and the lacerated body—whose divinely-human spirit was

now in the calm of its Sabbath rest in the Paradise of God—was thus carried to its loved and peaceful grave.<sup>24</sup>

The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* concludes: “Though Nicodemus is often portrayed as timid, [John A. T.] Robinson is probably correct in seeing him as quite courageous. Most likely, Nicodemus came by night, not out of fear, but to avoid the crowds that would have interrupted his interview with Jesus. His reaction to the council’s desire to arrest Jesus was boldly calculated to bring out the irony of their lawless act at the very moment in which they were ridiculing the lawless behavior of the ‘crowd’ (7:49–51). And he certainly showed more courage at the Cross than did the absent Disciples of Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

### Historical Nicodemus

The Talmud mentions a man from the period with a similar name: Nakdīmōn ben Goriōn.<sup>26</sup> The question arises as to whether the biblical and Talmudic figures could be the same individual.

Though common at the time, the name Nicodemus is not held by anyone else in the New Testament. Chandler was able to provide a partial list of the members of the Sanhedrin at the time of Christ. His list includes forty-two of the seventy-one members of that body. His list, though obviously incomplete, contains only one member named Nicodemus.<sup>27</sup> Obviously, there is the possibility that, with the absence of twenty-nine names, one or more individuals with the name of Nicodemus could be among them.

The *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* states, “A Nicodemus ben Gorion, who was a brother to the historian Josephus, a very wealthy member of the Sanhedrin in the 1st cent. has been identified by some with this man in the NT who came to Jesus by night. Nicodemus ben Gorion later lost his wealth and position so that some have attributed this reversal of circumstance to his having become a Christian.” However, the author then adds, “The identification is unlikely.”<sup>28</sup>

Frederic W. Farrar refers to Christian tradition when he writes:

Tradition says that after the Resurrection . . . [Nicodemus] became a professed disciple of Christ, and received baptism from Peter and John; that the Jews then stripped him of his office, beat him, and drove him from Jerusalem; that his kinsman Gamaliel received and sheltered him in his country house till death, and finally gave him honourable burial near the body of St. Stephen. If he be identical with the *Nakdīmōn Ben Goriōn* of the Talmud, he outlived the fall of Jerusalem, and his family were reduced from wealth to such horrible poverty that, whereas the bridal bed of his daughter had been covered with a dower

of 12,000 denarii, she was subsequently seen endeavouring to support life by picking the grains from the ordure of cattle in the streets.<sup>29</sup>

Chandler links the biblical and the historical Nicodemus based on wealth, name, and position: “We know from the Gospel account of him that he possessed great riches, and that he used nearly a hundred pounds of myrrh and spices for the burial of Christ. The name of Nicodemus is mentioned in the Talmud also; and, although it was known that his attachment to Christ was great, he is, nevertheless, spoken of with honor. But this fact may be due to his great wealth. There were, says the Hebrew book, three eminent men in Jerusalem—*Nicodemus ben Gurien*, ben Tzitzith Hacksab, ben Kalba Shevuah—each of whom could have supported the whole city for ten years.”<sup>30</sup>

Robinson sets forth the argument thus: “The connection alike of office, affluence and genuine, if ostentatious, piety is not at all impossible; and there could not have been that number of top people in Jerusalem with the name of Nicodemus.”<sup>31</sup>

The historical Nakdīmōn ben Goriōn fits all the characteristics described in the New Testament. He was, for example (1) a Pharisee, (2) a member of the Sanhedrin, (3) wealthy, and (4) one of whom “it was known that his attachment to Christ was great.”

Even if there were more than one member of the Sanhedrin with the name Nicodemus who were both Pharisees and wealthy, how many of them were also believers in Christ?

### Conclusion

The measure of the man should not be taken when he enters the door but rather when he leaves. Regardless of any reticence or motives that may be assigned to Nicodemus for seeking the interview at night, one must also take into consideration the effect of Christ’s teaching—the “Touch of the Master’s Hand”—on Nicodemus that evening and in succeeding days. One will recall that some of the early disciples (later Apostles) were somewhat skeptical on their first meeting with Jesus, yet they are not faulted. John gives us the account of Nathanael when he asks Philip, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” He is invited to “come and see.” Then based on Jesus’s miraculous description of Nathanael praying, he bears witness, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:46–49)—thus a skeptic becomes a disciple and perhaps even an Apostle.<sup>32</sup>

According to Elder McConkie, “We are left to assume that following his interview with Jesus [at night], the processes of conversion

continued to operate in the life of Nicodemus.”<sup>33</sup> It would be hard to imagine an individual having a personal face-to-face conversation with the Lord in which he hears Christ bear witness in unmistakable language that He was the Son of God without that testimony having some effect. Either this was the height of blasphemy or He was the Son of God, the Messiah, or a political time bomb. One source postulates that “John used the Nicodemus interview to illustrate the statement in 2:25 that Jesus ‘knew what was in man.’ Jesus saw in Nicodemus a sincere seeker after truth to whom He could reveal a clearer and more complete knowledge of His mission than He could to many others.”<sup>34</sup>

Elder McConkie, in his *Mortal Messiah* series, quotes extensively from both Edersheim and Farrar. Edersheim writes concerning the connection between the Nakdīmōn of the Talmud and the Nicodemus of the Bible: “But there can scarcely be a doubt that this somewhat legendary *Nakdīmōn* was *not* the Nicodemus of the Gospel.”<sup>35</sup> Elder McConkie chooses, instead, to include in his work Farrar’s more positive assessment of the connection: “If, *as seems extremely probable*, he be identical with the Nakdīmōn Ben Gorion of the Talmud, he was a man of enormous wealth”<sup>36</sup>

If Farrar and McConkie are correct in their assessment that it is not just “possible” but rather “extremely probable” that the Nicodemus of the Bible and the Nakdīmōn ben Gorion of the Talmud are the same individual, then the story of Nicodemus is one of the most dramatic stories of conversion and sacrifice in scripture. **RE**

## Notes

1. Merrill C. Tenny and Steven Barabas, eds., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), s.v. “Nicodemus.”
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 1:469; emphasis added.
3. Cunningham Geikie, *The Life and Words of Christ* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891), 1:495–96.
4. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:90.
5. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:471. According to McConkie, “Such ownership is inferred from John 19:27” (*Mortal Messiah*, 1:478n2).
6. Bible Dictionary, “Sadducees,” 764.
7. For a good illustration of the temple complex, see David B. Galbraith, D. Kelly Ogden, and Andrew C. Skinner, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 189.
8. James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 210–11.

9. The Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New English Bible (NEB), the Jerusalem Bible (JB), and the New International Version (NIV) all translate “pistēuō” as “trust.” The New American Standard Bible (NAS) translates “pistēuō” as “entrusting” (Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 157).
  10. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 159, 169–70n7.
  11. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 1:381.
  12. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:253.
  13. *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 9:549; see also McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:471; Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 159.
  14. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 371–72.
  15. Walter M. Chandler, *The Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer’s Standpoint* (New York City: Federal Book, 1925), appendix I, “Characters of the Sanhedrists who Tried Jesus,” 2: 291–326.
  16. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:255.
  17. Chandler, *Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer’s Standpoint*, 2:316.
  18. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, 448.
  19. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:478.
  20. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, 176.
  21. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 404.
  22. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 664–65.
  23. Chandler, *Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer’s Standpoint*, 2:318.
  24. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1874), 2:428–29.
  25. David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Nicodemus.”
  26. “The name, which seems to have been not uncommon among the Jews . . . is doubtless, like so many Jewish names at this period, derived from the Greek. In the Talmud it appears under the form Nakdīmōn” (Farrar, *Life of Christ*, 1:197n1).
  27. Chandler, *Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer’s Standpoint*, 2:291–326.
  28. Tenny and Barabas, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. “Nicodemus.” John A. T. Robinson points out that “there are some interesting parallels in Jewish tradition which indicate that the name Nicodemus was a well-known one in Jerusalem at the time and attached to persons of considerable eminence and affluence. Whether there was any connection with our Nicodemus, and if so what, cannot be proved, but it does look as if John is not merely inventing. At the expense of a little diversion it is worth trying to set out and sort out the evidence. There are two sources of information, Josephus and the Babylonian Talmud” (*Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley [London: Meyer-Stone Books, 1985], 284).
- As part of the Talmudic evidence, Robinson recounts the story of Nakdīmōn ben Gorion’s purported miracle. If the two be one, then perhaps because of Nicodemus’s previous personal experience with miracles, he was drawn to one who was

reputed to be able to perform miracles. Thus the dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus begins with, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

For a more detailed analysis of the Josephus and Babylonian Talmud source materials, as well as a number of arguments for and against the thesis that the two are one and the same person, see Robinson, *Priority of John*, 284–87.

29. Farrar, *Life of Christ*, 1:197n1.

“Miriam, daughter of Naqdimon ben Gurion of distinguished parentage, whose marriage contract providing 1,000,000 gold denars for her widowhood.” This enormous sum Baron presents in contrast to “poor fathers [who] were expected to supply a minimum dowry of 50 denarii” (Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952], 2:113–14, 221).

30. Chandler, *Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer’s Standpoint*, 2:319; emphasis added.

31. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 287.

32. Bible Dictionary, “Nathanael,” 737.

33. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:471.

34. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), s.v. “Nicodemus.”

35. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1:381n1.

36. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 4:239; see also Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, 2:428; emphasis added.

# Defining and Teaching Tolerance

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Our diverse world is becoming increasingly interconnected through travel, technology, commerce, and the exchange of information. At the same time The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with about thirteen million members worldwide and adding around a million members every three years, is embracing a wide range of cultures and experiences.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite the world’s increasing interconnectedness, divisions based on culture, ethnicity, politics, race, and economic status remain. Sadly, these divisions—to which the Church is not immune—often erode and destroy relationships within the universal family of God. In response to these divisions, President Gordon B. Hinckley and many other world and religious leaders have repeatedly appealed for greater tolerance.

However, within this chorus of appeals for greater tolerance, a wide spectrum of meaning and intent has emerged. On the minimal side, tolerance may be defined as grudgingly “putting up” with someone we do not like. Such tolerance may avoid overt discrimination and persecution, but offers little else. On the other end of the spectrum, some promote tolerance as implicit acceptance of another’s differing ideas, opinions, and practices; anything less than full acceptance is viewed as prejudice and even bigotry. Of course, neither of these two extremes is in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. How, then, has tolerance been defined and clarified by the Brethren in latter days?

## Basis for Tolerance

To begin, it may be helpful to understand something of the roots, the purpose, and the command underlying tolerance. Tolerance is rooted in the reality that all are the offspring of God (see Acts 17:29). President Howard W. Hunter explained that understanding the universal fatherhood of God, His concern for each of us, and our relationship to each other “is a message of life and love that strikes squarely against all stifling traditions based on race, language, economic or political standing, educational rank, or cultural background.”<sup>2</sup> Elder Russell M. Nelson adds that comprehension of our divine relation to God and man “inspires desire to build bridges of cooperation instead of walls of segregation.”<sup>3</sup>

Tolerance fulfills a vital role in the plan of happiness. Elder John A. Widtsoe explains, “Among the principles of beauty and power which make up the Gospel, none is more conducive to peace than the Mormon doctrine of tolerance. We are taught to give due respect to the opinions and mode of life of our fellow beings.”<sup>4</sup> In a world of diversity and individual agency, the practical intent of tolerance is to avoid conflict and promote peace. Where deep differences remain, tolerance provides a meaningful degree of societal harmony.

Tolerance is an integral part of the second great commandment. Perhaps nowhere in scripture is tolerance better illustrated than in the Savior’s command to “love thy neighbor” (Luke 10:25–37). Elder M. Russell Ballard explains, “His deliberate use of Jews and Samaritans clearly teaches that we are all neighbors and that we should love, esteem, respect, and serve one another despite our deepest differences—including religious, political, and cultural differences.” He adds, “Of all people on this earth, we should be the most loving, the kindest, and the most tolerant because of that doctrine.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the principle of tolerance highlights characteristics of love because love is kind, long-suffering, not easily provoked, and it bears all things (see 1 Corinthians 13:4–8; Moroni 7:45–48). As Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “Love is an ultimate quality, and tolerance is its handmaiden.”<sup>6</sup>

In the restored gospel, we have been blessed with a clear decree of religious tolerance in the eleventh article of faith. By itself this declaration is powerful, but it is within a study of the Savior’s mortal ministry—His teachings and example—that the principle of tolerance is given broader understanding and deeper application.

## The Virtue of Tolerance

Although not an ancient term, the principle of tolerance is readily expressed and exemplified throughout the Savior’s earthly ministry. Tolerance is found in His commands to be meek and merciful, to be peacemakers, and to rejoice when “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Matthew 5:5–12). He teaches that we should turn the other cheek and “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Matthew 5:38–45). Tolerance is manifest in the Savior’s command to forgive (see Matthew 7) and the frequency with which we are to do so (see Matthew 18:21–22). It appears in the Savior’s association with publicans and sinners (see Mark 2:15–17). And it is visible when the Savior raises a damsel from death despite those in the house having “laughed him to scorn” (Mark 5:38–42).

Tolerance is further manifest when the Savior’s disciples forbid a man to cast out devils because he did not follow them and He replies, “Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (see Luke 9:49–50). When James and John request fire from heaven in response to a Samaritan village’s refusal to accommodate, the Savior advocates tolerance by saying He “is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:51–56).

But perhaps some of the most powerful examples of tolerance are found in what the Savior *does not do*. We read of His disciples’ failure to fully utilize the priesthood, their repeated inability to understand parables, their prideful desire to know who was greatest among them, and their failure to comprehend His mission. Yet the Savior, although reproving at time, does not condemn them nor treat them cruelly. While passionate crowds on occasion follow the Savior, He does not seek to incite them against His accusers. The Savior explains to Peter that He can call down legions of angels, but He does not (see Matthew 26:51–54).

Ultimately, as Elder John K. Carmack explains, “The Atonement was the greatest act of tolerance in the history of the world.”<sup>7</sup> While final judgment and justice will have their day, the act of the Atonement tolerantly delays their effects, thus providing a probationary state and offering the means by which we can work out our salvation (see Alma 12:24).

In context of the Savior’s teachings and example, tolerance goes beyond allowing others to “worship how, where, or what they may” (Articles of Faith 1:11). Through the lens of the Savior’s earthly

ministry, tolerance may aptly be defined as a compassionate attitude and behavior toward all persons whose opinions and practices differ from our own. With this view, Elder Hugh B. Brown characterized the application of tolerance as “pure respect for man, . . . spiritual sympathy, . . . [and] an enlarged view of truth.”<sup>8</sup> And President Spencer W. Kimball said, “The most lovable quality any human being can possess is tolerance. It is the vision that enables one to see things from another’s viewpoint. It is the generosity that concedes to others the right to their own opinions and peculiarities. It is the bigness that enables us to let people be happy in their own way instead of our way.”<sup>9</sup>

### Tolerance Has Limits

While the Savior taught and exemplified the principle of tolerance, He also made clear that tolerance has limits. Twice He cleanses the temple (see John 2:14–16; Mark 11:15–17); He teaches that evil influences may need to be “cut off” (Mark 9:43–45); He publicly rebukes the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees (see Matthew 23:13–33; 16:1–12); and at times He rebukes even His most devout followers (see Mark 8:31–33).

Regarding limits to tolerance, Elder Nelson explained, “An erroneous assumption could be made that if a little of something is good, a lot must be better. Not so! Overdoses of needed medication can be toxic. . . . So tolerance, without limit, could lead to spineless permissiveness.”<sup>10</sup> Tolerance does not require us to accept sin, nor does tolerance justify sin. It does not exceed individual rights or the law, nor is it relativism. And though we apply tolerance, others may still feel offended and judged.

*Tolerance for sinner, not sin.* There is danger when tolerance extends beyond the person to the sin itself. President Stephen L. Richards explained: “There has been a great build-up . . . for what is termed broad-mindedness and tolerance. . . . It is a commendable interpretation of Christ’s teachings to solicit compassionate consideration for those who are weak and who have made mistakes, but it is a tragic error to fail to distinguish between tolerance for the sin and sympathy for the sinner. Truth is not tolerant of error. Standards of truth are exacting, and the blessings Christ promised are obtainable in their fulness only upon strict observance.”<sup>11</sup>

We maintain a compassionate attitude toward a neighbor whose practices equate to sin, but we avoid acceptance of the sin itself. An example of this appears in the Savior’s treatment of the woman taken in adultery. With regard the Savior does not condemn her, nor insolently

chide her for her transgression, yet He certainly does not condone her sin nor suggest absence of consequence. He simply says “go, and sin no more” (John 8:3–11). As President Hinckley said, “We cannot condone the sin, but we love the sinner.”<sup>12</sup>

*Tolerance does not justify or adopt sin.* Elder Joseph Fielding Smith said, “I believe in being tolerant, but I believe that that tolerance will teach me . . . not to make excuses for my wrong doing.”<sup>13</sup> Of those who might use tolerance to justify sin, Elder Neal A. Maxwell warned, “Be wary, therefore, when some demand public tolerance for whatever their private indulgences are!”<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, tolerance does not suggest that we conform to or adopt sin to achieve acceptance or maintain peace. Elder Widtsoe explains that “tolerance . . . does not mean that to keep peace we must live as they do. Tolerance is not conformity to the world’s view and practices.”<sup>15</sup> Elder James E. Talmage adds, “Toleration is a specified characteristic of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . [But] we do not carry it to the absurd extreme of saying that therefore we are under obligation to adopt what others believe.”<sup>16</sup>

*Tolerance does not exceed our individual rights or the law.* Doctrine and Covenants 134 states:

We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others. . . .

We believe that the commission of crime should be punished according to the nature of the offense . . . and for the public peace and tranquility all men should step forward and use their ability in bringing offenders against good laws to punishment. (D&C 134:4, 8)

When our basic rights and liberties under the law are breached, tolerance does not prohibit us from expressing objection, utilizing legal systems, or appealing to government for redress. Tolerance does, however, compel us in such circumstances to uphold the dignity of others.

*Tolerance is not relativism.* As mentioned, some advocate tolerance as implicit acceptance of another’s differing ideas, opinions, and practices. Most of us recognize that if we support everything we tolerate, then we will eventually tolerate everything and endorse nothing—except tolerance.<sup>17</sup> Elder Sterling W. Sill said, “With too much tolerance for evil, . . . we can easily expand the road to such width that nothing is excluded. We can get ourselves into a situation where everything goes.”<sup>18</sup> This distorted view of tolerance leads to flawed relativism.

The irony that occasions this type of tolerance is that those who promote it often have little tolerance for others who maintain the existence of absolute truth. As Elder Maxwell observed, “An otherwise permissive society, which tolerates almost everything, usually will not tolerate speech that challenges its iniquity. Evil is always intolerantly preoccupied with its own perpetuation.”<sup>19</sup> In response to those who may label us intolerant due to our convictions to truth, President Boyd K. Packer suggested, “If they throw the word [*tolerance*] at you, grab hold of it and say . . . , ‘I expect you to be tolerant of my lifestyle—obedience, integrity, abstinence, repentance.’”<sup>20</sup>

*Others may still feel offended and judged.* Although the gospel principle of tolerance generally lowers the risk of offending others, it does not guarantee it (see Matthew 15:12). Others may still use the stinging label “intolerant” when describing those who hold fast to the iron rod. To some, our standing with truth and our limited definition of tolerance is full of condescension, where we put up with them instead of respect them, where we judge them instead of accept them. However, in our application of tolerance, any judgment made is of truth and error, not judgment of another person’s worth or an assumption of our own superiority. A tolerant person feels neither superior nor inferior to those of other religions, races, cultures, and nationalities.

In our efforts to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ plainly, we run the risk, like Jacob, of enlarging “the wounds of those who are already wounded” (Jacob 2:9). President Packer explains:

Some ask if we know how many we hurt when we speak plainly. Do we know of marriages in trouble, of the many who remain single, of single-parent families, of couples unable to have children, of parents with wayward children . . . ? Do we know? Do we care?

Those who ask have no idea how much we care; you know little of the sleepless nights, of the endless hours of work, of prayer, . . . all for the happiness and redemption of mankind.

Because we *do* know and because we *do* care, we must teach the rules of happiness without dilution, apology, or avoidance. That is our calling.<sup>21</sup>

### Determining the Limits of Tolerance

Because tolerance has limits, defining its proper application within individual situations can be problematic. Responding to the question, “At what point does showing love cross the line into inadvertently endorsing [wrong] behavior?” Elder Oaks replied, “That’s a decision that needs to be made individually by the person responsible, calling

upon the Lord for inspiration. . . . There are so many different circumstances, it’s impossible to give one answer that fits all.”<sup>22</sup> In regard to tolerance, Elder Carmack said, “The Spirit will often whisper to us that we should intervene when that is the right course of action to follow.”<sup>23</sup>

While tolerance has limits, our love from which it emanates should never fail (see 1 Corinthians 13:8). The Lord is clear that in times of disagreement the foremost principles to be employed in our relationships are tolerance related. Long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, and kindness (see D&C 121:41–42) should permeate our associations. We do “[reprove] betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:41–45), but like the Savior’s rebuke of Peter (see Mark 8:31–33), it is the exception, not the rule.

Furthermore, because a gospel principle such as tolerance can be misunderstood and misapplied by others does not deny the power and benefit that can be derived from its proper understanding and application. Elder Widtsoe stated, “We know that tolerance is of God; intolerance of the devil. We are and must remain a tolerant people.”<sup>24</sup>

### Tolerance and Defense of Truth

To some, tolerance and defense of truth may seem opposing. However, Elder Hugh B. Brown stated their agreeable nature this way: “The Christlike life is always a combination of earnest, personal conviction and generous regard for the other man’s opinion. Dedication to and defense of truth never require or justify breaking the second commandment to love our fellow men.”<sup>25</sup> Elder Ballard further explains the fitting relationship between tolerance and dedication to truth:

In the Church, we often state the couplet: “Be in the world but not of the world.”

Perhaps we should state the couplet . . . as two separate admonitions. First, “*Be in the world.*” Be involved; be informed. Try to be understanding and tolerant and to appreciate diversity. Make meaningful contributions to society through service and involvement. Second, “*Be not of the world.*” Do not follow wrong paths or bend to accommodate or accept what is not right.

We should strive to change the corrupt and immoral tendencies . . . in society by keeping things that offend and debase *out* of our homes. [Yet] . . . in spite of all the opposition to good that we find on every hand, we should *not* try to take ourselves or our children *out* of the world. . . . We are to lift the world and help all to rise above the wickedness that surrounds us. The Savior prayed to the Father: “I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.” (John 17:15)<sup>26</sup>

Ann N. Madsen adds, “Truth demands our allegiance, but it should not be a barrier to tolerance and compassion and love. To accept and love others, we do not have to adopt their ideas or be condescending. When others differ from us in these essential matters, we must learn to see with eyes that separate people from their traditions and sins. Good people can have mistaken beliefs.”<sup>27</sup> While we are the salt of the earth and need to be with people who need its savor, care must be taken to ensure that we do not lose our savor through compromising the truth (see Matthew 5:13). As the Savior explains, “Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another” (Mark 9:50).

Capturing this balance between tolerance and defense of truth, President Hinckley said, “We are taught as members of this Church to be tolerant, to bring about good results, not to give in on our doctrine, not to give in on our standards, but to be tolerant in a way that will move forward the cause of peace and righteousness and goodness in the earth.”<sup>28</sup>

### Benefits Derived from Tolerance

As noted, the chief benefit derived from tolerance is peace. On its grandest scale, tolerance can avert war, genocide, and other horrendous conflicts. Yet perhaps the greatest cumulative effects of tolerance are felt in its silent application within families and other close associations. In our state of imperfection, tolerance helps preserve and nurture our most meaningful relationships. In this sense, tolerance not only emanates from our love for others but can be the basis from which our love can grow. A few more benefits follow.

*Increased understanding and unity.* Tolerance restrains prejudice, stereotyping, and ignorance, all key ingredients of intolerance, thus allowing greater understanding and unity to emerge over time as we continue to live together. Despite differences, tolerance enables us to join our neighbors in the common good. Elder Alexander B. Morrison explained, “As community members work together unselfishly in a common cause, for the common good, they find that whatever their backgrounds, convictions, or experience, there is much more which unites them than which draws them apart.”<sup>29</sup>

*Increased circle of influence.* Intolerant people inevitably limit their associations, while tolerant people often find their circle of friends widening. Elder Carmack explains that “tolerant people are versatile. They move easily from one situation to another, adapting quickly to the needs of others.”<sup>30</sup> Such ability derived from a tolerant attitude allows us to interact with ease among people of different nations, races,

and religions, thus increasing our capacity to influence other lives for good.

*Reciprocal respect and less worry.* Respectful tolerance of another’s beliefs and practices often earns reciprocal respect for our own beliefs and practices. This mutual respect, established through tolerance, then makes it easier to address disagreements in the right spirit, should they arise. Furthermore, President Kimball explained, “When you do not worry or concern yourself too much with what other people do and believe and say, there will come to you a new freedom.”<sup>31</sup> A tolerant attitude provides escape from the presumed need to critique the beliefs and practices of others.

*Enriched lives.* Tolerance also allows us to learn from different backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences. Regarding acceptance of others, President Hinckley encouraged, “Be friendly. Be understanding. Be tolerant.” He then added, “Look for their strengths and virtues, and you will find strength and virtues which will be helpful in your own life.”<sup>32</sup>

### How Can We Promote Tolerance?

In this light, we can teach, encourage, and exemplify several ideals that will help our students be more tolerant. Here are just a few:

*Teach the attributes of the Savior.* Teaching Christlike attributes taught and exemplified in the New Testament will naturally promote tolerance. In aggregate, the teachings and example of the Savior instruct us to be generous with those who oppose us, to respect those who mistreat us, and to love those who dislike us. The Lord has shown us the way of tolerance and expects no less.

*Treat beliefs and practices that are sacred to others with respect.* We can disagree with the beliefs and practices held sacred by another without making light of those beliefs or criticizing the person who holds them. Elder N. Eldon Tanner said, “Let us always remember that men of great character do not belittle others nor magnify their weaknesses.”<sup>33</sup> It is an ill-advised teaching method to criticize another person’s manner of worship in an effort to build up our own. As President Hinckley stated, “[We are] not argumentative. We do not debate. We, in effect, simply say to others, ‘Bring all the good that you have and let us see if we can add to it.’”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, we should be kind to representatives of other religions. Even if we refuse to listen to their message, we can do so in a courteous manner. The Golden Rule might ask, “If this were a Latter-day Saint missionary, how would I want him or her to be treated?”



*Learn about others and avoid stereotyping.* Too often in gospel discussions with those of other faiths, we listen only with the intent to refute what they say. Yet Elder Nelson made clear that “opportunities to listen to those of diverse religious or political persuasion can promote tolerance and learning.”<sup>35</sup> Understanding what another person thinks and believes is often essential in helping them understand something differently. What is more, if we expect others to listen respectfully to our beliefs, we should expect to do the same. Elder Ballard counseled, “Get to know your neighbors. Learn about their families, their work, their views. . . . Let us cultivate meaningful relationships of mutual trust and understanding with people from different backgrounds and beliefs.”<sup>36</sup> As we learn about others, we are less likely to stereotype and misjudge and are more likely to see the person as he or she really is. As we come to understand others, we dispel ignorance, which is often the soil in which intolerance grows.

*Join others in common causes.* In a gathering of numerous religious delegations, Elder Nelson explained, “Members of our church often join with other like-minded citizens, regardless of religious persuasion, in support of worthy causes and humanitarian projects. This can be done without losing independent identity and strength.”<sup>37</sup> President Hinckley also explained, “We can and do work with those of other religions in various undertakings in the everlasting fight against social evils which threaten the treasured values which are so important to all of us. These people are not of our faith, but they are our friends, neighbors, and coworkers in a variety of causes. We are pleased to lend our strength to their efforts.”<sup>38</sup>

*Recognize that despite differences, we are all children of our Father in Heaven.* As President Hinckley said, “Respect and tolerance go hand-in-hand with reverence for life itself. We should honor and respect all God’s children, as well as his creations.”<sup>39</sup> The Prophet Joseph Smith eloquently stated, “While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of those contracted feelings that influence the children of men.”<sup>40</sup> We should do likewise.

### Final Thoughts

The principle of tolerance evokes self-control. Ultimately, those who righteously apply tolerance are known as peacemakers and are called the children of God (see Matthew 5:9). We refrain out of love

and respect, not out of cowardice and shame. Tolerance recognizes sin, yet our limited knowledge of another’s circumstances, combined with a reluctance to judge, leads us to withhold a conspicuous response. Tolerance avoids retribution based on recognition of our own imperfections and an acute desire to treat others how we would like to be treated (see Matthew 7:12). Tolerance refrains out of understanding that we are all brothers and sisters and inherent in each of us is divine worth. It is awareness, not naïveté, that leads us to be tolerant.

I strongly agree with Elder Carmack that “tolerance is the right way to posture ourselves and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a richly diverse world.”<sup>41</sup> There are a myriad of definitions associated with tolerance, yet it is tolerance as defined in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ that possesses the utmost utility in promoting peace. Why? Because most other definitions are to some extent hostile, either in the harsh feelings that remain, or in the demand that one give up beliefs held sacred. By contrast, the gospel understanding of tolerance maintains deep respect and attributes inherent worth to all people while maintaining no demand that anyone give up their most cherished beliefs so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of another. If tolerance is properly employed, our neighbors should be able to sense our love and genuine regard for them, our respect for their right to worship, and our conviction to the truths we hold sacred. ■

### Notes

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4. John A. Widtsoe, in Conference Report, April 1941, 115.
5. M. Russell Ballard, in Conference Report, October 2001, 43, 45.
6. Dallin H. Oaks, “Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall,” *Ensign*, October 1994, 19.
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8. Hugh B. Brown, in Conference Report, October 1959, 107.
9. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 235.
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12. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, October 1995, 120.
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14. Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, October 2000, 46.
15. John A. Widtsoe, in Conference Report, April 1941, 115–16.
16. James E. Talmage, in Conference Report, April 1920, 101.

17. Bruce C. Hafen, “Church Delegates Attend World Congress of Families,” *Ensign*, June 1997, 75. This concept is taught in context of society’s tolerance of homosexual behavior, and yet the majority is opposed to same-sex marriage.
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20. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 2003, 27.
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28. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Words of the Living Prophet,” *Liahona*, June 2001, 34.
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36. Ballard, in Conference Report, October 2001, 45.
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# Helping Students Ask Questions

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On one occasion, a class was learning about morality. The teacher had just invited class members to commit to live the law of chastity when a young woman raised her hand and asked, “What if somebody has already broken the law of chastity? Can he or she still set a goal to live it from this point on?”

This important question from a student prompted the teacher to emphasize the power of repentance—something he had not planned to do. Questions from students can have a powerful effect in the teaching and learning process.

In the 2007 worldwide training broadcast on teaching, Sister Julie B. Beck observed, “The more questions we can get from the learners about something, the more they are engaged in the learning. . . . But that to me is a challenge as a teacher—not so much the questions I am asking but *what is happening that is helping other people to ask questions* so the Holy Ghost can teach them.”<sup>1</sup>

In this same broadcast, Elder W. Rolfe Kerr, commissioner of the Church Educational System, said, “What more exciting environment in the classroom is there than [when] the children or the adults in the class are asking questions?”<sup>2</sup>

It seems that some of the best classroom discussions begin with questions from students as opposed to questions from teachers. Is there scriptural evidence of this phenomenon? Do the scriptures provide insights as to how to encourage students to ask questions? In this

article I will explore the following: (1) scriptural evidence that powerful learning takes place when students ask questions, (2) scriptural insights on how to encourage students to ask questions, and (3) additional ways to help students ask questions.

### Learning Arising from Questions

In the scriptures are many examples of important teachings initiated by great questions from learners. Though the focus here is on the questions asked, consider the teachings that followed these questions:

“And it came to pass that one of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers saying: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings?” (Mosiah 12:20–21; followed by Abinadi’s discourse to Noah and his priests).

“Now the [father of King Lamoni] said unto them: What is this that ye have said concerning the Spirit of the Lord?” (Alma 22:5; followed by Aaron’s teaching of the plan of redemption).

“And they came unto Alma; and . . . said unto him: . . . They have cast us out of our synagogues; . . . and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?” (Alma 32:5; followed by Alma’s sermon on faith).

“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3; followed by the Olivet discourse, comprising Matthew 24 and 25).

“But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29; followed by the parable of the good Samaritan).

These examples provide clear evidence that powerful teaching often occurs when students ask questions.

### Scriptural Insights about Helping Students Ask Questions

Most teachers readily recognize the value of eliciting students’ questions. The difficulty lies in getting this to happen. How do teachers encourage students to ask questions? In addition to providing evidence that questions can spark effective teaching, the scriptures also give insight into how to encourage students to ask questions. The following four scriptural lessons seem particularly pertinent.

*Scriptural lesson 1: Stimulate student questions by discerning what issues may trouble them. If necessary, ask a sample question to initiate a conversation.* Ammon, a master missionary and teacher, demonstrated this principle in Alma 18. While Lamoni was viewing the arms of the Lamanite robbers, Ammon was feeding Lamoni’s horses. When Ammon entered the room, “he saw that the countenance of the king was changed” (Alma 18:12). Discerning changes in students’ countenances is of key importance for teachers. As President Boyd K. Packer wrote, “The eyes of the alert teacher move constantly back and forth across the class, taking in each movement, recording each expression, responding quickly to disinterest or confusion. They read immediately a puzzled expression or sense at once when learning has taken place.”<sup>3</sup>

Although Lamoni would not speak to him, “Ammon, being filled with the Spirit of God, . . . perceived the thoughts of the king. And he said unto him: Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings?” (Alma 18:16).

Because Ammon discerned the question that was in Lamoni’s heart, Lamoni felt free to speak, and he began to ask Ammon questions. This eventually opened the door for the conversion of thousands of Lamanites.

Alma the Younger used this same principle to teach his wayward son, Corianton. Although we do not get to read both sides of the conversation, it is clear that Alma discerned the questions that were on his son’s mind. Alma said, “You marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand. . . . I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead” (Alma 39:17; 40:1). Stating these unspoken questions allowed Alma to teach Corianton about the Resurrection.

In practical terms, a teacher can use this principle by thinking carefully beforehand about questions students might have concerning the lesson. For example, if teaching Doctrine and Covenants 64:9–11, the teacher might be prepared to ask (if no students mention it), “Some people wonder about this question—why is it that the person who doesn’t forgive is guilty of the greater sin? What do you think about that question?” Of course, posing some questions to students that they have not asked could plant thoughts that are not productive. Teachers need to be very thoughtful about the types of questions they ask so that they are building faith and not undermining it.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, in the 2007 worldwide training broadcast on teaching, gave this suggestion: “If I, the teacher, want questions from you, the student, I may have to prime the pump a little. . . . I may try to pose a question that will then take on a life of its own, and all I have to do is direct traffic in order to get the students to participate.”<sup>4</sup>

By presenting a question or two at the beginning of a discussion, students will be more likely to add questions of their own.

*Scriptural lesson 2: Be patient with students who seem to be asking questions in a challenging or negative manner. Respond with respect and testimony.* Some teachers may be turned off by students who ask cynical questions, but these questions still provide valuable opportunities. Many of the Savior’s teachings came when He was questioned by those with an adversarial perspective. For example, the famous statement, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,” was brought forth from an ill-intentioned question (John 8:7; see also Matthew 9:11; Matthew 15:2; Matthew 19:3; Matthew 22:35–36).

Another scriptural episode demonstrates that teachers who patiently answer cynical questions may be able to open students’ hearts to asking more sincere questions. Amulek faced a hostile questioner in Zeezrom. In Alma 11:21 we read, “Zeezrom began to question Amulek, saying: Will ye answer me a few questions which I shall ask you?” Notice the questions and answers that follow.

And Zeezrom said unto him: Thou sayest there is a true and living God?  
 And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God.  
 Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God?  
 And he answered, No.  
 Now Zeezrom said unto him again: How knowest thou these things?  
 And he said: An angel hath made them known unto me.  
 And Zeezrom said again: Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God?  
 And he said unto him, Yea.  
 And Zeezrom said again: Shall he save his people in their sins?  
 And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word. (Alma 11:26–34)

Although Zeezrom was clearly questioning Amulek in a manner that suggests he was trying to trap him, Amulek gives straightforward answers to his questions. However, he responds differently to Zeezrom’s question in verse 38: “Now Zeezrom saith again unto him: Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?”

Instead of giving a brief response, Amulek testifies of Jesus Christ, the Resurrection, and the Judgment. In response to this testimony, Zeezrom begins to tremble. The next time Zeezrom asks a question, his manner has changed even more: “And Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God. And he said unto Alma: What does this mean which Amulek hath spoken concerning the resurrection of the dead, that all shall rise from the dead, both the just and the unjust, and are brought to stand before God to be judged according to their works?” (Alma 12:8).

Notice the change in this once cynical questioner. Now Zeezrom really wants to learn. Teachers who treat disrespectful questioners with respect, and when appropriate, respond to questions with sincere testimony, may find that the questioners’ hearts soften and that the nature of their questions changes.

*Scriptural lesson 3: Some students will not directly ask the teacher questions but will instead approach their peers.* Helaman 5 contains the account of Nephi and Lehi preaching to a group of Lamanites and Nephite dissenters. Among the group was a man named Aminadab, “who was a Nephite by birth, who had once belonged to the church of God but had dissented from them” (Helaman 5:35).

During Nephi’s and Lehi’s sermon, the people were encircled with a cloud of darkness. Understandably they were concerned. They turned, however, not to Nephi or Lehi, but to Aminadab, saying, “Behold, what do all these things mean, and who is it with whom these men do converse?” (Helaman 5:38).

In 1 Nephi 15, after Laman and Lemuel heard their father preach about the vision of the tree of life, they approached not Lehi, but Nephi, saying, “Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 15:7).

Why did they ask Nephi instead of asking their father directly? We may never know all the reasons; nevertheless, it is significant that they turned to a sibling.

These two examples illustrate that at times, students with questions will turn to a peer instead of a teacher. How can a teacher use this insight to help students? One way is to ask the class, “What are questions that some of your friends have asked you?” By doing this, the teacher will become more attuned to the questions on the minds of his or her students. Furthermore, the fact that students are being approached with questions makes it very likely that some in the class are wondering about the same issues. The teacher could ask the class,

“How have you answered those questions?” This would give students an opportunity to practice answering questions and provide answers for their peers who have the same questions.

Another way teachers can apply this principle is by giving students opportunities to answer in class questions that they will likely be asked outside of class. For example, when teaching about the Word of Wisdom, a teacher could recognize that many students will be asked a question like this, “Why does your church not allow you to drink alcohol?”

After teaching the principles of the Word of Wisdom, a teacher could ask the students to role-play in pairs. One student would take the role of a missionary, and the other would be an investigator who asks, “Why can’t you drink alcohol?”

Giving students this kind of opportunity to practice answering questions will strengthen their understanding and potentially increase the understanding of those who will ask questions of the students in the future.

*Scriptural lesson 4: Some of the most important opportunities to answer student questions occur outside of class.* After an institute class on eternal marriage, Maria wrote her teacher a note with a question about her sealing status in the next life, given that her parents had divorced. Because the teacher only saw Maria once a week, he provided her with some pertinent quotes to study on her own and invited her to visit with him if she had further questions.

She did have additional questions, and they scheduled a meeting to talk about her concerns. Though Maria sat in many classes taught by this teacher, this one-on-one opportunity to take time to receive answers to questions outside of class may have provided the most memorable lessons she learned.

Of course, good judgment must be used in answering students’ personal questions. As President Spencer W. Kimball taught seminary and institute teachers, “You may be the first line of approach. Your wise counsel could help them solve some of their problems, and you will, of course, refer them to their bishops for those solutions which lie in the bishop’s domain.”<sup>5</sup>

There are several scriptural examples of the Savior answering questions in private. In Matthew 13:1–9, the Savior taught the multitude about the parable of the sower. Afterward, “the disciples came [privately], and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Matthew 13:10).

Later in this same chapter, after teaching other parables to the people, “Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field” (Matthew 13:36).

Thus, twice in one chapter we see the Savior approached with questions “after class,” so to speak. Questions not asked in public were appropriately asked in private settings. These private conversations occurring outside of formal instruction proved to be most beneficial.

One could say that Nicodemus also came to the Savior “outside of class time” when he came “by night” (John 3:2). In this private setting, Nicodemus asked the Savior questions that surely must have been troubling him: “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (John 3:4).

These examples teach us that some students will feel more comfortable asking some questions in settings outside the classroom. What can a teacher do to facilitate this kind of interaction?

Perhaps the most important thing is to be approachable and to encourage continuing conversations. For example, a teacher could do the following:

- Regularly have students turn in written responses to what was learned in class or in the readings, and then return these assignments with a personal response. Though most of the time the comments would be brief, this kind of communication creates an opportunity for students to ask questions, should they wish to do so.
- Encourage students to feel comfortable asking questions during class. Students can also be invited to ask after class if they prefer.
- Encourage students to visit during office hours if you have them.
- Avoid rushing out of the classroom. Sometimes providing refreshments can facilitate students opening up. Simply being present and looking unhurried often makes it possible for students to approach the teacher.

Perhaps the most important thing a teacher can do to facilitate receiving questions outside of class is, as President Howard W. Hunter said, simply to “remember that the very best teaching is one on one and often takes place out of the classroom”<sup>6</sup> and pray for opportunities to have this kind of teaching.

### Additional Ideas to Help Students Ask Questions

There are many other ways that teachers can help students ask questions. One teacher put a question box in the classroom so students could anonymously write questions that would be answered in a future class period. This helped the teacher plan class time for questions and also gave him the opportunity to prepare answers worthy of the questions.

A technique that one teacher employed was to ask the students to read a specific scripture block in preparation for the next class. Students were asked to come prepared with three questions about the reading. Many students came prepared with excellent questions. Similarly, another teacher showed a CES video and asked his students to write down questions they had while watching the video.

Another teacher asked his institute students to read Moses 1:1–4 slowly and carefully. He told them that they should read them over and over again and find at least ten questions they could ask from these verses. At first, the students thought that this was an overwhelming assignment—how could they find so many questions from so few verses? But as the students read the text closely, thinking about questions they could ask, their minds opened and the questions they thought up brought them deeper into the scriptures. As the students shared the questions, the teacher also allowed the students to answer each other's questions, thus increasing their opportunity to explain, share, and testify.

Perhaps one of the most important things a teacher can do to facilitate questions is to make sure students' questions are answered at appropriate times. Nothing may be as discouraging to a potential questioner than to see a classmate's question demeaned or unduly postponed.

### Conclusion

Teachers can and should accept the challenge of helping students ask more questions. The scriptures demonstrate that powerful learning can transpire when students ask questions. In addition to helping students ask questions in class, teachers can encourage students to ask questions to Heavenly Father, the True Teacher. Particularly with respect to personal questions, we can invite students to “inquire of the Lord” (Alma 27:7). The brother of Jared initiated an important learning opportunity when he asked in personal prayer, “And behold, O Lord, in them there is no light; whither shall we steer?” (Ether 2:19).

Like many of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, which came in answer to a question, we can teach our students to take their questions to the Lord and receive revelation.

A student's hunger for knowledge is a driving force in the educational process. As Sister Beck explained, “The more questions we can get from the learners about something, the more they are engaged in the learning.”<sup>7</sup> When students have questions they are almost always in a state of readiness to learn; therefore, by encouraging students to ask meaningful questions, teachers help increase their students' motivation to learn and come unto Christ. **RE**

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### Notes

1. Julie B. Beck, in Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” *Ensign*, June 2007, 101; emphasis added.
2. W. Rolfe Kerr, in Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” 102.
3. Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 138–39.
4. Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” 103.
5. Spencer W. Kimball, “Men of Example,” address to CES religious educators, September 12, 1975, 4.
6. Howard W. Hunter, “Eternal Investments,” address to CES religious educators, February 10, 1989, 5.
7. Beck, in Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” 101.



Governor Michael O. Leavitt signing the bill to ban smoking in public buildings in Utah, March 1994.

Courtesy of Jordan Tanner

# Smoking and Health: Showdown on Utah's Capitol Hill

*Jordan Tanner*

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My war with secondhand smoke began in 1972. While serving with the American Embassy in Seoul, Korea, I was transferred to Washington DC to head up the junior officer training program for Foreign Service officers entering the U.S. Information Agency. At the first division meeting, eleven people sat around a fairly large table. Several were chain-smokers, including the boss. Several of us there were non-smokers, but we were the minority. Soon the air was literally blue with smoke, and this turned out to be the norm.

After every meeting I had a splitting headache from breathing the heavy cigarette smoke. I went to my boss with a simple request: "Is there any way, Mac, that we could have the meetings smoke-free?"

"Well, Jordan," he replied, "I know that you are a Mormon and that you don't believe in smoking. But we can't tell others not to smoke. It's their right. As you know, I'm a heavy smoker, and I want to smoke in the meetings."

Such were the politics of smoking at the time. I went through that three-year assignment with continuing headaches, some so bad that I would have to leave the office and go home. Through that experience, I committed myself to become an advocate for getting smoking out of public places. That was in the early 1970s, before many people were interested in the smoking issue.

The first thing I did was join an organization in Washington DC called ASH (Action on Smoking and Health). I became an active

member of this organization, one of the earliest in the United States to oppose smoking in public places.

From Washington DC, I was assigned to Karachi, Pakistan, as the cultural attaché with a staff of Pakistanis and others. The U.S. tobacco companies had not yet stepped up their campaign to export tobacco to the Third World. I could breathe in meetings and soon realized my productivity went up dramatically, I felt better, and my health improved, reconfirming to me that secondhand smoke did have a measurable effect on people's ability to be effective in their work.

After Pakistan, I completed another posting in Seoul, Korea, then another stateside assignment, followed by Cape Town, South Africa, where the Cape winds, nicknamed the "Cape doctor," kept the air fresh and delightful. At this point I was the boss, so there was no smoking in our office. I wanted everyone who worked with me to be able to enjoy a smoke-free, healthy workplace—something I was earlier denied. Our last assignment in the Foreign Service was in Canberra, Australia. The U.S. ambassador was a gentleman named Bill Lane. He had been appointed by President Reagan and was not only a good representative of the United States but a very nice person. Bill and I became good friends. He knew, of course, that I was a Latter-day Saint. One day as we were talking, I told him I wished we could eliminate smoking in our embassies around the world. I told him of my earlier experience, how I felt that it was specifically a health issue but that it also had a lot to do with the productivity of everyone working in an embassy. He agreed, and the embassy in Australia became one of the first smoke-free embassies in the American Foreign Service.

This small victory was part of a larger movement, a growing official recognition of the dangers of secondhand smoke. The U.S. government increasingly started to move to a nonsmoking policy in its offices and buildings. By the time I left the Foreign Service, it was generally accepted that one did not smoke in meetings or in most federal government buildings.

Returning to Utah after retiring from the Foreign Service, I was soon elected to the Utah House of Representatives from Provo. In this capacity, I felt there was something I really wanted to accomplish: to make Utah a smoke-free state. In other words, I wanted to take smoking out of all public buildings and workplaces.

Arriving on Capitol Hill, I met several members of the legislature and spoke with a senator who had run a bill a year before attempting to take smoking out of restaurants in Utah. The bill had failed. The senator and others advised me to go for only a ban in restaurants and

not in all public buildings. But I wanted to craft a bill to ban smoking in all public buildings. The senator warned me it would never pass, and I asked why not.

His reply surprised me: "It's just not something that Utahns or the legislature is prepared to pass."

"Well," I replied, "I'm going to give it a try anyway."

Over and over, the same message came from a chorus of voices: "It will never pass." But I found it hard to believe that Utahns would not support a law promoting public health.

In 1993, I sponsored the first bill in the House to take smoking out of all public buildings in Utah, with the exception of the Salt Lake International Airport, where smoking rooms were in operation. It was politically unwise to go for an airport ban because of the strong opposition of Mayor Deedee Corradini. Mayor Corradini said, "We simply cannot take smoking out of the airport. Delta Airlines doesn't want a total ban. They will oppose the bill, and so will I."

To this day Salt Lake International Airport is still not a nonsmoking airport, in contrast to many large smoke-free airports around the United States, including Ronald Reagan Washington National, Chicago O'Hare, Dallas/Fort Worth, and San Francisco. At the time, the airport compromise had to be made if the bill was to have a chance of passing. In 1993 no state had passed a comprehensive smoking ban. Several large cities in California had passed ordinances banning smoking in public places, but even California had not attempted a comprehensive statewide ban. The only other state working on the issue was Vermont.

The bill met with limited support. But it opened up the debate and established the issues, laying the groundwork for a similar bill to be introduced in the 1994 legislative session. After the 1993 session closed, a coalition formed representing the public media (including KSL), the Utah Chapter of the American Lung Association, the Utah Chapter of the American Heart Association, some outstanding public health officials from the Utah Department of Health, the Utah Medical Association, and many other organizations and individuals interested in the issue. This coalition met time after time in early-morning strategy sessions to plan how we were going to get this legislation passed in the 1994 session.

When I introduced the bill in the 1994 session, I had an outstanding Senate sponsor, Dr. Robert Montgomery. He was a highly recognized cancer surgeon and believed that smoking was one of the most serious public health problems in the United States. He knew



from performing many lung cancer operations just how damaging smoking is to human lungs. Dr. Montgomery was a powerful ally and did an outstanding job in working to get the bill passed in the Senate. Together we held press conferences and worked with legislators serving on committees that would consider the bill.

There was tremendous opposition at the time from the American Tobacco Institute and major tobacco companies. Philip Morris and other big tobacco interests had twelve lobbyists working around the clock in Salt Lake City attempting to convince legislators that they should not support the bill. The tobacco lobbyists attended all committee hearings and testified that cigarette smoke was not nearly as bad as the health experts were saying, arguing that the science was unproven. In fact, according to them, their own research proved that cigarette smoking was not dangerous to health.

Despite these efforts, the bill found its way out of the committee hearings and on to the floor of the House. The tobacco lobbying campaign continued in full force; at times it felt like these outside interests had laid siege to the Utah Capitol. The tobacco lobbyists and their overseers did not want Utah to set a precedent for statewide bans on cigarette smoking in public buildings, so their efforts took on renewed urgency. They called individual legislators from the House and Senate chambers, arguing that a clean air act was not the type of thing that Utah should be doing. They also advanced the argument that this was “Mormon Church-sponsored legislation,” a red herring calculated to inflame prejudice and turn what was undeniably a health issue into a religious issue. Unfortunately several legislators bought into that particular argument.

Passage of the bill again looked doubtful because of the tobacco lobby's constant barrage of calculated misinformation. I worked tirelessly with my fellow legislators to counter its spread, trying to convince them that this was not a religious issue, that it was a public health issue, indeed one of the most important health issues in the United States. I argued that Utah was a state priding itself on health and that consistent with our desires to host the 2002 Winter Olympics, we should promote the best public health we possibly could.

The bill became a very significant piece of legislation, attracting an ever-increasing amount of media coverage and an unprecedented number of lobbyists from both inside and outside the state of Utah. Several Utah newspapers ran editorials. High school students staged a huge rally in the rotunda of the capitol. Students came by the hundreds to urge their particular representative to vote for the bill. I was so proud

of these youth for taking a public stand and letting their voice be heard on this important issue.

Senator Montgomery and I were invited to numerous meetings and discussed the importance of taking this huge step in promoting public health for the citizens of Utah. We met with then governor Michael Leavitt, who told us that if we could get the bill through both houses of the legislature, he was prepared to sign it. We held other meetings with the governor and urged him to speak out in favor of the bill. The governor's level of support was not what we had hoped for, but he did make some public comments in favor of the bill.

It now looked like the bill had a good chance of passing, but it was still extremely close. I felt so keenly about this legislation that it became a very emotional time. I knew this was a terribly important piece of legislation for public health but felt that because of the enormity of the lobbying effort against the bill the only way to get it passed was through a miracle. I prayed for divine guidance, feeling this was something we needed for all the people of Utah and also as a precedent for the people of the United States.

I introduced the bill during a morning session of House floor action on bills, giving a strong presentation on why the legislation was so necessary. Several legislators rose to speak against the bill. A long, tense debate followed. You could feel the suspense as the Speaker of the House finally closed the debate. As the votes came in, I felt that a miracle had indeed taken place. The miracle was not only that the bill had passed but that it had passed with a sufficient majority vote, thus sending a strong message of support to the Utah State Senate, which was next to vote.

On the day the bill was introduced to the Senate, Senator Montgomery gave an outstanding introduction of the bill, citing his personal experience with cancer patients and the urgent need to take steps to stop this menace to the public health. The Senate floor debate was just as active as the House's. Several senators spoke against the bill, some of them arguing that the legislation would hurt the image of Utah as a friendly state for tourists to visit.

The votes came in, and once again, the bill passed by a comfortable majority. Having passed both the House and the Senate, the bill could now be sent to the governor for his signature, at which point it would become a law.

The bill signing took place in the Gold Room of the Capitol Building. Senator Montgomery and I were surrounded by heads of associations who had worked so hard for passage and by individual

citizens who had been active participants in this huge and positive effort for public health.

In the days and weeks after, many people and families came with tears in their eyes to tell me the reasons why this legislation was such an important event in their lives. Some said the new law made it possible, for the first time in their lives, to take asthmatic children to a restaurant. For them this was one of the most wonderful things ever done for their families.

For several years we continued to receive phone calls from people throughout the state thanking us for making it possible to finally enjoy going out to a restaurant without having to breathe cigarette smoke. Others expressed their relief at being able to work in a smoke-free environment. The expressions of support and appreciation for this action on smoking were overwhelming. It seemed the people of Utah had been ready for this legislation after all.

Utah was the first state in the United States to implement a statewide ban on smoking in public buildings. It became a model for other states interested in passing similar bills, just as the tobacco lobby feared.

Since 1994 the legislature has amended the bill to ban smoking in private clubs, and the Salt Lake City Council has passed a restrictive ordinance that prohibits smoking at some outdoor public events. But the battle with big tobacco companies is far from over. Fewer than half the states currently have comprehensive bans on public smoking. While many municipalities have taken up the slack, the fact remains that millions of Americans are still forced to breathe secondhand smoke in places of work or in public establishments, such as bars and restaurants.

The importance of continuing the war on smoking was brought forcefully home in 2004, when I had a sister die from lung disease. She was not a smoker but had worked for over twelve years in an office in New Jersey where there were no restrictions on smoking. When she was diagnosed, the doctor told her that her lung problems were due to prolonged exposure to secondhand smoke. So we are still paying the price in this country, and we will continue to pay the price until we find the political will to ban smoking in all public places, in all fifty states.

And this is not our only clean-air challenge. Auto pollution, industrial pollution, and other pollutants continue to cost lives and untold billions in lost productivity and health-care costs. But for all the citizens of Utah, it means a great deal that we were able to help bring about such an important step in improving public health. **RE**

# Beneath the Surface of Multicultural Issues

*Nick Eastmond*

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A difficulty we face as teachers is knowing how to balance positive and negative sides of our lessons and to build a note of realism into a message of idealism. Maintaining this balance is challenging. This article examines this challenge based on observations my wife and I made during a three-month stay on Mauritius.

Mauritius is an island in the Indian Ocean about five hundred miles east of Madagascar. Many people know of the demise of the dodo bird on Mauritius but are otherwise unfamiliar with the island. In two classes I taught, I used a video from the Franklin Covey Leadership Series entitled *Celebrating Differences: Mauritius*.<sup>1</sup> In the video, management consultant Steven R. Covey argues that an organization in the United States or anywhere in the world could learn some lessons about incorporating diversity from the people of Mauritius. Each time I used the video in class, I would say, "I've arranged to spend part of a sabbatical year on that island. When I get there, I will find out if Covey's assessment was true or not." The students would smile, knowing that the reality of a culture seldom measures up to its ideal.

At the first seminar I gave at the University of Mauritius, I mentioned the Covey film and passed around the brochure about it. Everyone agreed that this acceptance of diversity was the message that Mauritians tried to convey to the rest of the world but that there are tensions that run much deeper. I inferred that there was a second half to the story. What I found, upon closer examination, was a number of

features of the local culture that supported multiculturalism, as well as some that negated or diminished it. In addition to the benefits of multiculturalism, there was a price to pay for toleration.

### Factors Favoring Multicultural Acceptance

The 1.2 million inhabitants of Mauritius are generally divided into four major groups: Hindu (52 percent), Muslim (18 percent), Chinese (3 percent), and general population (27 percent), which includes Creole of African descent and Franco-Mauritians (less than 1 percent).<sup>2</sup> The Covey video notes how these groups have learned to respect and value each other, often observing each other's holidays and attending ceremonies of the other groups.

In my view, certain factors portrayed in the video build multicultural acceptance:

- Perhaps because of the Hawaii-like climate, the island is relatively calm as people go about their lives.
- Only citizens with special permits are allowed to have firearms. Only police guarding high-security items (like bank deliveries) carry guns.
- Literacy rates for the island are high, reported at 84 percent for adults ages fifteen and above in 2000.<sup>3</sup>
- Most people are bilingual or trilingual. Primary school instruction is generally in French and secondary school in English. The University of Mauritius, as well as the country, observes English as the official language. However, the first language for most is Mauritian Creole, then French. All major newspapers are in French, and many television programs are in French and Mauritian Creole. To an American observer, the ability of most people to switch immediately from one language to another is nothing short of amazing.

### Strains on the Fabric of Multicultural Acceptance

It should come as no surprise that there could be flaws in the idyllic vision of this tropical paradise. Certain habits of mind and behaviors can be characterized as promoting tolerance of others' practices and beliefs, but some habits of the tolerant island border on unacceptable for those not from Mauritius.

*Unequal wealth distribution.* Because the land was completely uninhabited by humans prior to the arrival of the Dutch colonists from 1605 onward, there were no indigenous people to be dispossessed. The

descendants of the French colonists, who came after the Dutch had abandoned the island, are called Franco-Mauritians and are generally well-to-do. Today they account for less than 1 percent of the population but own most of the sugar estates and control an estimated 60 percent of the nation's wealth, a condition recently decried as "economic apartheid."<sup>4</sup>

*Problem avoidance.* "There seems to be a tendency," observes one French expatriate who now holds Mauritian citizenship, "of knowing that a problem exists but conspicuously avoiding its mention in conversation." Instead, safer topics are discussed, often at length, but the known problem of inequality is never addressed or solved.

*Toleration of abusive behavior.* Some behavior that would be socially disruptive in another context is tolerated in Mauritius. For example, we knew a family in which, due to a longstanding family disagreement, a nephew gave the silent treatment to his aunt in her own home, over many months. Both husband and wife chose to tolerate this pattern of behavior that seemed unacceptable to me. It seemed that such behavior could be tolerated in Mauritius more readily than it would have been elsewhere.

*Aberrations in public behavior.* Sometimes disruptive public behavior like cutting in line and aggressive driving is tolerated in Mauritius when it would be retaliated against or penalized in the U.S. The accident rate per capita on the highways is reported as the highest in the world.<sup>5</sup>

*Underemployment and social alienation.* There is a historical legacy of both slavery of Africans prior to 1839 and massive use of indentured Indian workers, under deplorable living and working conditions over the next century.<sup>6</sup> The net result is general landlessness, and large numbers of relatively low-paid workers among the descendants of both groups.

*Ethnic-based economic muscle flexing.* Since the country's independence from Britain in 1968, a rise in the number of Hindu people, the Mauritian ethnic majority, receiving special advantages from the system is evident. For example, from my experience and my inquiries, I discovered that of a dozen paid automobile drivers for the University of Mauritius, every one was from the Hindu majority. Certain classes of government workers—such as postal workers, police officers, and teachers—are almost entirely staffed by the Hindu majority. The irony is that before independence in 1968 these types of jobs were reserved for the colonials and the Hindus were systematically excluded. In

today's society, the minority Creole population is often excluded even though their ancestors have been on the island for centuries longer.

*Legal inequalities and stereotyping.* Sometimes the tactic of blaming the victim of poverty is invoked, alleging that members of a certain group are lazy, when in practice they are blocked from certain lines of employment, as explained above.

*Race riots.* We became aware that at times tension did erupt into race riots, the most recent being in 1999. A news article at the time reported that "at least four died in clashes with police." These riots were reportedly the worst seen in thirty years.<sup>7</sup> Speaking of such tensions, while we were in Mauritius, one Creole man described his view: "We all know that tolerance of differences is required [for us to get along on this island]. We put up with it and put up with it [the injustices], but finally it erupts. Then things calm down and life goes on." Everyone is aware that the tourist trade can quickly vanish if ethnic tensions mount. As we heard in South Africa, "Nothing kills tourism like a dead tourist." Keeping the current economy operating, particularly the tourism sector, requires widespread tolerance of ethnic and cultural differences, and all segments of the society generally accept that fact.

To sum up, the Covey video is accurate in portraying an impressive mix of cultures, but these are normal people working within their unique cultural milieu, and there is more than the positive side to see. In fairness to the Covey organization, it should be noted that the race riots described above occurred a full year after the release of the video and were apparently the worst seen in three decades. However, as in much of human society, much more exists than first meets the eye.

### Implications for Teachers

How would knowing about the broader picture help a teacher or observer of multiculturalism? To understand issues affecting a multicultural class, it is necessary to go below the positive sheen to deal with some tensions beneath the surface.

As religious educators, we may have a tendency to overlook the negative. For example, typical sayings in American Latter-day Saint culture are, "If you don't have something nice to say about someone, don't say it" and "Accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative." We try to focus on positive aspects of a class over the long term. We have our reasons for that emphasis, and they are often quite defensible. Teachers see this theme in the poem "The Touch of the Master's Hand" and in the story of Johnny Lingo and his eight-cow wife. In education circles, we speak of the value of the Pygmalion effect, drama-

tized by the character of Eliza Doolittle in the musical *My Fair Lady*: treat students the way you believe that they should be, and they will most often work to meet those expectations.<sup>8</sup> We believe that seeing a person through the Lord's eyes—as the prophet Samuel was able to see the boy David as the powerful king he would become—is our ideal in interpersonal relations.

Yet we must not overlook the unsavory aspects of a situation that may lead to a blindness of racial or cultural tensions with long-term disastrous consequences. Tensions festering under the surface can build and eventually erupt in violence. As one Mauritian sister, just returned from a mission in the Congo, said to our congregation on the island, "We were taught that in order to really love the people [on our mission], we needed to see both the positive and the negative sides of them: the positive to appreciate their uniqueness and let them feel our love for them, and the negative to be able to help them to improve."

Beyond that, if students perceive that messages received in class are only half truths, they will come to suspect the credibility of the other messages, concluding that the rest of the message may contain falsehoods also. I believe that we have to work to always be on the side of honesty and full disclosure, not avoiding the negative when it is obviously there. I appreciate the advice of President Spencer W. Kimball for truth telling in journal writing, a position that has relevance in a teaching about multicultural issues as well: "Your journal should contain your true self rather than a picture of you when you are 'made up' for a public performance. There is a temptation to paint one's virtues in rich color and whitewash the vices, but there is also the opposite pitfall of accentuating the negative. Personally I have little respect for anyone who delves into the ugly phases of the life he is portraying, whether it be his own or another's. The truth should be told, but we should not emphasize the negative."<sup>9</sup>

In all our dealings with others, we have to keep both positive and negative elements in mind, and act accordingly. In our teaching, we have to stay connected to both the positive and negative, to keep our messages grounded in reality. That is the challenge of honesty.<sup>10</sup>

### A Balance of Realism and Idealism

The General Authorities work hard to undercut the cultural blindness described above by viewing both the positive and the negative aspects of racial situations. A recent talk by President Gordon B. Hinckley in the priesthood session of April 2006 conference provides a welcome balance between realism and idealism; he does not mince

words in describing our current situation. He asks: “Why do any of us have to be so mean and unkind to others? Why can’t all of us reach out in friendship to everyone about us?” Then he responds:

I have wondered why there is so much hatred in the world. . . .

Racial strife still lifts its ugly head. I am advised that even right here among us there is some of this. I cannot understand how it can be. It seemed to me that we all rejoiced in the 1978 revelation given President Kimball. I was there in the temple at the time that that happened. There was no doubt in my mind or in the minds of my associates that what was revealed was the mind and the will of the Lord.

Now I am told that racial slurs and denigrating remarks are sometimes heard among us. I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ. Nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of the Church of Christ. How can any man holding the Melchizedek Priesthood arrogantly assume that he is eligible for the priesthood whereas another who lives a righteous life but whose skin is of a different color is ineligible?

Throughout my service as a member of the First Presidency, I have recognized and spoken a number of times on the diversity we see in our society. It is all about us, and we must make an effort to accommodate that diversity.

Let us all recognize that each of us is a son or daughter of our Father in Heaven, who loves all of His children.

Brethren, there is no basis for racial hatred among the priesthood of this Church. If any within the sound of my voice is inclined to indulge in this, then let him go before the Lord and ask for forgiveness and be no more involved in such.<sup>11</sup>

President Hinckley points to the positive features of our doctrine, including the 1978 revelation on priesthood. He testifies that we are all children of our Father in Heaven and that God loves all of His children, regardless of color and ethnic background, and so should we love our siblings. But he also points to racial slurs, the attitudes of superiority that separate one group from another, and the basic hatred and fear that underlie racist actions. The talk includes both the good and the bad elements of diversity in our world.

### The Doctrine of Inclusion

Another example of dealing with prejudice toward outsiders was a conference talk by Elder M. Russell Ballard entitled “Doctrine of Inclusion.” He notes that in the parable of the good Samaritan the Savior deliberately made a point about ethnicity:

Every time I read this parable I am impressed with its power and its simplicity. But have you ever wondered why the Savior chose to make the hero of this story a Samaritan? There was considerable antipathy between the Jews and the Samaritans at the time of Christ. Under normal circumstances these two groups avoided association with each other. It would still be a good, instructive parable if the man who fell among thieves had been rescued by a brother Jew.

His deliberate use of Jews and Samaritans clearly teaches that we are all neighbors and that we should love, esteem, respect, and serve one another despite our deepest differences—including religious, political, and cultural differences.<sup>12</sup>

It seems to me that we as teachers might choose to highlight good works of people who are commonly looked down on in our society. Highlighting the contributions of a minority group or individual can help create a sense of belonging and camaraderie. Praising the down-trodden seems to be at least part of Elder Ballard’s message.

In the remainder of his talk, he describes two success stories. In one a death occurred in a family who was not affiliated with our Church, yet the local ward’s compassionate response was overwhelming and positive. In the other he told of a member of the Church and a Jewish woman; both of them lived a long way from home and became very close friends.

But, in addition, Elder Ballard candidly points out certain lamentable practices of some members of the Church who teach their children to avoid making friends with people of other races or religions:

Perceptions and assumptions can be very dangerous and unfair. There are some of our members who may fail to reach out with friendly smiles, warm handshakes, and loving service to all of their neighbors. At the same time, there may be those who move into our neighborhoods who are not of our faith who come with negative preconceptions about the church and its members. Surely good neighbors should put forth every effort to understand each other and be kind to one another regardless of religion, nationality, race, or culture.

Occasionally I hear of members offending those of other faiths by overlooking them and leaving them out. This can occur especially in communities where our members are the majority. I have heard about narrow-minded parents who tell children that they cannot play with a particular child in the neighborhood simply because his or her family does not belong to our Church. This kind of behavior is not in keeping with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot comprehend why any member of our Church would allow these kinds of things to happen. I have been a member of this Church my entire life. . . . I have never taught—nor have I ever heard taught—a doctrine of exclusion. I have never heard the members of this Church urged to be anything

but loving, kind, tolerant, and benevolent to our friends and neighbors of other faiths.<sup>13</sup>

In these two instances of our General Authorities counseling members of the Church to improve their levels of tolerance and acceptance of people different from themselves, we see a pattern of (1) praising good practice where it is found, (2) citing bad practice and labeling it as such, and (3) drawing attention to gospel principles that should guide all of our actions. It seems that teachers in the seminaries and institutes, as well as Sunday School and other teachers, could profit by these examples. These are real, ongoing problems. W. E. B. Du Bois cited “the color line” (racism) as the central problem of the twentieth century,<sup>14</sup> and it seems fair to say that it has spilled over into the current century as well.

### Showing Our Beliefs by Our Actions

There is, of course, one more element in teaching behavior, and that concerns our actions. It will not do for us to espouse principles of inclusion but then to show disdain and revulsion toward people different from ourselves. An example of how to deal with someone from another culture would be Christ’s matter-of-fact but respectful treatment of the Samaritan woman at the well. His lack of reserve was so noticeable that the woman herself commented on it. Christ dealt with her in a way that showed his recognition of her as a daughter of God, not as a woman who had “had five husbands,” was living with a man who was not her husband, and somehow needed to be shamed (see John 4:9).

Another historical example of dealing well across racial and cultural boundaries was President Abraham Lincoln in his dealings with Frederick Douglass, a former escaped slave and then a leader of the Abolitionist movement. Douglass praised Lincoln in a letter: “In all my interviews with Mr. Lincoln I was impressed with his entire freedom from popular prejudice against the colored race. He was the first great man that I talked with in the United States freely, who in no single instance reminded me of the difference between himself and myself, of the difference of color, and I thought that all the more remarkable because he came from a state where there were black laws.”<sup>15</sup> That was high praise for a president who had many detractors during the difficult Civil War days.

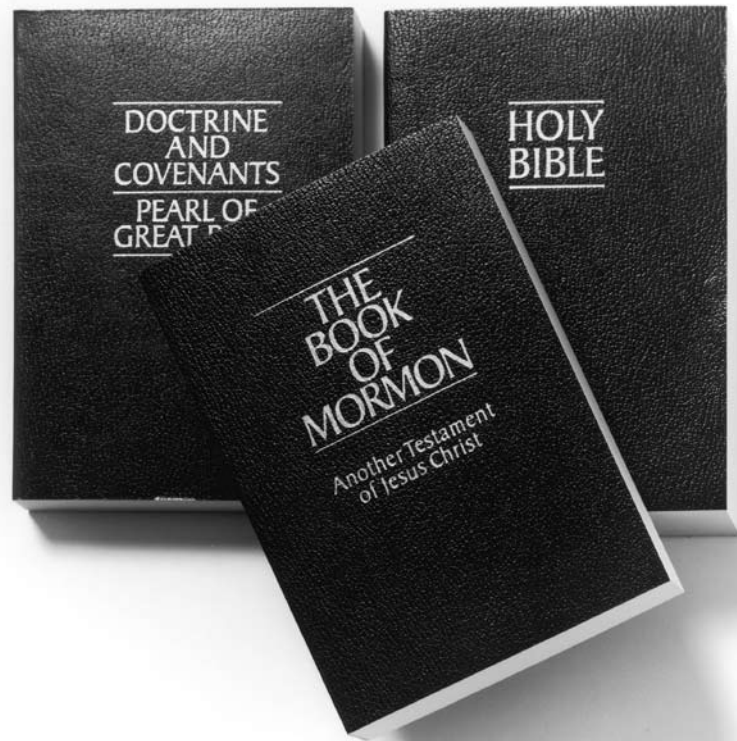
### Conclusion

In an age of international terrorism and social upheaval, the ongoing calm of life of most Mauritians is admirable. From my point of view, however, tolerance and tranquillity require compromises that can leave tensions under the surface. The lessons that Mauritians can teach the rest of the world, about how to respect and value other cultures are many. So in my view, we need to see beyond the calm on the surface of multiculturalism to the deeper levels that are part of the experience of life. As teachers, we can find ways to address real issues in race and diversity matters, pointing out good and bad aspects of current situations, but always teaching correct principles and demonstrating our belief in them through our actions. ■

### Notes

An earlier version of this paper appeared in the newsletter of the Utah Chapter of the National Association for Multicultural Education, March 2006, 1, 3.

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6. John Addison and K. Hazareesingh, *A New History of Mauritius* (Rose Hill, Mauritius: Editions de l’Ocean Indien).
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8. Robert Rosenthal and L. Jacobsen, “Pygmalion in the Classroom,” *Urban Review* 3, no. 1 (1968): 16–20.
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12. M. Russell Ballard, “Doctrine of Inclusion,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 36.
13. Ballard, “Doctrine of Inclusion,” 36–37.
14. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Classic, 1989), xxxi.
15. Russell Freedman, *Lincoln: A Photobiography* (New York: Clarion, 1987), 103–4.



Finding scriptural conversion factors is one key to finding Christ in the scriptures.

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# Scriptural Conversion Factors

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In 1978 I received a PhD in organic chemistry from the University of Utah. Many years and much effort were required to obtain this degree. However, as early as high school, I learned an important concept that applies to all the physical sciences: conversion factors.

Perhaps you remember Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Kindergarten is the time to learn about sharing, honesty, friendships, and rules—things that are absolutely essential to function in society, no matter how old or how educated you eventually become. Similarly, conversion factors are absolutely essential to function in the world of the physical sciences no matter how much other knowledge you eventually obtain.

So what are conversion factors? They are constant values that enable a number measured in one unit to be converted into the same value in a different unit. For example, a football field is one hundred yards long; the unit of distance is yards. Now suppose somebody needed to know how long a football field is in meters. Using a series of common conversion factors, we can calculate:

$$100 \text{ yards} \times .3 \text{ feet/yard} \times 12 \text{ inches/foot} \times 2.54 \text{ cm/inch} \times 1 \text{ meter}/100 \text{ cm} \\ = 91.44 \text{ meters}$$

Two important questions to ask whenever doing a calculation with conversion factors are these: (1) did all the units cancel out to the desired units? and (2) does the final answer make sense? In this football field example, first notice how the yards, and then the feet, inches, and

centimeters are all canceled out until only meters are left, the desired unit for the final result. Second, notice that the final answer makes sense when you consider the relationship between yards and meters. Since a meter is just a little longer than a yard, it makes sense that 91.44 meters is the same as 100 yards.

There are three important rules to follow when using conversion factors for the physical sciences: (1) All measured numbers have units. For example, even if the distance units are not explicitly expressed when somebody's height is said to be "five ten," it must be understood that the person's height is really 5 *feet* and 10 *inches*. (2) Units = units. In other words, the left- and right-hand sides of the equation must agree with each other. And (3), metric system units (kilograms instead of pounds, and meters instead of feet) are the required standard for all scientific calculations.

I have discovered three corresponding rules for the scriptures which lead to some insights for gospel study. Finding scriptural conversion factors is one key to finding Christ in the scriptures. As Christ Himself commanded, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they [the scriptures] are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

### The Three Rules of Scriptural Conversion Factors

1. *All things testify of Christ.* The Lord told Adam: "And behold, all things have their likeness, and 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). This verse is among my all-time favorites. Similar to how we sometimes forget the units of feet and inches when we say somebody is "five ten," sometimes our lives, and even our scripture study, omit the unit of Christ.

Alma's confrontation with the unbelieving Korihor illustrates this concept. Korihor denied Christ and contended that Alma could not know that there shall be a Christ. Alma responded with the assertion that the scriptures and the whole earth testify of Christ:

But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them? Believest thou that these things are true?

Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no

place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices that he may destroy the children of God.

And now Korihor said unto Alma: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words.

But Alma said unto him: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator. (Alma 30:41-44)

Symbols are powerful tools to teach about Christ, and scriptural conversion factors can be symbols. There are many symbols employed for Christ. He is the Bread, the Living Water, the Light, and the Rock, to mention just a few. These symbols and analogies, in their likenesses, point us to Christ and bear record of Him. By writing and remembering the symbol as a scriptural conversion factor—for example, Living Water = Christ—even some of the more difficult passages to study can take on more significant meaning. For example, take this one from Ezekiel: "And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezekiel 47:9). By converting rivers to Living Water, and knowing that Living Water = Christ, the passage is changed from a mere description of water bringing life to a desert area into a testimony of the healing and life-giving power of Christ.

Scriptural conversion factors can also be things that are not exactly symbols. People, prophets, parables, stories, names, titles, characteristics, concepts, and attributes can be scriptural conversion factors. In fact, conversion factors are so abundant in the scriptures that we often fail to recognize them for what they are. They are apparent in the English expressions of *to be*—which in its forms *am*, *art*, *is*, and *are*—renames the subject with an equivalent term. *To be* in this context can be replaced with an equal sign. Consider replacing the word *is* with an equal sign in the frequently quoted "this *is* my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39; emphasis added), and you will notice that the result looks like a conversion factor:

**my work and my glory = the immortality and eternal life of man**



2. *I Am = I Am.* The verb *to be* as noted above, appears to be a good clue for finding scriptural conversion factors. I admit to a long-time curiosity about the Lord's response when Moses asked God's name: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:13–14).

I believe that having I Am = God's name opens up a world of possibilities. With this name and concept, it is easier to see how all things do testify of Christ—which was rule 1. I Am becomes equal to anything we put on the other side of the equation.

**I Am = Light = Truth = The Way = Eternal Life = Alpha and Omega =  
much, much more**

3. *Standard works (the scriptures) must be used.* Similar to how the metric system units need to be the standard for scientific calculations, the standard units established and provided for gospel study are known as the standard works, and this list includes the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

Nothing is necessarily wrong with appropriate use of other sources like magazines, articles, talks, books, and manuals; it is simply an essential reality that everything, without exception, must eventually conform to the established standard which God has provided through His prophets. I rejoice that the continuing focus in gospel doctrine, seminary, and institute classes throughout the worldwide Church is an annual rotation among the standard works.

The prophet Alma showed that he understood the purpose of the scriptures and the power that the scriptures themselves have in the conversion process: "And this he [Alma] did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the *word of God* unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the *word of God*, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in *pure testimony* against them" (Alma 4:19; emphasis added). President Boyd K. Packer reemphasized the scriptures' importance: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study

of behavior will improve behavior."<sup>1</sup> And the standard works are provided to learn true doctrine. Again this innate feature of the scriptures is described in Alma's record: "And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God" (Alma 31:5).

### Applying Scriptural Conversion Factors

A seminary-class exercise that I enjoyed very much was to note in how many ways prophets' lives could be considered types of Christ's life. Abraham's willing sacrifice of Isaac is a classic example of this concept. Oftentimes the scriptures themselves explain what is equivalent to I Am. For example, consider what the scriptures say about the example of the prophet Jonah: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40); and, "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation" (Luke 11:30). Both sides of the equation agree with each other when written like this:

sign of Jonas = sign of the Son of Man  
  
three days in the whale's belly =  
three days in the heart of the earth

These equations show that the intent of the record describing Jonah and the whale is really to testify of Christ.

Our family favorite and a most insightful scriptural conversion factor actually comes from a parable. It is the good Samaritan = Christ.<sup>2</sup> The parable of the good Samaritan is most frequently associated with how to be a good neighbor in response to the lawyer's second question: "And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29). It is only by recognizing that the parable also answers the lawyer's first question, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25), that it becomes evident how Christ Himself plays the role of the good Samaritan and that this parable is a testimony of His saving mission. Once this connection is made and appreciated, the parable of the good Samaritan converts from a story about kindness into a confirming statement of our need for the Savior.

A handbook of physics and chemistry will contain a large table of conversion factors. Conversion factors can be looked up for practically

anything you would like to calculate, from A to Z. Similarly scriptural conversion factors can also be looked up. One of the best lists of scriptural conversion factors I have found is located in the Bible Dictionary. Under “Christ, Names of,” for example, is a marvelous list of scriptural conversion factors for practically anything you would like to find in the scriptures about names, titles, and concepts of Christ, from Alpha to Omega.

Once you think you might have received an insight with the use of a scriptural conversion factor, do not forget to apply the two questions mentioned above: (1) Do all the units cancel out to the desired units? Or in other words, do the scriptures themselves give a clue about the desired units and end result? In the example of Jonah and the whale, the Lord Himself indicated that the desired outcome was to be a sign in recognition of Himself. (2) Does the final answer make sense? In the example of the good Samaritan, having the good Samaritan represent Christ does make sense when viewed in answer to the lawyer’s original question. Like the appropriate use of symbols, an appropriate interpretation for a particular scriptural conversion factor will not be isolated in just one verse. An answer that makes sense will apply to many verses, will be repeated in many locations, and will be consistent with the entire scriptural text.

The word *conversion* is often defined and associated with the missionary concept of accepting baptism and joining the Church. A *convert* is one who has been changed from one belief to another. May each of us learn to apply scriptural conversion factors to study the scriptures. This might change what initially seems to be an interesting story, like Jonah and the whale or the good Samaritan, into a testimony that converts each of us to Christ. **RE**

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## Notes

1. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1986, 20.

2. See John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: A Type and Shadow of the Plan of Salvation,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 50–115; see also John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: Forgotten Symbols,” *Ensign*, February 2007, 40–47.

# The Key to Righteous Leadership

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And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers. (Abraham 1:2)

This scripture teaches us two significant principles: (1) Abraham desired to become a rightful heir of the priesthood; (2) he desired to become an even greater follower of righteousness, seeking greater knowledge, wanting even more instruction, and wanting to keep the commandments more fully.

A brief view of each principle is important to this essay. First is to discuss the importance of righteousness in the holy order of the priesthood. Second is to discover how to become greater followers of righteousness.

## The Holy Order of the Priesthood

We learn in Doctrine and Covenants 121:36 that “the rights of the priesthood” can be controlled or handled only “upon the principles of righteousness.” Abraham desired and received the priesthood of God because he was a follower of righteousness; he could be trusted. He

became the great patriarch and leader of the covenant people because he followed in righteousness. We also learn that the order of the holy priesthood is sacred, so sacred that “out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name, they, the church, in ancient days, called that priesthood after Melchizedek, or the Melchizedek Priesthood” (D&C 107:4). In formal nomenclature, the priesthood is called “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3).

The priesthood is holy. Thus the operation of the priesthood is very sacred and can be received only by covenant and by ordination “by the laying on of hands” (Articles of Faith 1:5). Furthermore, while performing priesthood ordinances, “the one who officiates speaks and acts, not of himself and of his personal authority, but by virtue of his ordination and appointment as a representative of the powers of heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

Alma gave an inspired vision of the priesthood as he spoke to the people in the land of Ammonihah. Marvelous was his understanding that “the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son. . . . And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption” (Alma 13:1–2). The power of the Son’s redemption comes through ordinances, which are administered by the priesthood. It is through the priesthood that the ordinances give power to the people to overcome all things: “Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order. . . . There were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God. . . . Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb” (Alma 13:8, 10–11).

The holy priesthood is a religious order modeled by the grace, equity, and truth of both the Father and the Son. It is received by ordination and sacred covenant. The covenants of the priesthood are that those who receive the holy priesthood will continue in their faithfulness, do good works, magnify their calling, learn their duty, and act in their office diligently (see Alma 13:3; D&C 84:33; 107:99). The covenant means being followers of righteousness. In return, the Father covenants by oath that righteous priesthood holders will inherit all His power and glory (see D&C 84:38–40).

“There is no limit to the power of the priesthood which you hold,” President Spencer W. Kimball taught priesthood leaders. “The limit comes in you if you do not live in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord and you limit yourselves in the power you exert.”<sup>2</sup> Because keeping covenants gives power to man to connect with the powers of the Spirit of the Lord, being an effective priesthood leader means becoming a better follower of righteousness.

### Followers of Righteousness

Leaders of the priesthood are to be followers of righteousness in every way. Thus followers of righteousness are actually followers of Christ. He is the model, the Righteous One. The scriptures teach, “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). “When shall the day of the Lord come? When shall the blood of the Righteous be shed? . . . Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain” (Moses 7:45, 47).

Thus the master key to righteous priesthood leadership is following the Master. Like Abraham, as we become greater followers of righteousness, we are rewarded with greater light and knowledge.

Following the Master involves following His appointed leaders in righteousness. In the kingdom of God, every leader has a leader. Thus:

- The quorum president will do well to follow his bishop and stake president.
- The bishop or branch president is to follow the stake or district president.
- The stake president is to take counsel from his Area President, and the district president from his mission and Area Presidents.
- Area Presidents are loyal to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency.
- The Twelve and First Presidency obey the prophet.
- The prophet holds dearly to the source of righteousness, Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ has always given His will to the Father (see John 5:19, 30; see also 6:38; 8:29).

From these thoughts, we may conclude that:

- Every leader has a leader.
- Every leader is, in turn, a follower.
- Good leaders are also good followers.

Thus priesthood leadership, even on the local level of the Church, is following the order of the Son of Righteousness. And how can the Saints receive the Lord's guidance and blessings unless they precisely follow His priesthood leaders in righteousness?

A man is first a follower of righteousness; then he becomes a leader in righteousness. After obtaining great knowledge, a desire for greater knowledge results in greater leadership.

### Which Way Do You Face?

If the Church were a democracy, then leaders would represent the people to the Lord. That would be something—telling the Lord by popular vote what to do to obtain righteousness and truth! But the kingdom of God is a theocracy, not a democracy.

Can we imagine an Area President going against the counsel of a member of the Twelve? What if a bishop said to the stake president, “The Saints want to do thus and thus. I believe in them. You may have the wrong inspiration.” President Boyd K. Packer has asked priesthood leaders, “Which way do you face?”

Thirty-eight years ago I came from Brigham City to the office I now occupy in the Administration Building to see Elder Harold B. Lee. . . .

[He] had agreed to give me counsel and some direction. He didn't say much, nothing really in detail, but what he told me has saved me time and time again.

“You must decide now which way you face,” he said. “Either you represent the teachers and students and champion their causes or you represent the Brethren who appointed you. You need to decide *now* which way you face.” . . . It took some hard and painful lessons before I understood his counsel. In time, I did understand, and my resolve to face the right way became irreversible. . . .

Perhaps too many of us are strong advocates of our own specialized work or are such strong protectors of our own turf that we face the wrong way—maybe just sideways. . . . Could you believe other than it is critical that all of us work together and set aside personal interests and all face the same way? . . . The temptation is for us to turn about and face the wrong way and it is hard to resist, for doing it seems so reasonable and right. . . .

Unwittingly we may turn about and face the wrong way. Then the channels of revelation are reversed. Let me say that again: Then the channels of revelation are reversed. In our efforts to comfort [others], we lose our bearing and leave that segment of the line to which we are assigned unprotected.<sup>3</sup>

With heartfelt obedience, followers of righteousness face leaders in the order of the priesthood. Backs are not turned toward those to whom jurisdiction is given. All leaders are positioned in the midst of the priesthood order to serve those whom they preside over. Leaders are to help those whom they have jurisdiction over and to be in harmony and unity with all leaders. Leaders teach others what they are taught by their leaders. Leaders enforce what their leaders want done. Leaders may counsel with their leaders and share the desires and feelings of those they lead, but they then take counsel from their leaders. Inspired priesthood leaders serve as the voice of the Lord (see D&C 1:14, 38; 21:5; 84:35, 36).

This does not mean priesthood leaders are power hungry. It is quite the reverse. Leaders in the holy order of the priesthood seek to be as the Savior, to do His work in His way with His power. When leaders are loyal to their leaders, then they feel and act more responsibly, for righteous leaders care for the souls of mankind. The Apostle Paul teaches, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy” (Hebrews 13:17).

### Submission of Our Will to God

For leaders of righteousness to become true followers in the order of the priesthood, they must be willing to submit their will to their God. This is a great sacrifice. It may be the ultimate sacrifice. Our will is our own private, personal treasure. Our will, or agency, is the one thing that is ours. Even God, who is omnipotent, will never desire to take anyone's will. By giving our agency to God, the Father can bestow all things unto us, even “my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him” (D&C 84:38).

Jesus has set the example. He was the most favored Son in that He not only sought the will of the Father and sought to glorify the Father but also “finished” all things the Father desired: “Behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, *thy will* be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2; emphasis added). “I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered *the will of the Father* in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11; emphasis added).

Thus Jesus could say not only to Matthew but also to all people, “Follow me” (Matthew 9:9). As priesthood leaders follow the Son of

Righteousness, they can also rightfully say, “Follow me.” Priesthood followers will do well to follow the example of Christ.

Jesus sought only the will of the Father and did only what the Father had commanded Him—this is the model and example to followers and leaders of righteousness. In receiving the priesthood ordinances of salvation, in effect, a person offers his or her will to the Father. Each person will someday need to submit his or her personal will to the Father’s will; doing this is really a sacrifice of agency.

Notice how President Packer surrendered his agency in the following manner: “I want to be good. I’m not ashamed to say that—I want to be good. And I’ve found in my life that it has been critically important that this was established between me and the Lord so that I knew that he knew which way I committed my agency. I went before him and said, ‘I’m not neutral, and you can do with me what you want. If you need my vote, it’s there. I don’t care what you do with me, and you don’t have to take anything from me because I give it to you—everything, all I own, all I am,’ and that makes the difference.”<sup>4</sup>

That makes the difference because followership is offered; our will is not forced but given. Thus agency is not eliminated in priesthood followership because of the free-will offering. Giving our will freely is what brings balance and power to the discipleship of the Lord’s servants.

The priesthood of God and the organization of its holy order is a theocracy in which the people sustain the leaders, and the leaders are followers of righteousness. Followers sustain and follow in righteousness and with their agency. They decide for themselves if they want to obey their leaders, on the local level and the general level. Each will be governed by their agency as to their dedication in following leaders. However, that agency cannot be violated by leaders, or it is not righteous leadership. That glorious, personal principle of choice must be protected in righteousness. It cannot be abrogated in unrighteousness. Agency used properly will sustain both followers and leaders of righteousness, for both will be guided by the Holy Spirit to give strength and power to each other. Unity and confidence will thus reign supreme. President Brigham Young cautioned against “reckless confidence”:

I am . . . afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by Him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God

in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually.<sup>5</sup>

Followers of righteousness know for themselves by the revelations of Jesus that they are led in the right way. Then all are united as one. “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). This is righteous followership: having confidence in the local leaders as well as the general leaders. Followers of righteousness also know righteousness and the Son of Righteousness; they do not follow blindly; they follow truth and thus make the people free (see John 8:31–32).

## Conclusion

Jesus and the Father are the embodiment of righteousness. Priesthood followers and leaders have been invited to take upon them the righteous character of God, or the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4–10). All followers or leaders in the holy order of the Son of God will seek to become like the Savior. The qualities of the character of God are essential for righteous followership in the kingdom.

Ultimately, righteousness is the key to leadership in God’s kingdom. Righteous followership comes first; righteous leadership follows. As we follow the Master, we come to possess greater knowledge, becoming “rightful heirs,” as was Abraham. It is clear that the spiral of priesthood leadership rises and falls upon our personal righteousness and obtaining of godly knowledge. **RE**

## Notes

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 64; see also Doctrine and Covenants 36:2.

2. Edward L. Kimball, ed., *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 498.

3. Boyd K. Packer, All-Church Coordinating Council, May 18, 1993, Office of the Council of the Twelve, 1, 3, 5.

4. Boyd K. Packer, “To Those Who Teach in Troubled Times,” in *Charge to Religious Educators* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 103.

5. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1862), 9:150.

# The First Seminary Teacher

*Casey Paul Griffiths*



Granite High Seminary Building, 1912

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When the first released-time seminary program was launched at Granite High School in 1911, it faced a number of challenges. Joseph F. Merrill, the member of the Granite Stake presidency who had first conceived of the program, faced the overwhelming task of building an entirely new form of religious education from scratch. Curriculum, facilities, and the legality of the fledgling program all weighed heavily on his mind. Chief among his concerns was the task of finding the right man to launch the program—the first seminary teacher. Writing to the stake presidency, Merrill gave his qualifications for the position as follows:

May I suggest it is the desire of the presidency of the stake to have a strong young man who is properly qualified to do the work in a most satisfactory manner. By young we do not necessarily mean a teacher who is young in years, but a man who is young in his feelings, who loves young people, who delights in their company, who can command their respect and admiration and exercise a great influence over them. . . . We want a man who is a thorough student, one who will not teach in a perfunctory way, but who will enliven his instructions by a strong, winning personality and give evidence of a thorough understanding of and scholarship in the things he teaches. . . . A teacher is wanted who is a leader and who will be universally regarded as the inferior of no teacher in the high school.<sup>1</sup>

The man ultimately picked for this position was Thomas J. Yates.<sup>2</sup> The following study is an attempt to shed some light on the background and labors of this pioneer of education in the Church.

### Thomas J. Yates and the Modern Religious Educator

Thomas J. Yates does not fit the mold of the typical professional religious educator. In fact, Yates shares more in common with the average early-morning seminary teacher than his modern professional counterparts. He was by no means an expert in religion, nor even a career educator. At the time he began his first assignment, Yates was working as an engineer on the Murray power plant. He did not have, nor would he ever have, any kind of professional training in how to teach religion. His stint as the instructor at Granite seminary lasted only one year, after which he was replaced by Guy C. Wilson, a full-time teacher from the Church academy. With no professional training or teaching experience, what did Yates bring to the position? The qualities which won him the job may hopefully be found in any of his current successors: a love of the gospel, a passion for the scriptures, and a willingness to serve at the Lord's call.

#### A Faithful Upbringing

Thomas J. Yates was born to Thomas and Elizabeth Yates in 1870. He spent the early years of his life in Scipio, Utah, where his father served as bishop of the local ward. During his adolescence he developed a puckish sense of humor and was involved in many pranks. Every year around Halloween, Thomas and his friends would engage in mischief. A favorite prank consisted of taking apart a neighbor's wagon, then reassembling it on top of a nearby shed. Some of his more outrageous exploits involved such unsavory activity as tipping over nearby outhouses.<sup>3</sup> But alongside this youthful exuberance there was a deep spirituality developing in young Thomas. He later recalled the first stirrings of testimony as he sat in his Primary classes. He later wrote: "My first testimony was gained while a member of the Primary Association. Through the teachings there and by fasting and prayer the spirit of testimony was received. There was no remarkable demonstration but a positive assurance was given me that the Gospel was true. No doubt has ever entered my mind from that day to this. I have beheld many manifestations of God's power since; all of which simply add to this childhood testimony."<sup>4</sup>

At the time of Thomas's childhood, Scipio was still a part of the frontier, and his reminiscences abound with memories of cowboy adventures. On one excursion to retrieve some stray horses, he was startled to see a bear, only to be further terrified when several Native Americans appeared and began firing their guns at the animal. Assum-

ing he was their real target, Thomas beat a quick retreat out of the area. His father refused to believe such a tall tale. Later that day when several of the Native Americans came to his father's store to trade a bear skin, Thomas's father asked them if they had seen a boy on a horse nearby. The Native Americans began laughing and responded that the only evidence of his son's presence had been a dust trail leading out of the valley. Similar stories of Yates's adventurous youth fill the pages of his personal writings. It is no stretch of the imagination to picture Thomas regaling his seminary classes with tales of his encounters with bears and Native Americans during the lighter moments of class.<sup>5</sup>

#### Education and Mission

When Yates was sixteen, he left Scipio to attend Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah. The academy was still in its formative stages, meeting in the ZCMI warehouse. Here he benefited from the instruction of Karl G. Maeser, the school's first principal, and skilled teachers, among them future Apostle James E. Talmage and Benjamin Cluff Jr., who later served as the first president of Brigham Young University. Yates paid tribute to Maeser's hand in his spiritual development, saying, "Dr. Maeser was one of the greatest spiritual teachers I have ever met. He left a spiritual imprint in most all the students that came under his influence."<sup>6</sup>

The next few years consisted of intensive studies at the academy, broken up by summers in Scipio working in the family businesses. When he graduated from Brigham Young Academy four years later, Yates, at age twenty, was hired as principal of a school in Deseret, Utah. Yates noted his intimidation at supervising teachers who were much older than he was. He even had several students who were older than he was. Nonetheless, he dove into the assignment with enthusiasm. Within a year he had been given supervisory responsibilities over local schools in Oasis, Hinckley, and Delta, becoming the assistant superintendent for all Millard County schools. Despite these successes, Yates felt a need to continue his schooling. Though a natural teacher, he did not see his professional future as being in education. He returned to Brigham Young Academy and began preparations to travel to the eastern United States for further education.<sup>7</sup>

During the next year at the academy, Yates fell in love with Lydia Horne, a fellow academy student. They planned to marry in the summer of 1895, after which they would travel to Cornell University, where both would further their education. Yates's plans were interrupted when he returned to his parents' home and found a letter

issuing a mission call. When his mother asked if he would accept the call despite his educational plans, his career, and his engagement, Yates showed his devotion to the gospel: “I told her there was only one answer; I would go on a mission. She said what about college? I said this is more important. I accept[ed] the call. [The] next morning my answer was on its way to Salt Lake.”<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to the practices of modern missionaries, Yates pressed on with his engagement plans after he received his call. He and Lydia decided to marry before he left on his mission. They were wed on March 20, 1895. After a little over two months of matrimony, Yates left for his mission at the beginning of June the same year. He spent the next three years serving in the Southern States Mission.<sup>9</sup>

He later offered a brief summary of his service. Yates’s experiences offer an intriguing window into missionary service at the turn of the century:

Our only means of travel was walking. We made it our custom in our travels, either in canvassing or going from branch to branch of the church to do a full days work regardless of where we would end the day. When night came we were often long distances from acquaintances, or friends, but we would work to the end of the day without knowledge where or with whom we would stay that night. We had full confidence that the Lord would raise up a friend when we needed it, for our Mission President had promised us He would, and He never failed us. During the thirty seven months of my mission I did not have to sleep out once and during the last thirty months we never paid for food or lodging but went entirely depending upon the Lord.<sup>10</sup>

When Yates returned in 1898, he and Lydia left for their studies at Cornell. Arriving in the East at a time when Latter-day Saint beliefs were still largely misunderstood, and in a place where the Church had yet to establish a strong presence, the young couple saw an opportunity to open doors for their religion. Yates felt his time at Cornell to be an extension of his missionary experience and took it upon himself to share the gospel with his professors and fellow students.<sup>11</sup>

Yates excelled in his studies at Cornell. He also recorded an encounter widely shared in Latter-day Saint history but little associated with his name. At a reception honoring Andrew D. White, the former American ambassador to Russia, White discovered Yates’s Utah background and immediately asked if he was a Mormon. When he replied in the affirmative, White then asked if he could meet with him again and set up an appointment for the following Sunday evening. Yates, bewildered by this invitation, went away wondering if his status at the

university was about to be called into question because of his faith. Nevertheless he arrived at the appointed hour the next Sunday, where he recorded the following experience:

Sunday came, and at five o’clock I was ushered into the study of Dr. White. Strangely enough, I learned that the invitation had grown out of a resolution formed several years before in Russia, where, in 1892, he had served as U. S. Foreign Minister.

It was while there that he had become acquainted with Count Leo Tolstoi, the great Russian author, statesman, and philosopher. A warm friendship existed between the two men, and Dr. White often visited Count Tolstoi, who had very decided views about certain social and economic problems.

On one occasion when Dr. White called on Count Tolstoi he was informed that the Count, who among other things taught that every man should wrest from the earth enough food to keep himself and family, was out in the fields plowing, for he practised what he preached. When Tolstoi saw him, he stopped long enough for a greeting, and then stated with characteristic frankness: “I am very busy today, but if you wish to walk beside me while I am plowing, I shall be pleased to talk with you.”

As the two men walked up and down the field, they discussed many subjects, and among these, religion.

“Dr. White,” said Count Tolstoi, “I wish you would tell me about your American religion.”

“We have no state church in America,” replied Dr. White.

“I know that, but what about your American religion?”

Patiently then Dr. White explained to the Count that in America there are many religions, and that each person is free to belong to the particular church in which he is interested.

To this Tolstoi impatiently replied: “I know all of this, but I want to know about the *American* religion. Catholicism originated in Rome; the Episcopal Church originated in England; the Lutheran Church in Germany, but the Church to which I refer originated in America, and is commonly known as the Mormon Church. What can you tell me of the teachings of the Mormons?”

“Well,” said Dr. White, “I know very little concerning them. They have an unsavory reputation, they practice polygamy, and are very superstitious.”

Then Count Leo Tolstoi, in his honest and stern, but lovable, manner, rebuked the ambassador. “Dr. White, I am greatly surprised and disappointed that a man of your great learning and position should be so ignorant on this important subject. The Mormon people teach the American religion; their principles teach the people not only of Heaven and its attendant glories, but how to live so that their social and economic relations with each other are placed on a sound basis. If the people follow the teachings of this Church, nothing can stop their progress—it will be limitless. There have been great movements started



in the past but they have died or been modified before they reached maturity. If Mormonism is able to endure, unmodified, until it reaches the third and fourth generation, it is destined to become the greatest power the world has ever known.”<sup>12</sup>

White said that his greater desire to learn about Mormonism had stemmed from this experience, and Yates stayed into the morning hours answering his questions and teaching the fundamentals of the gospel. Later, as he prepared to depart from Cornell, Yates decided to place some Church books in the school’s library but was surprised to see that the standard works, along with several other books and pamphlets on Mormonism, were already there.

Decades later, Yates related this experience in an article published in the *Improvement Era*, which found wide readership when LeGrand Richards included it in his classic missionary treatise, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder*.<sup>13</sup> Some scholars questioned Yates’s memory on the subject,<sup>14</sup> but the basic facts related in the story are completely consistent, and the tale has become one of the most oft-quoted stories on the potential of Mormonism. Literary critic Harold Bloom drew on this experience for the title and central ideas of his book, *The American Religion*, which was largely a critique of Mormonism.<sup>15</sup>

### Innovations in the Granite Stake

Yates graduated from Cornell in 1902 in mechanical engineering and electrical engineering.<sup>16</sup> He and Lydia returned to Utah, and Yates began working for several different power companies. Lydia passed away in 1903, leaving Yates alone to raise two daughters. He remarried the next year to Lily Fairbanks.<sup>17</sup>

During this time, Yates became deeply involved in his work in the Granite Stake, which was a hotbed of innovation in the Church. In the early twentieth century, the Granite Stake, led by President Frank Y. Taylor, developed a number of programs which soon spread throughout the Church. Found among these programs were the establishment of teacher-training classes, systematization of temple work under the direction of the priesthood, and the establishment of a stake amusement committee. All of these programs, while commonplace throughout the Church today, represented pioneering movements in the early part of the century.<sup>18</sup>

The most far-reaching invention of the Granite stake, family home evening, gave birth to perhaps its second-most influential creation, released-time seminary. In 1909 the Granite Stake held a meeting to announce the beginning of a family night program. The meeting drew

over two thousand people, among them Church President Joseph F. Smith, who spoke to the group, declaring the inspiration of the stake presidency in launching the program. The program flourished in the Granite Stake, which undoubtedly influenced the First Presidency when they commended it to the rest of the Church in 1915.<sup>19</sup>

During one of these family nights, Joseph F. Merrill, a counselor in the Granite stake presidency, became enamored with the stories his wife, Annie Hyde Merrill, began telling their children from the Bible and the Book of Mormon.<sup>20</sup> In his own words, “her list of these stories were was so long that her husband often marveled at their number, and frequently sat as spellbound as were the children as she skilfully related them.”<sup>21</sup> When Merrill asked his wife where she learned how to teach these stories, she replied it was in James E. Talmage’s class at the Salt Lake Stake Academy. Realizing the academies were rapidly being replaced in Utah by the spread of public high schools, Merrill began to wrestle with the problem of how Latter-day Saint children who attended these schools might receive similar religious instruction. Inspired by his wife’s teaching and partially by seminaries seen during his graduate studies at the University of Chicago, Merrill began forming a bold plan to bring religion to public school students without violating the barriers between church and state.<sup>22</sup>

The plan was simple in its execution. A facility could be built adjacent to Granite High School where students, temporarily released from school custody, could receive religious training. Merrill presented his plan to the presidency and high council of the Granite Stake, the superintendent of Church schools, and the Utah superintendent of public instruction. With all these groups granting approval, Merrill moved ahead. He was granted general supervision over the work and the authority to select a proper teacher, with the stake presidency’s approval. It was under these circumstances that Merrill penned the letter referred to at the beginning of this article, requesting a man who would “be universally regarded as the inferior of no teacher in the high school.”<sup>23</sup> The man selected was Thomas J. Yates.

### The Right Man

Why choose Yates? There were several reasons not to, the most important being that Yates was not a professional educator. True, he held some experience from his work in the Church academies in Millard County, but his stint as a teacher there had been twenty years prior and had only lasted one year. Yates also held a full-time position working as an engineer on the construction of the nearby Murray power

plant. Finally, a man in his forties, Yates apparently did not fit the bill as the “young man” Merrill was looking for.

Why, then, was Yates chosen? In a word, discipleship. As a member of the Granite Stake high council, Yates was chosen to be the point man in nearly every type of new program the stake launched. The year before his call to serve as the seminary teacher, Yates was called as the chairman of the high council missionary committee. Under his direction, every seventy in the stake was called on a mission, beginning the first organized missionary work performed by a local missionary organization.<sup>24</sup> Merrill may also have been impressed by Yates’s integrity during his schooling in the East. Merrill had also been among the first Latter-day Saint students to venture to the eastern United States seeking higher education. He graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1899 and knew the dangerous spiritual shoals of higher learning. Seeing how Yates, a fellow scholar, had maintained his faith in the gospel through his education outside the geographic centers of Mormonism may have made a strong impression on Merrill. Lastly, President Taylor saw Yates as a man with the utmost integrity. In a stake conference, Taylor commented, “Brother Yates always reminds me of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, he is a tower of purity and strength.”<sup>25</sup> Yates showed a great willingness to see that plan succeed. As soon as he was informed of his call, he arranged his schedule so he could still work full time in the morning and Saturdays and teach in the afternoon.

### Laying the Foundations

Once the approval was given, Yates and Merrill launched headlong into preparations to have the new program ready by the fall. Yates was optimistic about the possibilities, though he recognized the difficulties involved in launching a whole new educational program. “This was a new venture. It had never been tried before. We could see wonderful possibilities if it were successful it would mean a complete change in the Church.”<sup>26</sup>

The first problem they chose to tackle involved the new curriculum. After some discussion, they made the vital decision to center the student’s studies around the standard works, with one class in Old Testament, one centered on the New Testament, and one combining study of the Book of Mormon with a course in Church history. Once the general subjects were selected, Yates and Merrill faced the daunting task of deciding which incidents in each book were most important to learn and which could be taught in an interesting way. The finished

product was based roughly on the religion classes taught at the Latter-day Saint academies.<sup>27</sup>

All the while, Merrill and Yates continued to meet with school officials to smooth over any legal concerns and to coordinate the students’ schedules so that released-time seminary would be possible. The high school schedule of a typical student in 1912 consisted of a six-class day. Each student took five classes, then had one period to use for study. Merrill and Yates worked with the school’s principal, James E. Moss, to see if it would be allowed to have students attend religion classes during their free period if their parents requested it. Through several meetings, Yates was able to secure full cooperation from Moss and the faculty of the school. Attending seminary meant the students would have to sacrifice their study time, but Yates felt their sacrifice would be rewarded.<sup>28</sup>

Along with these intellectual and spiritual challenges, a few physical ones arose. Since it was decided to keep the seminary program completely separate from the high school, a new building had to be built. Yates took part in purchasing the land, designing the building, and even overseeing its construction. He later wrote, “It required considerable thought to plan this building. We did not know the number of students to provide for, and therefore the size of the class rooms, or the number of rooms. Provision had to be made for hanging wraps and boots etc. There was no precedent to guide us.”<sup>29</sup> President Taylor borrowed \$2,500 from Zion’s Savings Bank in the fall of 1912. The Church general board of education paid interest on the note, and when the Granite Stake could not pay, the board was compelled to pay the principal. The first seminary building was begun only a few weeks before the beginning of school and was not finished until several weeks into the school year. Even when the structure was completed, its accommodations were spartan. The building consisted of four rooms, a cloak room, an office, a small library, and a classroom. Furnishings in the classroom consisted of blackboards, armrest seats, and a stove. There were no lights. There were no regular textbooks other than the scriptures. The seminary’s entire library consisted of a Bible dictionary owned by Yates. The students made their own maps of the Holy Land, North America, South America, Mesopotamia, and Arabia.<sup>30</sup>

### The First Class—1912

When the seminary opened in the fall of 1912, seventy students were enrolled. Construction on the seminary building was not complete until the third week of school. Many students who wanted to take seminary could not because by that point in the school year they

already had full academic schedules.<sup>31</sup> Yates himself was making a tremendous sacrifice in time and effort just to get to the building and teach. He would spend every morning working at the Murray power plant and ride his horse to the seminary in time to teach during the last two periods of the day.<sup>32</sup> His salary for the first year was one hundred dollars a month.<sup>33</sup>

What was the first seminary class like? Yates's own recollections from a 1950 interview provide some insight into how the students' studies were conducted:

Students were asked to prepare a whole chapter in the Bible and then report to the class. Then the class would discuss it.

No textbooks were used.

The students did not have any form of recreation, there were no parties, no dances, no class affairs or anything in recreation to deviate from the regular pattern of things.

Graduation was a simple procedure; only a diploma was given. Neither did they present any awards.

They had no officers. The students who were allowed to belong to the Seminary considered it a great honor, and they realized that they were starting something new and different in the school system.

All students had to keep a complete notebook on all material given in class. They were checked regularly, and tests were given. The course was a much stricter one than. The seminary classes were much on the order of the Sunday School class. A general opening session, and then the classwork.<sup>34</sup>

Yates's academic approach to learning was paralleled by a philosophy of friendship and love. He was expected to be not only a teacher but also a guide to show how the gospel could be practically applied in the lives of the students. In this bare-bones environment, the teaching strategy boiled down to little more than a steady diet of the scriptures, seasoned with the friendship of a loving teacher. William E. Berrett, himself an early seminary teacher and later head of the Church Educational System, summed up the strategy of that first crucial year as follows: "There were no texts or outlines as are found in the Seminary System of the Church today. Emphasis was given to teacher-student rapport. 'Go to the football games with them and do whatever is necessary to show to them the relationship of life and their religion.' The scriptures were the texts."<sup>35</sup>

At the end of the school year, President Taylor offered Yates the same position and urged him to continue. However, the strain of traveling back and forth from Murray everyday proved to be too much, and Yates declined. Asked to recommend his own replacement, Yates

chose Guy C. Wilson, a professional educator recently moved to Salt Lake from Colonia Juárez, where he had served as principal of the local Church academy. He left Mexico after the 1912–13 revolution forced most of the Mormon colonists out of Mexico, leaving Wilson without a school. His replacement chosen, Yates handed over the reins and went on to other responsibilities in the Granite Stake.

### After Granite Seminary—A Lifetime of Devotion

Several of those affiliated with the launch of the Granite Seminary went on to notable futures in Church education. Joseph F. Merrill became the Church commissioner of education in 1928. Serving in this capacity, he oversaw the final closure or transfer of nearly all the remaining Church academies, in favor of the less-expensive seminary program he had developed. He also supervised the transfer of nearly all of the Church-owned junior colleges to state control. These schools were replaced by the institute program, also begun under Merrill's leadership. Institute, first launched in 1929 at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, was largely an application of the principles of the seminary program applied on the collegiate level. Merrill also played a crucial role in defending the legality of released-time seminary and credit for biblical studies in the early 1930s.<sup>36</sup> He was ordained an Apostle in 1931, serving with distinction until his death in 1952. Shortly after his call to the Twelve he was called as president of the European Mission, where he served as a mentor to a number of future Church leaders, including future Church President Gordon B. Hinckley.

For Guy C. Wilson, Yates's replacement, the Granite Seminary was one notable stop in a long and distinguished career in religious education. In fact, Wilson may rightly be called the Church's first professional religious educator. Prior to the advent of seminary, religion was taught as a part-time subject by other teachers who during the rest of the day may have taught chemistry, arithmetic, or whatever subject was called for. After Granite Seminary, Wilson formed the center of the corps of teachers in the Church who were trained and employed solely to teach religion during the school day. As the seminary program expanded, this corps of professional religious educators expanded. Wilson stayed at Granite for two years, moving on in 1915 to become the principal of LDS College in Salt Lake City. Upon the closure of that school in 1930, he transferred to Brigham Young University, becoming the school's first full-time religion teacher.<sup>37</sup> He and former Brigham Young University president George H. Brimhall effectively functioned as the religion department. The letterhead from the Church

department of education in the 1920s and '30s identified Wilson as a “supervisor” over seminary teachers in the system.<sup>38</sup>

The seminary program itself caught on until it became the preferred method of religious education throughout the Church. The system of Church schools that had been functioning since the 1890s was largely dismantled in the 1920s in favor of the less-expensive seminary system. Merrill, Yates, and the other founders of released-time seminary did not found the venture with the intent to replace the academies; it had been merely to provide a supplement form of religious study for those students without an opportunity to attend Church schools. Merrill summed up his own surprise by saying: “We sometimes build better than we know. It was so in this case. [The Granite Seminary’s] promoters had no thought or desire that it should have any influence in closing LDS academies. But if it were successful at Granite they did hope that sooner or later LDS students in other public high schools might have the privilege of attending a seminary. The Church Board of Education must have had that same hope.”<sup>39</sup> Without realizing it at the time, Yates, Merrill, and President Taylor inadvertently gave birth to the system that would revolutionize Church education.

What of Thomas Yates? While his associates moved on to positions of distinction in Church education, he returned to his private life and continued to labor diligently on other Church assignments. In his autobiography, he briefly describes his work with the seminary but spends the majority of his time detailing other work in the Granite Stake and giving his professional history. His own writings contain no evaluation of that first, critical year of seminary. Other sources indicate that Yates’s struggles during the year were difficult. Speaking of his arrival at the seminary in 1913, Guy Wilson wrote, “Brother Thomas Yates had the previous year conducted classes in the Seminary, but it was felt that a lack of funds and other facilities had prevented him from giving the work a fair trial.”<sup>40</sup>

If Yates felt he hadn’t given the work a “fair trial,” he makes no mention of it in his own writings. Instead, he moved breathlessly into another series of callings he enthusiastically undertook, first as a Sunday School teacher, then as a teacher for the Granite Stake genealogical society. He continued to teach in the Church all his life, later serving as a teacher in Gospel Doctrine class, the Mutual program, and a high priests group instructor.<sup>41</sup> He authored several articles for the Church magazines, including one detailing his encounter with President White at Cornell.<sup>42</sup> He remained an enthusiastic student of the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, which he wrote his own concordance

for. After forty years of scripture study and research, he wrote and published his only book, *A Brief History of the Origin of the Nations*, an ambitious work that sought to explain the beginnings of every national and ethnic group on earth and give a brief history of each.<sup>43</sup> Throughout this work, Yates’s unquestioning faith in the divinity and truth of the scriptures, both ancient and modern, seems to breathe from the pages.<sup>44</sup> During the last years of his life, Yates worked as a tour guide on Temple Square.<sup>45</sup> At the time of his death in 1958, he had served as a temple worker for ten years.<sup>46</sup>

How did Yates feel about his own legacy? At the commencement ceremony for the Granite Seminary held in 1954, Yates was invited to watch as a statue of his own likeness was unveiled in the very building he had taught in forty-two years earlier. The statue would help to preserve him as an icon of latter-day education for succeeding generations. Even the building he helped design stood as a monument to the work of the Granite Stake for almost eighty years. Undergoing several renovations along the way, it continued to house the Granite Seminary until a more modern structure was completed in 1994.<sup>47</sup> A history completed in honor of the commencement contained Yates’s own sentiments on the legacy he began:

In the olden days, the church dominated the school, and when American freedom was established the pendulum swung to other extreme and the church was eliminated completely from the school. Those responsible for our educational system failed to differentiate between the church and religious education and in excluding the church, they also eliminated religious education.

They failed to realize that moral training and religious education are so interwoven that the exclusion of one carries the other with it.

The seminary is the answer to this question. This institution which originated at the Granite High School has spread its influence throughout our state and into other states. It is destined to become not only national, but a great international institution, for it is supplying that other half to our educational system, which has been neglected until our penitentiaries are being filled with youths who have gone wrong, not because they were inherently bad, but because the moral and spiritual part of their education has been neglected.

Long live the Granite seminary, the “trail blazer” marking the way for youth of all lands into that training that develops character, through moral and religious education.<sup>48</sup>

Within the brief seminary career of Thomas J. Yates, we find several apparent contradictions. He was a product of the Church academies and yet was instrumental in creating the program that would lead to their demise. He was a highly educated man, trained at the finest

universities in the nation, yet he demonstrated a simple, unassuming faith in the gospel. He was perhaps the first professional religious educator, yet he was not a professional educator by trade. He launched a program which would bring monumental changes in the way that the Church provides religious education for its youth, yet he never saw it as the crowning achievement of his own Church service; it was just another calling performed faithfully. Today the obscurity of the origins of Church education may mean that the name Thomas Yates is only known to those who have chosen Church education as their profession. Yet Thomas Yates is the ultimate model for those who today are the unsung heroes, and the majority of those who work in the seminary program: the volunteer teachers. Like those volunteer teachers, he sometimes struggled to maintain the balance between his calling as a teacher and his career and family. In the end, his illustrious seminary career lasted only one year, not a lifetime. It is perhaps in the lives of those volunteer teachers who arise early in the morning, teach with little or no financial compensation, and rely on the Spirit and the word to motivate students, that the legacy of the first seminary teacher may best be found. **RE**

## Notes

1. Joseph F. Merrill, "A New Institution in Religious Education," *Improvement Era*, January 1938, 55.
2. Sadly, Yates has received little recognition for this achievement. The last article published in a Church magazine to describe the history of seminary lists many details of the first seminary program but names Yates's successor, Guy C. Wilson, as the first seminary teacher (see Janet Thomas, "A Century of Seminary," *New Era*, January 2000, 26).
3. Thomas J. Yates, *Autobiography and Biography of Thomas J. Yates*, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 127.
4. Yates, *Autobiography*, 3.
5. Yates, *Autobiography*, 10.
6. Yates, *Autobiography*, 14–15.
7. Yates, *Autobiography*, 17–18.
8. Yates, *Autobiography*, 45.
9. Yates, *Autobiography*, 46.
10. Yates, *Autobiography*, 57; original punctuation preserved.
11. Yates, *Autobiography*, 60.
12. Thomas J. Yates, "Count Tolstoi and the 'American Religion,'" *Improvement Era*, February 1939, 94.
13. See LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 413–14.

14. See Leland A. Fetzer, "Tolstoy and Mormonism," *Dialogue* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 13–29.
15. See Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).
16. Yates, *Autobiography*, 89.
17. Yates, *Autobiography*, 5.
18. *An Expression of Appreciation to President Frank Y. Taylor*, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
19. Richard O. Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 322–23.
20. William E. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Printing Center, 1988), 28.
21. Merrill, "A New Institution," 12.
22. Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century*, 89.
23. Merrill, "A New Institution," 12.
24. Yates, *Autobiography*, 61.
25. Yates, *Autobiography*, 42.
26. Yates, *Autobiography*, 79.
27. Merrill, "A New Institution," 55–56.
28. Berrett, *A Miracle*, 30; Yates, *Autobiography*, 80.
29. Yates, *Autobiography*, 80.
30. Charles Coleman and Dwight Jones, comp., *History of Granite Seminary*, unpublished manuscript, 1933, Church History Library.
31. Yates, *Autobiography*, 80.
32. "New Building Dedicated at Granite, the Oldest Seminary in the Church," *Church News*, September 10, 1994.
33. Ward H. Magleby, "Granite Seminary, 1912," *Impact* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1968): 9.
34. LeRoi B. Groberg, as cited in Magleby, "Granite Seminary, 1912," 9, 15.
35. Merrill Briggs, *A History of the Development of the Curriculum of the Seminaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, unpublished manuscript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
36. For an overview of Merrill's service to Church education, see Casey P. Griffiths, "Joseph F. Merrill: Latter-day Saint Commissioner of Education, 1928–1933" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2007).
37. Richard O. Cowan, *The Latter-day Saint Century* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 86.
38. Joseph F. Merrill to George H. Brimhall, Salt Lake City, November 26, 1928, Box 33, Folder 4, George A. Brimhall Collection, UA 1092, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
39. Merrill, "A New Institution," 55.
40. Charles Coleman and Dwight Jones, comp., *History of Granite Seminary, 1933*, Church History Library, 32.
41. Yates, *Autobiography*, 81–83.
42. Yates, "Count Tolstoi and the 'American Religion,'" 94.
43. Yates, *Autobiography*, 131.

44. See Thomas J. Yates, *Origin and Brief History of Nations* (Salt Lake City: Paragon Press, 1956).

45. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Early Teacher Taught Many Noted Youths,” *Deseret News*, September 8, 1948.

46. Yates, *Autobiography*, 132.

47. “New Building Dedicated at Granite,” 9.

48. Groberg, as cited in Magleby, “Granite Seminary, 1912,” 9.

# John Wesley: A Methodist Foundation for the Restoration

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In August 1877 the signers of the Declaration of Independence visited President Wilford Woodruff, asking for their temple work to be done. Woodruff quickly began this task; in addition, he performed the temple ordinances for a number of other prominent historical figures. In what is often considered an addendum to the story, Woodruff set apart three of the individuals—Christopher Columbus, Benjamin Franklin, and John Wesley—as high priests without explaining why in his journals. Woodruff recalled that the signers said, “We laid the foundation of the government you now enjoy,”<sup>1</sup> implying that their work played an important role in the Restoration of the gospel; the special distinction granted to Columbus, Franklin, and Wesley suggests that they perhaps played a particularly important role.

Church members frequently cite the contributions of the Founding Fathers and Columbus to the Restoration, but much less has been said of Wesley. If we designate Columbus’s, Franklin’s, and Wesley’s contributions to the Restoration according to their major achievements, then Columbus’s achievement would be geographical (finding the New World), Franklin’s would be political (helping to found the United States), and Wesley’s would be religious (founding Methodism). Members of the Church tend to credit the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, particularly Martin Luther, for playing the primary religious role in setting the stage for the Restoration. Nevertheless, it was Wesley whom Woodruff ordained with Columbus and Franklin.

Indeed, Wesley laid a major part of the groundwork for the Restoration by promoting essentially correct doctrine, encouraging religious zeal at a time when it was waning, and suggesting that the divine could play an active role in the lives of individuals in the midst of Protestant formalism and Enlightenment skepticism. Thus Wesley infused Anglo-American culture with a religiosity that was receptive to the Restoration. Methodism's influence in the Restored Church is extensive; the following is an attempt to give a summary of Wesley's achievements.

### Beginnings

Born June 17, 1703, to Anglican rector Samuel Wesley and his wife, Susanna, John Wesley grew up in Epworth, Lincolnshire, England. He was raised by a devout mother whose discipline and devotion provided the seedbed for these important characteristics of Methodism.<sup>2</sup> Because of his mother's example and encouragement, Wesley began training to become an Anglican clergyman at Oxford. Through this study, Wesley discovered a number of Catholic and Anglican writers who were a part of what is called the holy living tradition. These writers rigorously focused on devoting every minute of their lives to God through stringent scheduling and personal devotion. This program was best laid out by the medieval mystic Thomas à Kempis in his classic work *The Imitation of Christ*, but the works of Anglicans Jeremy Taylor and particularly William Law further ingrained such notions in Wesley. Law, a contemporary of Wesley's, argued that one should strive for perfection in obedience to God's law and set aside all frivolity as a diversion from this important task. Wesley found some suggestions of these writers to be overly gloomy and austere, but he nevertheless became convinced that obedience to God's law, "inward and outward" as Wesley put it, was essential to being a "real Christian."<sup>3</sup>

The idea of being a real Christian rather than a nominal Christian became the essence of Wesley's movement. This factor is demonstrated in Methodism's beginnings, which took place when John Wesley's younger brother, Charles, began attending Oxford. Concerned about the religious state of the college, Charles and a small group of like-minded individuals started what became known as the Oxford Holy Club. Although most of the students at Oxford were technically Christians, the Wesleys did not believe many of them behaved as real Christians. However, the Wesleys did not seek to create a separate church but hoped to create a society within the Church of England that would promote true Christianity.

Soon John joined the Oxford Holy Club in their pious living, which included regular fasting, partaking of the Lord's Supper, scripture study, prayer, and holy conversation. Furthermore, the group engaged in simple living, giving what they could to the poor, and ministering to prisoners. Because of their methodical regimen, they were soon labeled "Methodists," though some detractors went as far as to call them "Bible moths" or "Bible bigots." Some critics even claimed that the untimely death of William Morgan, a member of the club, was caused by the frequent fasts of the Holy Club members.<sup>4</sup> Morgan's brother complained to his father that the Methodists "imagine they cannot be saved if they do not spend every hour, nay minute, of their lives in the service of God."<sup>5</sup>

### Further Influences

Despite these criticisms, John and Charles Wesley pressed forward in their determination to live holy lives. In 1736 the Church of England called John and Charles on a mission to the American colony of Georgia. John hoped this call would allow him to preach to the Native Americans and generally increase his holiness. After eighteen months, John headed home, frustrated that he had not accomplished either of his goals. Nevertheless, his Georgia mission was a turning point for Wesley in several ways, not the least of which was his encounter with a German pietist sect known as the Moravians. Wesley was particularly impressed with the conduct of the Moravians: on the voyage to America, while the ship was in peril and the rest of the passengers were screaming in terror, the Moravians—down to the last man, woman, and child—quietly sang hymns.<sup>6</sup>

When Wesley returned to England, he met several Moravian missionaries, who taught him the importance of faith in salvation. As Wesley had been frustrated by his inability to live the holy law perfectly, the Moravians taught Wesley that he lacked an absolute faith in Christ. Wesley soon attended a meeting at Aldersgate Street where the preacher read from one of Martin Luther's treatises on the importance of faith. Upon hearing the remarks, Wesley obtained the faith he sought, recounting, "I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."<sup>7</sup> Thus the experience of salvation through faith became central to Methodism, but this did not take away from the necessity of obedience to Christ. In fact, Wesley taught that it was through saving faith in Christ that one would be able to cease sinning entirely. In Wesley's words, saving faith

brought “a sense of pardon for all past, and freedom from all present sins.”<sup>8</sup>

The Moravians influenced the way Wesley organized the Methodists. For example, the Moravians met in small groups called classes, where their adherents would inquire after each other’s spiritual progress. This division into classes, in addition to field preaching, became the hallmark of the Methodist organization.

When he returned from Georgia with new doctrine, Anglican bishops began to exclude Wesley from local pulpits.<sup>9</sup> With the encouragement of George Whitefield (1714–70), a fellow member of the Oxford Holy Club, Wesley began to preach throughout England, often in open fields. This practice, so common to the American religious experience, was seen as subversive by the Anglican establishment. The Church of England worked on a parish system in which ministers were assigned certain geographical areas. Thus itinerant preachers encroached on another minister’s territory. On the other hand, field preaching was essential for Wesley and his followers to reach the people.

Wesley took his message of scriptural holiness to the people, and he and George Whitefield sparked a revival of religion in Great Britain. Wesley’s purpose was to cause his listeners to feel the same conversion he had experienced. Wesley felt it was important for Christians to *experience* salvation; he called this “experimental” or “heart” religion. Such experiences were central to the Methodist revival: sinners experienced salvation and dedicated their lives to Christ. Once a person had this experience, Wesley would encourage them to join the local Methodist class so the Methodists could help the new converts stay on the path. Thus the dual forms of the field meeting, where sinners repented and came to Christ, and the class meeting, where converts helped each other to remain steadfast, were Wesley’s way of spreading Christianity in England.

### Break from Other Faiths

Methodism grew rapidly. As it did, Wesley began to part with many of his associates. Though he owed much of his theology and practice to the Moravians, Wesley disagreed with certain ideas they had about faith. The Moravians taught there were not degrees in faith: one either had absolute faith or none at all. Until one had absolute faith, one should not engage in any religious activity at all except waiting for the faith to come. Wesley, however, believed that one should continually be engaged in good works, which build one’s faith. Also, when

Wesley visited a Moravian settlement at Herrnhut, Germany, he felt the Moravians engaged too much in levity and too little in rigorous devotion.<sup>10</sup>

Wesley soon split with his Calvinist associates, chief of whom was George Whitefield. While most Calvinists clung to double predestination, Wesley promoted instead an Arminian view of salvation. Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) was a Dutch theologian who sought to modify Calvinist thought by rejecting double predestination, arguing instead that all people who accepted the Lord could be saved. Likewise Arminius rejected the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace, that humans were powerless to resist God’s saving influence if He chose to save them. Instead Arminius argued that humans possessed free will that they could use to affect their salvation. He wrote that humans could fall from grace if they turned from the Lord.<sup>11</sup> Arminianism began more than a century before Wesley’s time, but most evangelicals prior to Wesley had preferred five-point Calvinism. As a result of Wesley’s Arminianism, the Calvinist Methodists formed in opposition to Wesley and followed George Whitefield.<sup>12</sup>

Wesley’s most difficult religious relationship was with the Church of England because of his field preaching. Other religions existed in England at the time—marginalized in English society—but an Anglican minister considering all England as his parish, as Wesley did, violated the laws of the Church. Furthermore, Wesley allowed those who were not ordained Anglican ministers to preach Methodism. Wesley’s use of lay preachers, his field preaching, his insistence on holiness, and his long hair led others to consider him a radical bent on separation from the state church.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Wesley saw Methodism as a reform movement within its mother church and was determined to remain with it. With this goal in mind, Wesley encouraged his followers to take the Lord’s Supper at Anglican churches, allowed only ordained Anglican clergymen within his movement to administer the Lord’s Supper, and generally defended the Church of England as a legitimate, though flawed, body. Wesley dissented from Anglican rules only when he felt he absolutely had to: Wesley continued to field preach because he felt that between obeying the Church and preaching the gospel, preaching was a higher obligation.<sup>14</sup> The relationship between Methodism and the Church of England was always strained, and Wesley felt fettered.



### Authority Anxiety

Wesley's desire to remain with the Church of England was based largely on a number of pragmatic reasons: separation would cause infighting among the Methodists and marginalization in English society, and running a separate church would be overly taxing. All these consequences, Wesley reasoned, would limit Methodism's effectiveness in spreading true religion.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Wesley was also bothered by the concept of religious authority. Wesley ascribed to the state-church idea of authority that the Church of England promoted; this concept rejected the Catholic idea of papal supremacy and apostolic succession, arguing instead that each nation's church had authority insofar as it adhered to scripture and Christian tradition. To Anglicans, the Church of England followed this tradition and therefore had its own apostolic authority, while dissenting sects did not.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, in his explanation for why the Methodists should not part with the Church of England, Wesley threw in his own doubts about members of his society having the authority to perform ordinances. Wesley explained that in the Bible, "It is true *extraordinary prophets* were frequently raised up, who had not been educated in the 'schools of the prophets,' neither had the outward, ordinary call. But we read of no *extraordinary priests*. As none took it to himself, so none exercised this office but he that was outwardly 'called of God, as was Aaron.'" <sup>17</sup> Without Methodism's connection to the Church of England, Wesley felt that his followers would not have the authority to perform ordinances. Though Wesley was willing to defy the state church on a few points, particularly field preaching, Wesley did not want to undertake practices that would force separation with the Church of England. Nevertheless, Methodism continued to spread throughout Great Britain, with over twenty-five thousand members on the eve of the religion's spread to the American colonies.<sup>18</sup>

Methodism's growth in the American colonies caused even greater tension between Wesley and the Church of England when Wesley sought the ordination of some of his followers whom he wished to send to the colonies. The bishop of London refused, saying that Wesley's candidates did not have sufficient learning. Frustrated, Wesley decided that expediency demanded that he break with protocol and ordain the men himself. "The Case is widely different between England and North America," Wesley explained, "Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end." Wesley's brother Charles was furious that Wesley had performed these ordinations without authority from the Church of

England, saying that such an act was tantamount to breaking with the Church. After months of debate, Wesley wrote to Charles, "You say I separate from the Church; I say I do not. Then let it stand."<sup>19</sup> Despite this declaration, the American Methodists split with the Anglicans in 1784, and the British Methodists split soon after Wesley's death in 1791.

Though he opposed the American Revolution, Wesley could not help notice the freedom the American Methodists gained when the Church of England was disestablished in the United States of America. Wesley remarked to his American followers: "As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."<sup>20</sup> Thus the American Revolution wove together the contributions of Columbus, Franklin, and Wesley to create the full opportunity to do as Wesley suggested.

### Methodism in America

Though Oxford Holy Club member George Whitefield was a major part of the American First Great Awakening of the 1740s, preachers of Wesleyan Methodism did not officially arrive in the American colonies until 1769. Methodism gained a good foothold in many of the northern cities before the Revolutionary War; however, with their connection to the Church of England, the Methodists were seen as Loyalists and faced many threats of violence at the hands of the Patriots. The fact that Wesley vehemently denounced the Revolution did not help Methodism's reputation in the colonies.<sup>21</sup>

Yet Methodism in America weathered the storm, and with the American Church of England in disarray after the Revolution, the Methodists were able to scoop up much of their membership.<sup>22</sup> The American Methodist church, called the Methodist Episcopal Church, was soon taken over by Francis Asbury (1745–1816). Using the word *episcopal* because the church was run by bishops, the Methodist Episcopal Church made Asbury its first bishop. However, though Asbury remained devoted to Wesley's teachings, Asbury rejected Wesley's authority and ran Methodism in the United States without taking orders from Wesley.<sup>23</sup> Asbury proved to be a masterful organizer and leader, and he soon enlisted an army of itinerants who covered every corner of the new nation.

Methodism took off like wildfire in America to the point that it became the nation's largest religion by 1830.<sup>24</sup> Historian John Wigger

explains, “Much of the movement’s astonishing success could be traced to the way in which American Methodists took advantage of the revolutionary religious freedoms of the early republic to release, and in a sense institutionalize, elements of popular religious enthusiasm long latent in American and European Protestantism,” including belief in miracles and visions.<sup>25</sup> Methodist itinerants battled Calvinism and infused the English-speaking culture with an intense belief in religious experience. Methodist success led to the effectual triumph of Arminianism over five-point Calvinism in America.<sup>26</sup> As a successful Methodist preacher from New Jersey exclaimed, “The doctrine [of double predestination] must die, and I would like to stand upon its grave and preach its funeral sermon.”<sup>27</sup>

The nature of early American Methodism is perhaps best represented by the lives of Benjamin Abbott (1732–96) and Lorenzo Dow (1777–1834). Abbott, born in 1732, saw dramatic visions of heaven and hell that motivated him to seek salvation. When he was forty years old, he first heard a Methodist preacher in New Jersey. Abbott attended Methodist meetings and even ventured into the woods to pray vocally for the first time. Such attempts made Abbott feel a little better, but he did not feel fully relieved until one night when he had an unusual dream about crossing a river. When Abbott awoke, he “saw, by faith, the Lord Jesus Christ standing by me, with his arms extended wide saying to me, ‘I died for you.’ I then looked up and by faith saw the Ancient of Days, and he said to me, ‘I freely forgive you for what Christ has done.’” Overcome in the joy of his redemption, Abbott nevertheless had one more question, “At the time of my conviction I used to consider what church or society I should join, whether the baptists, presbyterians, or methodists; but at this time the Lord said unto me, ‘You must join the methodists for they are my people.’”<sup>28</sup>

Abbott’s Presbyterian wife became concerned when Abbott told her about his experiences, and she encouraged him to see her minister. When they met, the minister “told me he understood that God had done great things for me; whereupon I related my conviction and my conversion; he paid a strict attention until I had done, and then told me that I was under strong delusions of the devil.”<sup>29</sup> Such a claim dismayed Abbott, yet confident in the validity and holiness of his vision, he soon set about preaching repentance to sinners across southern New Jersey.

Methodism’s cultural influence throughout the United States is illustrated by the career of the charismatic Methodist preacher Lorenzo Dow. Beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century, Dow tire-

lessly tramped over North America, visiting backwoods hamlets and dazzling locals with his animated preaching style. Dow also denounced five-point Calvinism, which he summarized in the following ditty: “You can and you can’t—You shall and you shan’t—You will and you won’t—And you will be damned if you do—And you will be damned if you don’t.”<sup>30</sup> Called “crazy Dow” by his detractors, Dow nevertheless won over multitudes of Americans; it is estimated that in the early 1800s only George Washington “had more children named after him than Lorenzo Dow.”<sup>31</sup>

### Transition

Not long after John Wesley’s death, Methodism in both Great Britain and the United States began to undergo fundamental changes. These changes are perhaps best described by Job Smith, who was raised a Methodist but later joined the Church:

John Wesley, being inspired to do good among the English people, and to show the difference between empty formalities and real, religious activity, left off his surplice . . . and set out with earnest, honest desire and faith to preach the gospel as far as he understood it, for the reformation and salvation of those who would listen to him. . . .

Later on, and as wealth and popularity filled fashionable chapels and places of worship, formality and fashion deadened the preaching of his successors, and he being now gone, left nothing but his printed sermons to keep his fervor alive.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars note numerous changes in Methodism beginning around 1810.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Jon Butler notes, “Methodists revivals of the 1830s paled in comparison to those that [Benjamin] Abbott led in the 1790s.”<sup>34</sup> The best indication of what had changed within Methodism comes with Joseph Smith’s experience with the Methodists. Around 1820 Joseph “was called up to serious reflection” on the matter of religion, and “in process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them” (Joseph Smith—History 1:8). In fact, Joseph’s brother William said that it was a “Rev. Mr. Lane of the Methodists” who “preached a sermon on ‘What church shall I join?’ And the burden of his discourse was to ask God, using as a text, ‘If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally.’ And of course when Joseph went home and was looking over the text he was impressed to do just what the preacher had said.”<sup>35</sup> Yet the response Joseph received from the local preacher indicates that a change had occurred within the society: “I was greatly surprised by his behavior, he treated my communication

not only lightly but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such had ceased with the apostles, and there would never be any more of them.”<sup>36</sup> Clearly American Methodism *had* changed from the visionary time of Benjamin Abbott.

In Britain this shift occurred even earlier. As a result of the changes described by Job Smith above, the Primitive Methodists formed in 1808, hoping to restore Wesley’s original vigor. In an *Ensign* article, Christopher Bigelow claimed that the “spiritual integrity and involvement in England’s religious revival” of the Primitive Methodists’ leader Hugh Bourne “likely helped prepare many to receive the message of the Restoration.”<sup>37</sup> In 1834, Thomas Kingston broke with the Primitive Methodists on the same grounds that the Primitive Methodists broke with the main body to form the United Brethren. The United Brethren are a particularly interesting group because of the great success Wilford Woodruff had among them in 1840. Woodruff was enjoying great success in Staffordshire when the Spirit told him to “go south.” To the south, Woodruff met the United Brethren and eventually baptized the entire group (six hundred) save one.<sup>38</sup> Similar schisms had formed in the United States. Reformed Methodists, in which Brigham Young’s family was involved, was another such splinter group.<sup>39</sup>

A Methodist visitor to Nauvoo recorded the Saints’ view that “the Methodists were right as far as they had gone, and next to the Latter-day Saints, . . . were the best people in the land, but they had stopped short of their grand and glorious mission; that they were afraid of persecution, and had shrunk from their duty; that if they had followed the light they would have taken the world.”<sup>40</sup> John Wesley himself was worried whether the Methodists would remain true to the principles that he strived so earnestly to practice. Toward the end of his life, Wesley warned the Methodists that if they were not careful, God might “remove the candlestick from this people and raise up another people who will be more faithful to his grace.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, in the account of the First Vision recorded by the Prophet’s Hebrew tutor, Alexander Neibaur, Joseph prayed, “Must I join the Methodist Church?” to which the response was, “No, they are not my People, have gone astray.”<sup>42</sup>

### Early Methodist Converts to Mormonism

The Prophet’s Methodist leanings were quite common among early Latter-day Saint converts. For example, when missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arrived in southern

New Jersey, Methodism was the area’s leading religion, and Benjamin Abbott’s efforts were a major reason why.<sup>43</sup> The Church’s first convert in the area was a Methodist preacher, Josiah Ells, and the Trenton *Daily State Gazette* reported that “the [Mormon] excitement carried off quite a number from the Methodist Church.”<sup>44</sup> Often Methodists who converted to the Church in New Jersey saw continuity between their new and old faiths. Alfred Wilson, whom William Appleby described as a “devoted and humble member of the Methodist Church, prior to his conversion to Mormonism,” described his experience to Appleby: “I enjoyed myself somewhat and received a certain portion of the Spirit of the Lord while in the Methodist Church.” But, said he, “I never new what true religion or the spirit of the Lord was until I became a member of the Church to which I belong.”<sup>45</sup>

Samuel Harrison, a Latter-day Saint missionary to New Jersey in the 1850s, described a conversation he had with “a man of great influence with the Methodists” in the area, who was thinking of converting:

He asked me if I thought that the Methodists and other religious people enjoyed any thing like religion, or what it was that caused them to feel happy. I told him that every person that lived up to the light that they had, always felt justified, “but,” said I, “if light is made known to them more than what they already have, and they reject that light, they never will feel like as they did before they knew it. Now I appeal to you as a man—can you, with the light that you have received from the Latter-day Saints, enjoy the Methodist religion?” He said, “No, I can not.” “Now,” said I, “wherein you have rejoiced in Methodism, embrace the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and you shall rejoice ten fold.”<sup>46</sup>

Apparently, more early converts came out of Methodism than any other religion. Two studies of early American converts found that Methodism was on par with the Baptists as principal prior denominations of the early converts.<sup>47</sup> Methodist converts were even more common in Great Britain; Malcolm Thorpe’s study of early British converts’ journals shows more Methodists joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than members of any other church.<sup>48</sup> The number grows even larger when we include members of Methodist splinter groups like the Primitive Methodists and the United Brethren.

Even more striking is the number of American converts whose parents belonged to Methodism. In fact, the converts’ parents were more than twenty times as likely to have been Methodists as were the

parents of the general American populace at the time; indeed, children of Methodists were more likely to have joined the Church than were the children of people with any other affiliation. The following chart compares religious affiliations of the converts' parents with the affiliations of the American populace a generation before the establishment of the Church:

**Denominational affiliation of early converts' parents and of the 1800 American populace<sup>49</sup>**

Affiliation	Converts' parents	American populace in 1800	How many times greater than general population
Methodist	28%	1.2%	23
Presbyterian	12%	0.9%	13
Episcopalian	4%	0.5%	8
Baptist	17%	2.4%	7
Congregationalist	11%	1.6%	7

Because so many early Saints' parents were Methodist, several of their children were named after Lorenzo Dow. Thus far I have found nineteen early Saints named after Lorenzo Dow; their last names were Barlow, Barnes, Barton, Booth, Brown, Budd, Clark, Hatch, Hickey, Johnson, Merritt, Omstead, Perry, Pettit, Snow, Wasson, Webb, Wells, and Young. This is more evidence that early Saints had a strong tendency to come from a Methodist background.

Of course, those early Latter-day Saint converts had felt that Methodism was missing something. For instance, Thomas B. Marsh and John Taylor both left Methodism to begin quests to find a church more closely in line with the New Testament pattern.<sup>50</sup> Brigham Young, whose brother was named after Lorenzo Dow, felt that Dow taught “nothing but morals. . . . When he came to teaching the things of God he was as dark as midnight.”<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, Dow himself expressed similar feelings: “I frequently wished I lived in the days of the prophets or apostles, that I could have had sure guides.”<sup>52</sup>

While some converts had rejected their parents' faith before they heard of Joseph Smith, many other converts remained Methodists up to the time they joined the Church. “The best and holiest . . . among the Mormons had been members of the Methodist Church,” some Saints once told a Methodist visitor to Nauvoo.<sup>53</sup> This statement has some validity considering that the first three Presidents of the

Church—Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor—had been involved with Methodism, and that the fifth President of the Church and Brigham Young's brother were both named Lorenzo.<sup>54</sup>

**Similarities with Latter-day Saint Doctrine**

That so many Methodists joined the Church is understandable due to so many fundamental doctrinal similarities. Wesley taught that man has fallen and that the “natural man” is totally against God and under the bondage of sin. Nevertheless, Christ's grace is given to all people that they might choose to follow Him and be redeemed. This redemption comes through the individual's faith in Christ and is an act of grace; however, the individual must choose to receive Christ's grace through obedience. Through faith the individual receives an assurance that Christ had redeemed her or him. Wesley called this experience of being redeemed passing through “the gate.” Once the individual has entered through the gate, he or she gains an ascendancy over sin but has not entirely overcome it. At this point the individual must continually strive to eradicate sin in the hope of achieving entire sanctification. At entire sanctification, the individual is filled with perfect love and has no more desire to sin. Wesley called this state holiness, or perfection. Yet the individual can still fall from holiness and therefore needs to be ever vigilant.<sup>55</sup>

The Book of Mormon is in accordance with Arminianism's essential elements of the fallen man who needs redemption (see Alma 34:9), free salvation for all who desire it (see 2 Nephi 26:33), man's free will to follow Christ and be redeemed (see 2 Nephi 2:27; 10:23), and man's free will to turn from Christ and lose salvation (see 2 Nephi 31:14; D&C 20:32). In the words of John Brooke, Mormonism “explicitly rejected Calvinism.”<sup>56</sup> Thus a local historian of the time recorded that a speech delivered by John Taylor, who had at one time been a Methodist, “seemed to differ but little from an old-fashioned Methodist sermon on the necessity of salvation.”<sup>57</sup> One New Yorker observed, “Setting aside the near approach of the Millennium and the Book of Mormon, [the Latter-day Saints] resemble in faith and discipline the Methodists.”<sup>58</sup>

Besides their similar doctrines of salvation, early Mormonism's ecclesiastical system resembled Methodism's highly effective system. At its basic level, early Methodists were divided into small classes led by a class leader who encouraged the members' continued quest for holy living. The classes were watched over by the itinerants, who administered to groups of classes in their circuits. Groups of classes met

together at quarterly conferences. Over larger regions was the general conference, where the itinerants met together annually to receive their appointments from the presiding elder (itinerants were appointed to new circuits every few years).<sup>59</sup> The Lord's instructions in the Doctrine and Covenants commanded the early members to meet quarterly (see D&C 20:61–67), and, of course, Latter-day Saints still meet in a semiannual general conference. Interestingly, early Saints outside of Kirtland, Far West, and Nauvoo used an ecclesiastical structure that very closely resembled the Methodist system. These outlying areas were governed by conferences, where traveling elders decided ecclesiastical matters and governed the branches.<sup>60</sup> For instance, the same New York observer noted that Latter-day Saint meetings in the state were “marked by the fervid simplicity that characterizes [the Methodist] body of Christians.”<sup>61</sup>

Naturally there were a number of points on which Latter-day Saints and Methodists differed. The New Yorker who commented on the similarities between Mormonism and Methodism noted, “It is in believing the Book of Mormon [is] *inspired* that the chief difference consists; but it must be admitted that this is an important difference.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, baptism did not figure strongly into Wesleyan theology, and Wesley accepted infant baptism. Wesley assented to the idea that infant baptism passed the covenant from parent to child (like circumcision in the Old Testament), but ultimately the purpose of baptism in Wesley's theology is nebulous. First, Wesley rejected infant damnation; he wrote to a friend, “No infant ever was or ever will be ‘sent to hell for the guilt of Adam's sin,’ seeing it is cancelled by the righteousness of Christ as soon as they are sent into the world.” Second, Wesley expressed skepticism that baptism affected the new birth, exclaiming, “How many are the baptized gluttons and drunkards, the baptized liars and common swearers, the baptized railers and evil-speakers, the baptized whoremongers, thieves, extortioners!”<sup>63</sup> Wesley certainly never rejected baptism as a practice, but its exact purpose in his theology is unclear from a Latter-day Saint perspective.

Also Methodism did not include the elements that Joseph Smith added to standard Protestantism: degrees of heavenly glory, deification, the temple, and so forth. For example, Wesley never approached the Latter-day Saint doctrine of deification. Though Wesley taught the doctrine of perfection and even spoke of a “continual increase” in this perfection, he never took the position that humans could become like God.<sup>64</sup> He was also unsure about pentecostal spiritual gifts. Though Wesley believed God's active presence in the world and even lamented

Christianity's loss of what he called “the extraordinary gifts of the spirit,”<sup>65</sup> he felt uneasy about the New Testament spiritual gifts. He cautioned his flock to “beware of enthusiasm. Such is the imagining you have the gift of prophesying, or discerning spirits, which I do not believe one of you has; no, nor ever had yet.”<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

Of course, Wesley was not called to restore the fullness of the gospel. In the words of Brigham Young, “Had the priesthood been conferred upon [John Wesley], he would have built up the kingdom of God in his day as it is now being built up. He would have introduced the ordinances, powers, grades, and quorums of the Priesthood: but, not holding the Priesthood, he could not do it.”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, his contributions were essential in laying the foundation for the Restoration. Wesley's contributions to the Restoration are perhaps best illustrated by a conversation reported by Thomas Steed to have occurred between two members of the United Brethren on the eve of Wilford Woodruff's visit:

[The preachers] were walking a distance to fill an appointment for preaching when one said to the other: “What are you going to preach today?”

“I don't know, I have preached all I know. What are you going to preach?”

“I, also, have preached all I know. I hope the Lord will send us light. . . .”

This was the condition of nearly all the preachers.<sup>68</sup>

The United Brethren, all but one of whom joined the Mormons, truly believed that Mormonism was the further light that they were looking for.

The Prophet Joseph Smith expressed his own attitude toward Methodism to a Methodist preacher named Peter Cartwright in Illinois. Cartwright recorded, “He believed that among all the Churches in the world the Methodists was the nearest right. But they had stopped short by not claiming the gift of tongues, of prophecy, and of miracles, and then quoted a batch of Scriptures to prove his position correct. . . . ‘Indeed,’ said Joe, ‘if the Methodists would only advance a step or two further, they would take the world. We Latter-day Saints are Methodists, as far as they have gone, only have advanced further.’”<sup>69</sup>

“I never passed John Wesley's church in London without stopping to look at it,” declared Brigham Young. “Was he a good man? Yes; I suppose him to have been, by all accounts as good as ever walked on

this earth, according to his knowledge. . . . Did the Spirit of God rest upon him? Yes, and does, more or less, at times, upon all people.”<sup>70</sup> Wesley, in following the light that he received, prepared the world for even more. **RE**

## Notes

1. Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 160.
2. Kenneth Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 14–19.
3. Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989), 72–75.
4. Collins, *Wesley*, 42–43; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 83–88.
5. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 25:365.
6. Collins, *Wesley*, 56–58.
7. Cited in Collins, *Wesley*, 89; emphasis in original.
8. Cited in Collins, *Wesley*, 88.
9. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 183–86.
10. Collins, *Wesley*, 97–99.
11. “Arminianus, Jacobus,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 1:419–20.
12. The Calvinist Methodists looked to Whitefield as their leader, though he never attempted to organize his own movement. Wesley and Whitefield tried to get along despite their doctrinal disagreements; the major critiques of Wesley came from other Calvinist Methodists (Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 282).
13. Collins, *Wesley*, 123–26; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 183.
14. John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 23.
15. John Wesley, “Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 13:225–31.
16. Ted A. Campbell, “Christian Tradition, John Wesley, and Evangelicalism,” *Anglican Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1992): 54–67.
17. John Wesley, “Ought We to Separate from the Church of England?” in Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth, 1970), 332–33; emphasis in original.
18. David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 214.
19. Collins, *Wesley*, 230–32.
20. Cited in Collins, *Wesley*, 232.
21. William H. Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism: The Delmarva Peninsula, 1769–1820* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1984), 39–41.
22. Williams, *Garden of American Methodism*, 89–90.
23. Collins, *Wesley*, 234.
24. Edwin Gaustad and Philip Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219–28, 374.

25. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 105–6.
26. Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976), 11.
27. Caleb A. Malmesbury, *The Life of Charles Pitman* (Philadelphia: Methodist Episcopal Book Rooms, 1887), 86.
28. Benjamin Abbott, *The Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott* (Philadelphia: D&S Hall, 1825), 6–15. Of course, nearly fifty years later, Joseph Smith received a different answer to the same question.
29. Abbott, *Experience of Abbott*, 17.
30. Quoted in John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 18.
31. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 241.
32. Job Smith, “The United Brethren,” *Improvement Era*, July 1910, 818–19.
33. Russell Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1991), xii.
34. Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 241.
35. Cited in Larry C. Porter, “Reverend George Lane—Good ‘Gifts,’ Much ‘Grace,’ and Marked ‘Usefulness,’” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (1969): 337–38.
36. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:7.
37. Christopher K. Bigelow, “In Search of God’s Truth,” *Ensign*, June 1999, 49.
38. Smith, “United Brethren,” 818–23; Woodruff, *Discourses*, 60.
39. Rebecca Cornwall and Richard F. Palmer, “The Religious and Family Background of Brigham Young,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 3 (1978): 289–99.
40. Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher*, ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curtis, 1856), 397–98.
41. John Wesley, “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels,” *The Works of John Wesley*, 4:563.
42. Milton Vaughn Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 177.
43. My focus on New Jersey stems from my articles “‘Sweeping Everything before It’: Early Mormonism in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey,” *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 74–106; “South Jersey Methodism and the Creation of Ocean Grove,” *New Jersey History* 122, nos. 1–2 (2004): 44–67.
44. Benjamin Winchester, Letter to Robinson and Smith, in *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 11; *Daily State Gazette* (Trenton), May 7, 1870.
45. William Appleby, “Autobiography and Journal of William Appleby,” typescript, Church History Library, 31–32.
46. Samuel Harrison, in *Millennial Star*, December 9, 1854, 782.
47. Lawrence M. Yorganson, “Some Demographic Aspects of One Hundred Early Mormon Converts, 1830–1837” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), 42–43; Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman Jr., “The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons,” *BYU Studies* 30, no. 2 (1990): 56.
48. Malcolm R. Thorpe, “The Religious Backgrounds of Mormon Converts in Britain, 1837–52,” *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 70.
49. The affiliation of the converts’ parents come from Yorganson, “Some Demographic Aspects” 42; Grandstaff and Backman Jr., “Social Origins,” 56. For

the American rates, see Hempstead, *Methodism*, 212; Gaustad and Barlow, *New Historical Atlas*, 79; Edwin Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 62, 72, 92.

50. G. St. John Stott, "John Taylor's Religious Preparation," *Dialogue* 19, no. 1 (1986): 123–24; A. Gary Anderson, "Thomas B. Marsh: The Preparation and Conversion of the Emerging Apostle," in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint History: New York*, ed. Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman, and Susan Easton Black (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1992), 129–48.

51. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 14:197.

52. Lorenzo Dow, *History of a Cosmopolite* (Joshua Martin, 1848), 11.

53. Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 260.

54. Though many Methodists joined the Church, most did not, and some even became bitter opponents. Yet numerous opponents came from among the Church's own membership. Individuals such as Philastus Hurlbut, John C. Bennett, and William Law (all former Latter-day Saints) caused more problems for the Church than members of any other church. Certain Methodists' opposition to the Church should not be seen as John Wesley's doing any more than Mormon dissenters' opposition could rightly be called Joseph Smith's fault.

55. Collins, *Wesley*, 184–93.

56. John Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13. Marvin Hill argues that the Book of Mormon actually has both Calvinist and Arminian elements in its theology; however, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the two theologies (Marvin S. Hill, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 [1969]: 363–64). The elements in the Book of Mormon that have been called Calvinist—those which describe fallen man as carnal and devilish, who cannot merit anything of himself—are actually points of agreement between Arminianism and Calvinism. That is, these are Arminian doctrines as well as Calvinist doctrines. The differences between the two theologies are irresistible grace, free will, and limited salvation. These are what distinguish the two theologies, and the Book of Mormon ends up on the Arminian side. As Timothy L. Smith argued, one of the most common fallacies that scholars commit "is to label everyone who believed in man's sinfulness a 'Calvinist'" (Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 33). Clyde D. Ford rightly notes that the Book of Mormon goes beyond Arminianism by answering the question, what happens to those who die without hearing of Christianity? but notes that in matters of the personal salvation of people who have heard the gospel, the Book of Mormon is in line with Arminian theology ("Lehi on the Great Issues: Book of Mormon Theology in Early Nineteenth-Century Perspective," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 4 [2005]: 75–96). Though one might claim that the Book of Mormon's Arminian stance on predestination demonstrates that the book is an outgrowth of theology of the time in which it was printed, this is a myopic claim. Elements of Arminianism can be found in such philosophies as the Pelagian heresy of the fourth century and the Thomist theology that the Roman Catholic Church embraced. All reject the Augustinian/Calvinist concept of double predestination by advocating the role of free will and good works in human salvation. All who advocate this point of view

(including Latter-day Saints) argue that theirs is the theology of the Bible, and if this is the case, then the Book of Mormon would teach the same theology.

57. Edwin Salter, *A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties* (Bayonne, NJ: E. Gardiner and Sons, 1890), 253.

58. Josephine, "The Book of Mormon," *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1841, 305–6.

59. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 23.

60. This statement is based on a study of the various conference minutes listed in *Times and Seasons*.

61. Josephine, "The Book of Mormon," 306.

62. Josephine, "The Book of Mormon," 305; emphasis in original.

63. Cited in Collins, *Wesley*, 140.

64. John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," in *The Works of Rev. John Wesley* (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1827), 12.

65. Parley P. Pratt dubbed Wesley "A Latter-day Saint, in Regard to the Spiritual Gifts and the Apostasy of the Church," *Millennial Star*, June 1841, 23.

66. Wesley, *Christian Perfection*, 55.

67. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:5.

68. Smith, "United Brethren," 823.

69. Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 342.

70. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:5.

# The Narrow Neck of Land

*Andrew H. Hedges*



Teachers and students of the Book of Mormon may grapple with questions concerning the location of events in the New World.

Image from *Hammond Odyssey World Atlas* (Canada, rev. 2001 ed.), 49.

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At some point, most teachers and students of the Book of Mormon grapple with questions concerning the location of Book of Mormon events in the New World. Scholars and readers from Joseph Smith's day to the present have tried their hand at locating key features and sites mentioned in the text, and we can count several dozen scenarios proposed over the years.<sup>1</sup> Arguing that the text's "narrow neck of land" (Ether 10:20) lay somewhere between southern Mexico and Colombia, most proposed geographies locate the bulk of Book of Mormon events in Central or South America. Others have suggested limited sites centered in the eastern United States, specifically near the Susquehanna River and around the Great Lakes.<sup>2</sup>

Of the various models proposed over the years, John L. Sorenson's limited Mesoamerican geography is arguably the most widely accepted.<sup>3</sup> A key feature of Sorenson's geography is his identification of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the "narrow neck of land." Sorenson arrives at this identification using several pieces of information, not the least of which is Mormon's description that it was "a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea," across this narrow neck of land (Alma 22:32)—somewhere potentially between 50 and 144 miles, Sorenson argues, with a "plausible compromise range" somewhere between 75 and 125 miles.<sup>4</sup> Ruling out potential sites to the south of the Yucatan Peninsula, Sorenson concludes that "the only 'narrow neck' potentially



acceptable in terms of the Book of Mormon requirements is the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico,” whose 120-mile breadth at its narrowest point “is just within the range of plausibility” he establishes.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I argue three related points: first, if one accepts the range of distances Sorenson proposes for a “day and a half’s journey for a Nephite,” the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is actually too wide to meet the requirements of the text; second, there are good textual reasons for looking for a much narrower isthmus even if one increases the theoretical distance a Nephite could travel in a day and a half; and third, other “narrow necks of land” in Panama and perhaps Costa Rica are a better fit with the text of the Book of Mormon. While I am calling Sorenson’s theory into question, it must be emphasized that I am not arguing for the absolute impossibility of Tehuantepec’s candidacy for the “narrow neck of land.” My point is simply that there are good reasons for teachers, scholars, and students to be cautious in their acceptance of this popular theory and that other sites in Central America fit better with the textual evidence.<sup>6</sup>

#### Implications of Helaman 4:7

The most important textual challenge to the Tehuantepec thesis is in Helaman 4. In this chapter, Mormon recounts how Nephite dissenters and Lamanites “succeeded in obtaining possession of the land of Zarahemla; yea, and also all the lands, even unto the land which was near the land Bountiful” (Helaman 4:5). The routed Nephite armies retreated north “even into the land of Bountiful; and there they did fortify against the Lamanites, from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day’s journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country” (Helaman 4:6–7).<sup>7</sup>

That a Nephite could make it across the narrow neck in a single day—that is, one-third less the time than the “day and a half’s journey” along the line Bountiful and Desolation—has significant implications for Sorenson’s thesis. Arguing that 125 miles was the most a Nephite could plausibly travel in a day and a half, and with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec being 120 miles at its narrowest, Sorenson is saying that it would take a Nephite a minimum of a day and a half to get across the isthmus. But the narrow neck to which Mormon refers could actually be crossed—apparently at some point other than along the “line Bountiful and the land Desolation”—in a single day. If Sorenson’s conclusions about how far a Nephite might plausibly travel in a day and a half are

correct, and if the amount of time required to cross the narrow neck is directly proportional to the distance across the narrow neck, then a distance of eighty-two miles or so—that is, one-third less the 125-mile distance a Nephite could travel in a day and a half—is the widest distance possible for Mormon’s narrow neck. Sorenson’s suggestion that a Nephite might potentially be able to travel 144 miles in a day and a half (a distance significantly beyond what he considers plausible) would allow our Nephite to travel ninety-six miles in a single day, but this is still more than twenty miles shorter than Tehuantepec’s width. At 120 miles across at its narrowest, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is simply too wide for the numbers Sorenson and Mormon present.

Sorenson bases his proposed distances on the “nearly 100 miles a day” some California Native Americans were reportedly capable of traveling under nineteenth-century conditions.<sup>8</sup> As applicable as these numbers appear to be to the question of what an exceptional Nephite could have done in a real-world situation 2,100 years ago, the theoretical possibility of a Nephite traveling 120 miles in one day should be noted. According to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, a runner in New York City covered 153.76 miles in a twenty-four-hour period in April 2004—almost thirty-four miles more than the distance across Tehuantepec. Similarly, top runners generally complete the hundred-mile races that are becoming popular today in under fifteen hours, opening the door to the possibility of 120 miles being run in eighteen hours or so. How applicable these data are to estimating how far a Nephite might have been able to travel in a day, however, is another issue. The twenty-four-hour record, for example, was set on a treadmill, indoors, in a lighted room, by a runner well stocked with food and water and decked out in the most up-to-date running gear—a far cry from the conditions that would have faced a Nephite trying to make it across a narrow neck of land in Mesoamerica. The hundred-mile races, which are run outdoors, better approximate the conditions that would have faced a Nephite, but only roughly; again, the well-marked route, the running shoes, the water and juice stands, and the accompanying support crew give the clear advantage to the modern athlete. With people logging these distances and times today, however, the possibility that a Nephite, under ideal conditions, could have covered 120 miles in twenty-four hours or less is clearly a real one.

It is also possible that our Nephite was mounted on a horse rather than on foot when he crossed the narrow neck in a single day.<sup>9</sup> How much this would have increased the distance he would have been capable of traveling is debatable. Most nineteenth-century Americans

considered fifty miles to be a long day's ride, although we do have reports of some Mexican riders, on Spanish horses, who were capable of traveling 100 or 120 miles in a single day in nineteenth-century California.<sup>10</sup> This again brings us within reach, barely, of the distance across Tehuantepec. Differences between the equipment used by the Mexican riders (such as horseshoes), however, compared to the Nephite riders, and the fact that we have no clear evidence that the Nephites even rode horses,<sup>11</sup> call into serious question how reliably we might be able to apply this information to the Book of Mormon.

### “A Day's Journey” in Context

While it appears, then, that we should accept the possibility of a Nephite making it over the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in twenty-four hours or less, it also seems clear that such a feat, either on foot or on horseback, would have been an extraordinary one for the time. Yet the words Mormon uses to describe this trip across the narrow neck of land—“a day's journey” or “a day and half's journey” for a Nephite—lack any hint that it was an exceptional performance, especially when compared with how Mormon and others use these same words elsewhere in the text. Rather than suggesting an almost superhuman effort, for example, all other occurrences of the word *journey* and its derivatives in the Book of Mormon are used in the context of average people—often with families, belongings, and animals—traveling under a variety of circumstances. Nephi and his brothers “took [their] journey . . . with [their] tents” from Lehi's camp to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates (1 Nephi 3:9); Lehi's family “journey[ed] into the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:9, 33; see also 4:38; 5:6, 22; 7:5, 6; 17:1, 12; 18:25; 19:1; Mosiah 1:17; Alma 18:37; 37:41), as did the people of Mulek on their way to the promised land (see Omni 1:16). Nephi and his followers, similarly, loaded with “tents and whatsoever things were possible, . . . did journey” in the wilderness to escape Laman (2 Nephi 5:7; see also Mosiah 10:1); Zeniff's colonizers “took their journey” from Zarahemla to the land of Nephi (Omni 1:29; see also Mosiah 9:3); and Alma the Elder's “four hundred and fifty souls” (Mosiah 18:35), together with their flocks and grain, “fled eight days' journey into the wilderness” (Mosiah 23:3; see also 24:24). Limhi's people “journeyed” as well (see Mosiah 22:12), as did missionaries in the course of their labors (see Mosiah 28:9; Alma 17:1, 5, 6, 9, 18; 21:1; 28:8). This included Alma the Younger (Alma 8:3, 6, 13, 14), who met Amulek “journeying to see a very near kindred” (Alma 10:7) near Ammonihah. Other examples could be offered, but the point is clear: *journeying* was an activity

in which many people engaged under a variety of circumstances, rather than an exceptional feat of endurance.

We can do the same with the word *day*. As we have seen, the only chance a Nephite had of making it across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in “a day” was if Mormon understood the word to refer to a twenty-four-hour period, or at least to a length of time several hours longer than daylight lasts in central American latitudes. Nowhere, however, does Mormon or any other writer in the Book of Mormon use the word *day* to denote such a length of time. To be sure, there are many instances where the precise length of time meant by *day* is ambiguous—precisely how long Alma's people were on the move, for example, when they “traveled all day” in their flight from the Lamanites is unclear (Mosiah 24:20). On the other hand, there are numerous occasions where Mormon and other writers clearly meant something like “daytime” or “from dawn to dusk” when they used the word *day* to refer to a length of time. Enos, for example, cried “all the day long” for forgiveness and continued to pray “when the night came” (Enos 1:4); the Nephites “did pursue the Amlicites all that day,” after which they “did pitch their tents for the night” (Alma 2:19–20; compare 56:40); and the armies of Shiz and Coriantumr “fought all . . . day” several days in a row, retiring to their respective camps each night (Ether 15:20; see also vv. 15–26).

*Day* is also juxtaposed against *night* when a day of the calendar is meant—the best-known instance perhaps being the “day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night” that would signal the birth of the Savior (Helaman 14:4; see also 3 Nephi 1:19). Similarly, we read how the Jaredites praised the Lord “all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord” (Ether 6:9) and how Ether “hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day, and by night he went forth viewing the things which should come upon the people” (Ether 13:13). In Alma, we read of the Nephites who “fought valiantly by day and toiled by night,” and whose spies watched the Lamanites continually “that they might not pass [them] by night nor by day” and get in their rear (Alma 56:16, 22; compare 3 Nephi 3:14). Nephi reported how the Lord “heard [his] cry by day” and gave him “knowledge by visions in the nighttime” (2 Nephi 4:23; compare 9:52, 33:3). Even several doctrinal discourses preserve and utilize the idea that *day* meant “daytime.” Jacob, for example, urged his audience to “harden not [their] hearts” while the Lord's “arm of mercy is extended . . . in the light of the day” (Jacob 6:5); Amulek reminded the Zoramites that “after this day of life . . . cometh the night of darkness

wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33); and Alma taught Corianton that “he [who] has desired to do evil all the day long . . . shall . . . have his reward of evil when the night cometh” (Alma 41:5). Numerous other examples could be cited, but the point should be clear: each time the word *day* is qualified by the context, it means “daytime.” Never does it appear by the context to refer specifically to a twenty-four-hour period.

In the context of Book of Mormon usage, then, “a day’s journey for a Nephite” appears to be the distance someone could be expected to travel under common conditions during daylight hours. The only thing in this phrase that might suggest something out of the ordinary is its reference to “a” Nephite rather than to a group—a reference not unlike the generic “unburdened man” of Herodotus, perhaps, who could reportedly make it across the “narrowest neck” of Asia Minor in five days.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, it appears to have been a distance with which many people could relate from their own travel experiences—indeed, one has a difficult time understanding how such a phrase could have been useful among the Nephites unless it had some sort of universal applicability.<sup>13</sup> Without more data, any actual numbers we might propose can be considered only estimates, but if we assume that a “journeying” Nephite averaged between two and four miles per hour and that he could travel for some eight or twelve hours, Mormon’s “day’s journey for a Nephite” falls somewhere between sixteen and fifty miles.<sup>14</sup>

### Central America and the Narrow Neck

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is the northernmost “narrow neck of land” in southern Mexico and Central America. The closest potential “narrow neck” to the south—a line running from northwest Honduras to southeast El Salvador—is even wider, at 150 miles. Moving farther south, the first place where less than one hundred air miles separates the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean is in northern Costa Rica, although it is with difficulty that one is able to find a constriction here representing a “neck” between larger land masses to the north and south. Such a neck is perhaps easier to see in southern Costa Rica, where a seventy-mile neck of sorts is found, and in western Panama, where only forty miles separate the Pacific from the Caribbean. “Narrow necks” of forty-five and fifty miles occur just west and east of the Azuero Peninsula, with others—like today’s Canal Zone—occurring farther east still. Just before Panama’s border with Colombia, the distance between the Pacific and Caribbean jumps again to eighty-five or ninety miles.

Moving south from the United States, then, and using the numbers Sorenson provides, the first place that presents itself as a possible candidate for the “narrow neck” is in northern Costa Rica, where the distance between the Pacific and either the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean first drops below one hundred miles. And not until we reach Panama, where the distance between the Pacific and Caribbean drops to between fifty and thirty miles at several points, do we find sites narrow enough to be “a day’s journey for a Nephite” as Mormon apparently understood the phrase. While not definitive, one could argue that these Panamanian “narrow necks” also fit other descriptions in text better than sites to the north. In a story we have already referenced, for example, the Nephites were able to prevent the Lamanites from advancing into the land northward by “fortify[ing] against the Lamanites, from the west sea, even unto the east” (Helaman 4:7; for a similar situation, see Alma 52:9). While the possibility that the Nephites could have fortified a line 120 miles long against a superior number of the enemy is not entirely out of the question, it requires far more explanation than the proposition that their line was only thirty or forty miles long. Similarly, Mormon’s statement that “the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward” (Alma 22:32), appears to give the seas in the vicinity of Zarahemla and Nephi a presence and influence in the local geography greater than appears likely near Tehuantepec, but in a way that accords well with Panamanian geography. Given Panama’s relative width, one also sees the Gulf of San Miguel, Chiriqui Lagoon, Lake Gutan, and Lake Bayano potentially answering to the enigmatic “place where the sea divides the land” (Ether 10:20) better than any feature in the vicinity of Tehuantepec.<sup>15</sup> The text is too vague in its descriptions for any of these observations to be conclusive, but it is clear that a “narrow neck” in or near Panama presents fewer difficulties than one at Tehuantepec in light of important textual descriptions about the area.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that if one accepts the data John Sorenson provides on how far a Nephite could have traveled in a day and a half, the 120-mile-wide Isthmus of Tehuantepec is too wide to be the Nephites’ “narrow neck of land.” While I cite evidence suggesting that we might legitimately increase the theoretical distance a Nephite could have traveled in a day, I argue from textual evidence that “a day’s journey” or “a day and a half’s journey” for a Nephite was substantially

less than the distance across Tehuantepec. In light of these and other considerations, I suggest that sites in or near modern Panama fit the textual evidence and descriptions we have for the “narrow neck” better than Tehuantepec. This last suggestion is made only on the basis of matching the available data on the distance across the narrow neck of land with a real-world location. Of course, many other issues, such as the archaeology and anthropology of the area, would need to be addressed before any firm conclusions could be drawn about the viability of this suggestion on a broader front.<sup>17</sup> My intent is simply to point out where an existing theory runs afoul of the available data—including its own—on a fundamental feature of Book of Mormon geography and to suggest a possible point of departure for further research. **RE**

## Notes

1. See John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 38–206.

2. Most notably, see Delbert W. Curtis, *Christ in North America* (Tigard, OR: Resource Communications, 1993); Duane R. Aston, *Return to Cumorah: Piecing Together the Puzzle Where the Nephites Lived* (Sacramento: American River Publications, 1998); Paul Hedengren, *The Land of Lehi: Further Evidence for the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Tepran, 1999); and Phyllis Carol Olive, *The Lost Lands of the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Bonneville Books, 2000). For a critique of these “Limited Great Lakes” models, see John E. Clark, “Evaluating the Case for a Limited Great Lakes Setting,” *FARMS Review of Books* 14, nos. 1–2 (2002), 9–77.

3. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1996).

4. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 17.

5. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 29, 36.

6. Other ideas about Book of Mormon geography currently popular with some scholars and students have been challenged recently as well. These include the thesis that the Nephites’ and Jaredites’ final battles must have taken place close to the “narrow neck of land” and the suggestion that most early Church members, including leaders, originally subscribed to a “hemispheric” model of Book of Mormon geography, which they later abandoned in favor of a more limited geography centered in Central America (see Andrew H. Hedges, “Text and Model: Cumorah and the Limited Mesoamerican Theory,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture*, forthcoming publication, Spring 2008; Andrew H. Hedges, “Book of Mormon Geography in the World of Joseph Smith,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 8, nos. 1–2 [Spring/Fall 2007], 77–89).

7. Sorenson fails to consider this verse in his reconstruction of Book of Mormon geography, as a review of his “Scripture References” shows (see Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 407).

8. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 9, 17.

9. Sorenson entertains the possibility of the narrow neck being traversed by “some mode of travel other than on foot” but ultimately bases his calculations on

“foot travel—probably the normal mode” (Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 17).

10. Andrew H. Hedges, “First Impressions: California Through the Eyes of Its Early Saints, 1846–1857,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: California*, ed. David F. Boone, Robert C. Freeman, Andrew H. Hedges, and Richard Neitzel Holzappel (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1998), 13.

11. The only references we have to any Book of Mormon peoples using horses for travel has Lamanites using them to pull chariots (see Alma 18:9–12; 20:6).

12. Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. A. D. Godley, 1.72 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 89. In a comment relevant to the current discussion, Godley believes it to be “much more than a five days’ march” across the 280-mile “narrow neck” of Asia Minor.

13. This is how we often use such phrases today. When someone from Ogden, Utah, asks me how far it is to Yellowstone, for example, and I tell him “four or five hours,” I am assuming he will be traveling under the conditions one from Ogden usually travels to Yellowstone. Unless I have good reason to do so, I do not base my answer on the assumption that he will be flying in a plane, even though such a travel option is not out of the question. Nor do I base my answer on the assumption that he will be driving a high-performance race car with the freeways and highways devoid of traffic and a well-trained pit crew stationed every twenty miles along the route. An answer based on these assumptions might indicate how quickly one could get to Yellowstone under exceptional conditions but would have little meaning and utility for the average person. By the same token, the phrases Mormon uses would have been far more useful among the Nephites if they conveyed the idea of how far an average person could expect to travel over the course of any given day or day and a half than if they represented exceptional people and conditions.

14. Archaeologists generally calculate “a day’s walk” or “a day of travel” in ancient Mesoamerica to have been about twenty to thirty kilometers, or twelve to nineteen miles (see Arthur Demarest, *Ancient Maya: The Rise and Fall of a Rain-forest Civilization* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 152; Richard E. Blanton and others, *Ancient Oaxaca* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 89).

15. Like Helaman 4:7 (see note 7 above), Ether 10:20 does not appear in Sorenson’s reconstruction (see Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 408).

16. It should be noted here that Sorenson rejects Panama as a candidate for the “narrow neck” on the grounds that “Limhi’s exploring party [see Mosiah 8:7–8; 21:25–26] could hardly have passed through it and returned without realizing that they had left the land of Zarahemla” (Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 29; see also 14, 16–17). There are at least two problems with this line of reasoning, however. First, the text provides no evidence that Limhi’s men knew that Zarahemla lay south of the “narrow neck”; and second, it is quite conceivable that forty-three men could have traveled through one of the heavily forested “narrow necks” of Panama without realizing the distance to the sea on either side of them was shorter than it had been. Had they known as much about the general location of Zarahemla, as Sorenson suggests, it is doubtful they would have been as “lost” as they were (see Mosiah 8:8; 21:25). In short, Sorenson’s rejection of

Panama as a possible “narrow neck” rests more on his assumptions about the text than on the text itself.

17. This may be easier said than done at this point. Situated between the high cultural centers to the north and south, Panama has received relatively little attention from archaeologists over the years. Some might view this as evidence in and of itself that the area was not home to a people with as complex a civilization as the Nephites, but such a conclusion would be unwarranted. To date, none of the sites excavated in southern Mexico and Central America have been clearly identified with any of the events or places of the Book of Mormon, and the question of what Nephite or Jaredite remains should look like is very much an open one. Until a positive identification is made, scholars should be open to a variety of possibilities regarding the form Nephite and Jaredite remains might take and where they might be found.

# Evidence of Ancient Writing on Metal: An Interview with H. Curtis Wright

*H. Curtis Wright and Elisabeth R. Sutton*

*H. Curtis Wright is a professor emeritus of ancient Greek studies and modern library education at BYU. Wright's book *Modern Presentism and Ancient Metallic Epigraphy*<sup>1</sup> contains the largest bibliography ever collected about metallic epigraphy, ancient writing on metal—nearly two thousand references.*

*Elisabeth R. Sutton (elisabeth.sutton@gmail.com) graduated from BYU with an English major and an Arab-Islamic studies minor.*

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**Sutton:** *What first sparked your interest in ancient epigraphy?*

**Wright:** Before my mission, I was studying at the University of Utah. I was headed on a track like mechanical engineering or something else mathematical. My mission among the Navajos put me in a situation where my companion and I; the local trader, who was Mormon; and his wife, who was Presbyterian, were the only ones who didn't know what was going on around us because we could not understand the language. There I learned that knowledge of foreign languages in certain circumstances is not a pretty nicety; it is a survival necessity. As long as you cannot understand what is going on around you, you tend to become paranoid and nervous. You will not be comfortable in the courts and the marketplace. That is what got me interested in languages, particularly Navajo. We were not supposed to learn the language in those days because we didn't have a Missionary Training Center. I ended up trying to learn it anyway.

When Matthew Cowley and Elder Spencer W. Kimball (before he was President of the Church) found out that I was trying to learn Navajo, I thought they would be angry. But they were not; they were interested in the fact that I tried to learn it. Some of the traders

down there had done business with the Navajos for forty years and still could not speak Navajo. They spoke what the Navajos called “Baking Powder” Navajo. I never could get any of the traders that I knew to function as an interpreter. They could not speak the language well enough. So when Elder Kimball and Elder Cowley, the General Authorities that I have known best, found out I was seriously interested in Navajo, Elder Kimball said, “Don’t go back to the U; go back to the Y and study under Hugh Nibley.”

That is how I got in contact with Hugh Nibley. I came to Brigham Young University on January 4, 1951, and I started studying with him. When I arrived, he was working on a series of articles called “Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites” for the *Improvement Era*.<sup>2</sup> In the first months that I knew him, he was talking about ancient metal documents. He had discovered what he called a worldwide pattern of ancient metal documents, so I got interested in that and began to think about it. All of a sudden I started to notice writing on metals in ancient cultures I was studying.

**Sutton:** *Where did you earn your PhD?*

**Wright:** From Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. This is what happened: I was a classics librarian at the University of Cincinnati, where there is a very important classics department in terms of Bronze Age archaeology. It was just a marvelous place to be. After a year I got a chance to apply for a United States Office of Education (USOE) grant in Cleveland, which is just up the state from Cincinnati. Case Western had a program that worked out just fine. Jesse Shera was convinced that librarianship was interdisciplinary—that there is nothing at a university that does not touch a library. He had created a bifurcated program, what he called the cognate-area PhD. Because Shera believed in the total interdisciplinarity of librarianship, he believed that you could pick any PhD-granting program in the whole university and spend half your time in that program.

We in the bifurcated librarianship program used to call ourselves the Cleveland Seven because we were seven graduate students working on one or the other of these programs. I selected classics, so half of my doctoral study was British and American library education and the other half was ancient Greek language and literature. Now, if I had studied classics without librarianship, then the other half of my degree would have been Latin language and literature. That is why I call myself a half-trained classicist, though I can also read Latin when I put my mind to it.

I had to compete with honest-to-goodness classicists. I studied shoulder to shoulder with other students who went on to earn doctorates in classics, and I ended up with a 4.0 average in my classes. I took them seriously, but that does not mean anything because there is no correlation between education and actual talent. A PhD just shows that you have the tenacity to get it done. It doesn’t say much about what you really know.

I had never heard another teacher acknowledge the worldwide pattern of ancient metal documents before Nibley, so I started to collect a bibliography of articles on it. In the fall of 1969, just after I finished my PhD and returned to BYU, a man named Spencer Palmer happened to see me with a four-page bibliography, and he started bugging me about it. So I finally published “Metallic Documents of Antiquity” in the 1970 *BYU Studies* just to get him off my back.<sup>3</sup> It had seven pages of bibliography.

**Sutton:** *So that’s the article that started it all?*

**Wright:** That is where I started. But all I did for a year or so was notice these things. I found out about five hundred curse tablets in a well discovered in Boeotia. After about a year, I thought I should be keeping track of these things, so I collected this stuff in files for fifty-four years. Then I put it together in this book: 211 pages of scholarly references to ancient metallic epigraphy.

**Sutton:** *What has been the response to your research?*

**Wright:** While I was preparing for my oral exams on the classics side of my PhD, I took this bibliography of seven pages and showed it to Dr. Charles H. Reeves. He was a very brilliant man, the head of classics in Cleveland. He and I went to a restaurant there, and he looked at the bibliography and said, “This is incredible. I’ve heard of a couple of the things here. I had no idea there was so much of this stuff.” He was just plain startled by this. Now, he was a Bronze Age archaeologist, and the archaeologists are the ones who wrote about epigraphy, not the historians, because classics makes a clear distinction between archaeological monuments and historical documents.

Archaeologists tended to hide epigraphic things away and call them monuments, and everybody looking for epigraphic documents is cut off. I had to learn the conventions of classics when I became a classics librarian. That is just the way they think about these things, and the way they think about them determines how you handle them in the classics library. On the other side of the spectrum, Near Eastern studies does not make any distinction between soft and hard writing materials at all. They are interested only in the message itself. I think Latter-day

Saints should go back and reassess the whole corpus of ancient writings in Near Eastern studies because they bury the distinction that makes these things visible.

Anytime I have shown anybody this research in classics, not just in Mormonism, they have been flabbergasted by it. My graduate director was Russian, and his name was Rawski. He was also fluent in German, and he made the mistake of telling me, “Well, if you find anything in German, I’ll read it for you.” And then I started dumping bushels of journal articles on him.

He turned to me twenty years later and said, “I told you that I would translate your articles because I was sure you wouldn’t find anything.” I found examples of ancient writing on metal because I learned where to look for them. This has been the story with everyone who has seen my research. They are shocked. Not just people in Mormonism. Scholarly people everywhere are shocked to see so many of these epigraphic documents. So this turns out to be an unknown, or very obscure, footnote in the history of ancient writing. And people are always shocked by it.

**Sutton:** *What surprised you the most during your research?*

**Wright:** Well, number one, I am surprised just like everyone else with the sheer number of metallic epigraphs that are available. Also, it is hard to study the transition from no writing at all to protowriting, because you have nothing, no record at all to go by. The earliest technologies that go way, way back are the ancient technologies of woodworking, stonecutting, and metalsmithing, and my guess is that they are the oldest forms of writing because you do not have to smelt anything. You just have to chop trees down, for example, since they dry out, and then you build a boat or whatever you want. Writing drew on these technologies.

I have one article in the bibliography called “Sie schrieben auf Holz” (They wrote on wood).<sup>4</sup> However, wood is biodegradable, so wood documents do not survive, while stone lasts forever. Engraving stone seems to be the most cumbersome thing. What would you use to write with? Well, you have to have chisels, hammers, punches, scribes, everything—you have to have all the paraphernalia that a stonemason uses in order to write. They used to do that for public consumption.

**Sutton:** *What about clay tablets?*

**Wright:** Clay tablets are not epigraphical. They are probably the oldest. They are not epigraphical in the classical sense, but classics does not have a lot to do with clay. The all-time winner of the war for survival is the clay tablet largely because clay has no intrinsic value. Metal

is always getting melted down and sold on the black market. We have examples of that. But clay has no value, so it piles up. But I assume that you use clay tablets when they are wet or moist, and you impress them and then let them dry. That is not the same thing as using metal.

**Sutton:** *I guess working with clay would be a little bit easier than carrying a chisel around, but you would still require wet clay.*

**Wright:** Just imagine what the scribe’s kit is; you need everything suited to work with moist tablets. And that means you have a different kit than if you are working with marble tablets or with wood or with metal. I believe that when writing first appears, it makes use of extant technology. So woodworking and stonecutting and engraving are already up and running when writing appears. All you need to create writing is contrast, a stable contrast between figure and ground that makes writing visible. They first do it epigraphically. That is, they violate the surface with something like a scorer, a punch, or a chisel. Once they have figured that out, they also figure out easier ways to write.

**Sutton:** *In your book, you pointed out that many Indo-European and Semitic words for “to write” come from words for “to cut” and “to scrape.”<sup>25</sup> I think you make a very good argument for protowriting being epigraphic with those etymologies: if people started out writing on paper with ink, then they would not call the process cutting.*

**Wright:** Tree products are popular during the formative age of writing, and I think stonecutting is also. An ancient technique of gem carving goes way back, and gem cutting is only a refined kind of stonemasonry. I think gem carving was also involved in the first writing techniques. Metalworking is also very antique. Tubal-cain of the Bible was head of a great family of metalworkers: Tubal-cain means Cain the Metalworker. All these things predate writing and make writing possible.

**Sutton:** *What should Latter-day Saints know about writing on metal?*

**Wright:** First, it is very ancient. I would guess that the first writing is done on wood. Then they progress to using metals and stone. Also, I deplore the blurring of the classical distinction between hard and soft writing surfaces in Near Eastern studies. They make fun of the distinction; they think the distinction is silly. But the distinction between hard and soft writing surfaces is a key player. That is where classical philology begins, and philology is a concern for the literary tradition, not for the scientific tradition. I could not have made sense of the classics library in Cincinnati if I had not understood this distinction. Near

Eastern scholars are so interested in what the document says that they could not care less what it was made of.

**Sutton:** *So if someone were looking at a transcription of something written on metal, and they did not know that it was originally on metal, then they would assume it was written on a soft material?*

**Wright:** Yes, that is right. I will tell you an example of this—I studied a treaty associated with the Thirty Years’ War, one of the wars in Greece, for a long time without the vaguest hint that it was a metal document. I found out after I had a PhD that it was a metal document. It is ridiculous how this happens. This is what makes me think that Latter-day Saint scholars should reexamine all Near Eastern texts. If they did that, they would find metal documents.

Also this book suggests that nothing obviates the possibility—nothing rules out the possibility—that both scrolls in the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah 36 are actually metal.<sup>6</sup>

**Sutton:** *You also wrote that writing “with ink” (Jeremiah 36:18) may have just been added later.*

**Wright:** It is added later because the Masoretes think that was the only way to write. Both scrolls in the Masoretic Jeremiah 36 and in the Septuagint Jeremiah 42 may have been metallic epigraphs.

**Sutton:** *In the book, you wrote that the Septuagint was probably more accurate than the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, which was used for the King James Version of the Bible.*

**Wright:** That all depends on how you construe that. You know, the Book of Mormon is the first book in modern times that draws a very sharp distinction between the Jews at Jerusalem—the rabbinical Jews—and the Jews everywhere else—the Diaspora Jews. When the Jews came back from Babylon, they came back in two groups, because when they went to Babylon they were in two groups. There were supporters of the dead kings, the nationalist party. Then there were supporters of the prophets, the prophetic party, to which Jeremiah and Lehi belonged.

In the Book of Mormon, you can read about the same split when you study the king-men and the freemen. The king-men were supporters of the kings, and the freemen were supporters of the gospel (see Alma 51; 60–62). The Jews have the same problem. Two stories developed among the Jews about what happened when Moses went up to Mount Sinai. One is that he went up there as a king, and when he came down he had all the commandments, and he gave those commandments as a king. The other theory was that when Moses went up and came down the mountain, he was a prophet.

**Sutton:** *So did the first group justify wanting a king because they said Moses was a king?*

**Wright:** Well, the repercussions of this split come out in the book of Deuteronomy. In the Jerusalem of Lehi’s day, there is a very definite party of king-men. And then opposed to them you have Jeremiah, Lehi, and others, who are the prophetic people. So they were divided. Jerusalem was a divided city. When they come back from exile, the Jewish nationalists, the king-men, were the ones who built up and restored Jerusalem. The Jews in Jerusalem are often called “Temple Jews” because they rebuilt the temple, and they built a wall around Jerusalem and did a marvelously successful job of keeping almost everything Greek outside the walls. Now, the Jews in Jerusalem did not determine policy for the Jews in the Diaspora, and the Temple Jews did not like losing control over the Diaspora Jews.

So the Judaism outside Jerusalem was not under the control of the rabbis. The rabbis prefer the Masoretic Text, or the Hebrew text, but the Diaspora Jews and their creation of the Septuagint went back a lot earlier than the Masoretic Text. When the intellectual center of Greece moved from Athens to Alexandria, the cultural desire to have the biggest libraries almost precipitated a war between the northern and southern colonies, and it was a prestige thing. Jewish scholars got together in Alexandria to publish the Septuagint, and it is in Greek because the Diaspora Jews spoke Greek. That is how the Bible became known; a tiny local scripture became the worldwide scriptures right there in Alexandria.

I have not run into anybody at BYU who seriously studies the Septuagint except for John F. Hall; he wrote the introduction to my book. He said writing about the Septuagint is important. He has never heard of anybody at BYU except Hugh Nibley and me who consider the Septuagint this way. After all, the Christian church is modeled on the synagogue, not the temple.

**Sutton:** *This book is the first volume in a series. What is the second volume going to be about?*

**Wright:** The second one is about Nibley’s writings on the sophic and the mantic, which I call the antigospel and the gospel. I had to understand this because when you study Greek you have to learn the difference between thinking and sensing in the Greek mentality.

**Sutton:** *What do sophic and mantic mean in Greek?*

**Wright:** *Sophic* and *mantic* explain thinking and sensing. They determine the sensory-noetic disjunction implicit in Greek thinking, and if you do not understand that, then you do not understand the



Greeks. Our preference for thinking about sensory things is scientific, but we think about literary things and ideas in a different way. I understand that very well, and I have run into quite a few people at BYU who also understand it. But Nibley lifts it up to a power of ten. He shows that the sophic-mantic dichotomy exists all over the world, in all cultures. I think it is the most important thing he ever did.

My assemblage of Nibley's ideas on sophic and mantic sat in my office for twenty-two years until I finally gave it to FARMS. And now I have sifted through all of this stuff and intend to make a full-blown book out of it.

*Sutton: Your research has come a long way.*

**Wright:** In 1970, I had seven pages in my bibliography of published information about ancient epigraphy. It has since gone from 7 pages to 211 pages because my office was right next to the ancient studies library. Every year a huge bibliography of classical studies comes out, and I learned how to find the epigraphical information in it. **RE**

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## Notes

1. H. Curtis Wright, *Modern Presentism and Ancient Metallic Epigraphy* (Salt Lake City: Wings of Fire, 2006).
2. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, vol. 5 in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, ed. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988).
3. H. Curtis Wright, "Metallic Documents of Antiquity," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1970): 457–77.
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5. Wright, *Modern Presentism and Ancient Metallic Epigraphy*, 10–16.
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# Lessons Learned at BYU

*Donald Q. Cannon*

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*This address was given at a Friday faculty forum at BYU on April 13, 2007.*

Reflecting on my career at the university, I have titled this lecture "Lessons Learned at BYU." You may be able to apply some of these ideas in your work. The lessons are not in any particular order.

## **Do not publish everything you write.**

The people who read your papers usually help with that. I had an experience with this very early in my career here at BYU. I had taught colonial history and studied a lot about George Fox, the founder of the Quakers. I found some really fascinating parallels between George Fox and Joseph Smith. When I got here, one of the things I did was write a paper and submit it to *BYU Studies* and had it rejected right away, which does happen. I thought I would have it published elsewhere. I showed it to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who was then the dean of Religious Education. He said, "Come in and talk to me," so I knew there was something coming. He said, "First of all, this might be construed as being a little bit too controversial; you're making George Fox look as good as Joseph Smith." So this was his recommendation: as soon as you get to be like Hugh Nibley, publish it. I have it here. It has never been published. We do come up with some things that are probably not appropriate to be put into print.

### **Do not teach all you know.**

You have heard Bob Millet and others say to show some restraint in what you teach, and I think this is wise counsel. We all know way more than students can understand or care about. I think we do need to be selective. For example, I am quite fascinated with what I call the evolution of the temple endowment. I have studied all the things I could get my hands on; I have thought about it and looked at the development and have also been very fascinated with the parallels between Mormonism and Masonry in the endowment ceremony; I'm still very interested in that and have had some good discussions with many of you. But it would not be appropriate in most classes to discuss that. That is just one example; you all have lots of things like that. I think there are limits to what we can appropriately say.

I am really fascinated with eternal progression. Larry Dahl and I have had a lot of discussions. I think this is one of my favorite topics of exploration. It is one of the things that interested me in the King Follett discourse and the work we have done on that, but again, to push this beyond what is in the scriptures or what the Brethren have said in a class would probably be inappropriate. In a personal setting, if students come to my office and want to talk about things, I would be more willing to share such things. I think you all know what I am talking about. There are lots of things that we understand and hold personally that might not be appropriate for class consumption.

### **Travel, especially world travel, makes it possible to become a citizen of the world.**

Travel is a broadening, liberating experience. We have been a very fortunate group in being able to travel extensively, both in and out of the United States. Better than traveling is living in another place. I might say that the six months we spent in Austria with the study abroad program were much more enlightening than the two and a half years I spent in Germany as a missionary. As missionaries, we are restricted in what we observe and in what we learn. We learn some things, but not nearly as much as you do as a resident in another place. I think those of you who have had a chance to go to Israel and live there have learned something that you certainly cannot learn in a book. In this regard, I am again very thankful for the money that has been provided and for these opportunities.

As I think about world travel, I suppose the trip to Asia that Spencer Palmer conceived first comes to mind. At that time I was associate

dean and went as an adviser to the world religion teachers; we visited nine Asian countries in forty-three days. That was a tremendously eye-opening experience in a way that I simply can't convey in words. It opened our eyes to what goes on in Asia and that part of the world and helped us become more aware of other religions. Going to an animal sacrifice at a Hindu temple in Nepal, where they dispatched a monkey for future life, was a stunning experience.

Travel does so much toward promoting understanding of other people. That is true whether it is inside or outside the United States. Our most recent experience in the British Isles last summer was very helpful in understanding different cultures and different perspectives. People are asking me what my wife and I are going to do when we retire; travel is one of the things we hope to continue if we are financially able.

### **Traveling together builds fellowship and friendship.**

You learn things about people that you do not learn otherwise. Let me share a few things here. Going back very early, LaMar Berrett was very much a proponent of getting us out to visit Church history sites. For Larry Porter and LaMar Berrett, being on the ground was very essential, and I agree.

Being with Roger Keller on our trip to Asia was a great experience; seeing his tremendous interest in other religions was a fantastic thing. I especially remember being on the Great Wall; if you think it runs along on the level, you are quite wrong; it goes uphill and downhill for nearly four thousand miles.

It is difficult promoting our Regional Studies tours to New England or Missouri or wherever we have gone, but these trips develop our faculty and build collegiality.

### **Regular exercise is important.**

I have been swimming for the last thirty-four years, two or three times a week. I have added strength training, and I like to walk and hike and some other things. I think to stay at your desk all day is a huge mistake, especially during the week when you are at work. Even if you just walk around the building, I think it is very important. Thinking about this talk, I took a little informal survey in the locker room, and I asked what the chief benefit of coming down there is. In almost every case they said, it makes me feel good, both psychologically and

physically. It is a break. When you are in the pool, you are not going to get a committee assignment or a student complaining about grades.

### **Research is as fulfilling as teaching.**

Notice that I did not say research was better than teaching. I am talking about research, not writing. Writing is still very hard work for me; after forty years in higher education, thirty-four at BYU and six at the University of Maine, it is still very hard work, but research is very fulfilling. It is like being a detective, looking for clues, trying to fit things together, making discoveries. Let me offer two examples of discovery. LaMar Berrett had sent me to New England on a sweep to find out what kinds of materials were available on Mormon studies. In the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston, I found a Thomas L. Kane letter that apparently nobody had found. It had not been published anyway. I brought it back and wrote something about it, and they published it in the fall 1977 issue of *BYU Studies*; it was Thomas L. Kane's first encounter with the main body of the Mormons. He had met some of them in Philadelphia. His letter heading read "Mormon Camp Near Council Bluffs, July 11, 1846." It was Kane's views on what the Mormons were planning to do and what they might do.

Second, I was studying the journals of my great-grandfather Angus M. Cannon; he has about eighty-five volumes here at BYU or in Salt Lake. I found the entry for January 1888; he was visiting David Whitmer, and Sister Whitmer asked him to stay because she figured David was dying. Indeed David died in a few days, so Angus was the last Mormon, the last Utah Mormon, to hear the last testimony of the last of the Three Witnesses. I had heard about that, but it was so exciting to read that actual passage. I did write a little article about that in the spring 1980 issue of *BYU Studies* titled "Angus M. Cannon and David Whitmer: A Comment on History and Historical Method." That has been a very meaningful thing. Sometimes you go looking and you don't find things—most of the time, in fact—but the search is really worth it.

In research, there are impressions that come. At the MHA meetings in Vermont we had 650 believers, nonbelievers, and others traveling around to the Joseph Smith sites. I think the very first time I ever went to Sharon, Vermont, Truman Madsen and Lynn McKinley were speaking. I had come up from graduate school in Massachusetts. I have been there dozens of times since, but I never cease to be thrilled by it. I love New England, I love Vermont, I love Joseph Smith, and they all come together there. It is such a magnificent place for many

reasons. The Church has done such a great job in restoring buildings, marking sites, and doing things there.

On the other hand, a quite different experience geographically is Lee's Ferry in Arizona. It doesn't look like Vermont. It is a very remote, barren, sad place, but it tells you very quickly about the Mormon frontier experience. You stand there and go to the graveyard and see the graves of children who died of various diseases and look at the sand and walk around. It is a gripping experience.

### **Consistent work will result in a fairly substantial volume of publication.**

I have published seventy articles, twenty books, and ten book reviews so far, and there are lots in progress. Eventually, the Nauvoo Legion book will come out. The point is, I do not stay up all night. Just consistent work will produce a fair amount of publications.

### **Serving in the Church enhances one's teaching.**

It seems that I draw on whatever I am doing in the Church at the moment. It just comes up. My wife has been a temple worker for a long time at the Mount Timpanogos temple, and I thought I had better try and catch up. But lately where it's appropriate, it has been possible to say things about temples and temple service that I could not say before. The same is true when I was a branch president at the Missionary Training Center and talking about missionary work or *Preach My Gospel*. You have experiences in Church that are very real, and they are current and are not scripted; they just pop up.

When I was first in the stake presidency, the old stake president had never held a disciplinary council. The new stake president said, "We are going to catch up"; we had two or three courts a month for a year. This is not a happy experience, but it is a learning experience. There are procedures to follow, and there is a fairness and a correctness in the procedures.

### **I have learned from observing you.**

Your good examples have helped me to lead a better life. I have seen some really wonderful examples of how to live the gospel and how to apply it.

Stan Johnson was our stake president for a while. He used the scriptures so skillfully all the time in his role. You would never be with him for more than five minutes before he would pull out Book of

Mormon scriptures or other things that were very meaningful. This was not something he got out of a handbook; it was a very natural thing.

Brent Top's expression of love for his wife, Wendy, in his writings and in other ways has been very touching to me.

Speaking of a love for the scriptures, I remember being down at the Mesa Arizona Temple grounds while we were waiting to go into a session. Bob Matthews had joined us and was there a little early. He was not walking around the lemon groves; he was reading his scriptures, and that was very meaningful to me.

Hugh Nibley's love of the temple inspired me. Hugh was not afraid to talk about the temple, and we learned some tremendous things from him. I never did tire of listening to him.

**We have a very special opportunity to gain an appreciation of the General Authorities that most people don't have.**

This was more true in the old days where we had a closer interface, but it has been my good privilege to watch university presidents turn into Apostles. Dallin H. Oaks and Jeffrey R. Holland were good people when they were here. But the transformation is just phenomenal. The embrace of spiritual things, their thirst for spiritual knowledge, the spiritual power that emanates from them is an amazing thing, and it has been fun to watch and to have that privilege and to see them continue to play such a huge role in the Church. Let me mention a brief experience I had fairly recently with Elder Holland. He went to Chile, and I was teaching a course on the international Church, so I called up and said, "Sometime I'd like to sit down with you and talk about the significance of that experience, your two tours of duty in South America, if you're willing."

I tried to prepare for the questions I would ask, and as I did I thought a great deal about his job as an Apostle. I was overwhelmed contemplating their duties and their responsibilities.

When I went in and shook his hand, I said, "You have an enormous job," and his response was, "It's a big church." You could sense the responsibility and the pressure, and it was such a wonderful thing for him to take time. I said, "It's the first time in twenty-five years I have asked you to spend an hour, so I haven't taken advantage of our friendship." He was so willing and gracious to spend that time. He spent a whole hour and talked very openly about it. I asked him to rate his experiences as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and the South American experience. He said, "Way, way, way over the top." I asked, "Why?" He said, "It was so wonderful to actually live

among Saints and not just visit in a scripted way. With the routine of the meetings and the committees and the responsibilities that go with the bureaucratic side, it was so wonderful and so refreshing to be out there and mingle with the Saints."

I have had a lot of students who have done papers on South America, specifically Chile, who have commented on the tremendous change Elder Holland made in increasing the retention rate for new converts. He took hold of that problem, which was way out of control.

**Conclusion**

I remember when I was very first here at BYU and we would have a faculty meeting and would listen to what was being said, I would think, "I'm not like them, maybe someday." I am still working on that. But I do have a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel and of the Church and particularly of BYU and its mission and of the great privilege it is to teach and to work here, and I pray the Lord will bless you all in your future endeavors. **RE**

# New Publications

To purchase the following publications, visit [www.byubookstore.com](http://www.byubookstore.com), click on book title or search ISBN; or call the BYU Bookstore toll-free at 1-800-253-2578.

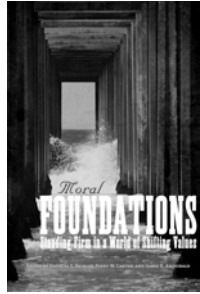
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*An Uncommon Common Pioneer: The Journals of James Henry Martineau, 1828–1918 (to be released late August 2008)*

James Henry Martineau's journals are a rich historical resource. They present the life of a Mormon convert, a pioneer, and an individual dedicating his life in the service of his family, his country, and his church. More than the life of one man, these records reflect the everyday struggles of a people whose lives were in transition as they set the foundations of a new society. Martineau's contributions to the settlements of northern and southern Utah, southern Idaho, southeast Arizona, and the Mormon colonies in northern Mexico are monumental. He was a civil engineer whose survey work left a lasting impression. Although not a prominent religious leader, he was a patriarch and was often in contact with or serving with those in authority. This volume offers a reflection of this common, yet uncommon, Latter-day Saint pioneer.

*ISBN: 978-0-8425-2697-5, Retail: \$39.95*

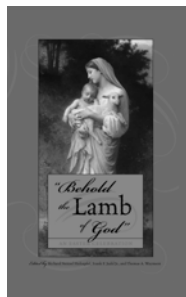


***Moral Foundations: Standing Firm in a World of Shifting Values***

“The Gospel: The Foundation for a Professional Career” symposium was held on Brigham Young University campus in March 2007. It was cosponsored by Religious Education and the Ira A. Fulton College of Engineering and Technology. The purpose of the symposium was to emphasize how important it is for graduates of BYU to live the highest standards of morality and integrity as

they leave campus and assume residency and employment in the world community. It was an opportunity to make principles taught by the Latter-day Saint faith find practical application in the lives of graduates. This volume contains the presentations from this symposium.

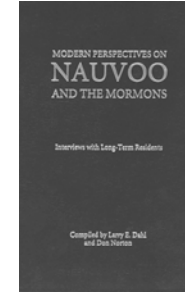
ISBN: 978-0-8425-2686-9, Retail: \$21.95



***“Behold the Lamb of God”: An Easter Celebration***

Followers of Jesus Christ since the beginning have referred to their Savior as the Lamb of God. While down by the river Jordan, John the Baptist was baptizing those who desired to follow the Savior. When the Savior approached the Baptist, John declared, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). After John baptized Jesus, he bore record “that he had baptized the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 10:10). The next day, when John and two of his disciples saw Jesus, the Baptist again proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36). This volume celebrates the life and sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2693-7, Retail: \$25.95

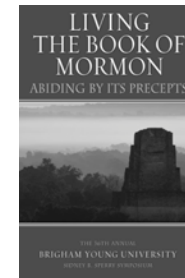


***Modern Perspectives on Nauvoo and the Mormons: Interviews with Long-Term Residents***

After the announcement of the intent to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple, there was much discussion in the town about why The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would want to build such a large building in such a small place and what impact it might have on Nauvoo. Questions were raised about the vast potential increase in the number of visitors to Nauvoo, as well as whether large numbers of Church

members would come to settle in Nauvoo permanently, significantly affecting the political and cultural environment. Additional interest focused on the whole history of the Mormons in Nauvoo. Those ideas, attitudes, and feelings of residents were captured in this collection of interviews. Twenty-six Nauvoo residents were interviewed and their answers recorded in this volume. (Original printing: January 2003. Second printing: October 2007.)

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2526-8, Retail: \$29.95

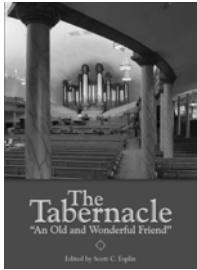


***Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts***  
***The 36th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium***

“I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” Joseph Smith’s statement rings true 166 years later. The Book of Mormon clarifies precepts taught in the Bible and invites us to live more Christlike

lives. Topics of the 2007 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium include redemption through Christ, the “three Rs” of the Book of Mormon, and the divine precept of charity. Presenters include Elder Joe J. Christensen, Terry B. Ball, Richard O. Cowan, and Robert L. Millet.

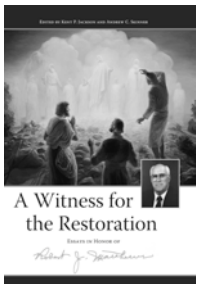
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***The Tabernacle: "An Old and Wonderful Friend"***

As the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City's Temple Square was renovated in 2007, historian Scott C. Esplin releases this in-depth review of the Tabernacle's construction. Featuring beautiful and historic photos, much of the book consists of a newly edited version of Stewart L. Grow's thesis on the building of the Tabernacle. Grow was the grandson of Henry Grow, the bridge builder who built the roof of the historic Tabernacle. The author has provided a new introduction, placing the thesis in historical context.

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***A Witness for the Restoration:  
Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews***

This collection of essays offers tribute to Robert J. Matthews for his eightieth birthday. The wide-ranging essays are a reflection of his varied interests and academic loves. Written by Matthews's colleagues, topics range from biblical studies to the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2676-0, Retail: \$24.95

## Past Conferences

### The BYU Easter Conference

Easter was in March this year, so the Easter Conference was held Saturday, March 22, 2008, in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium. President Merrill J. Bateman, emeritus Seventy and Provo Utah Temple president, was the keynote speaker. *"Behold the Lamb of God": An Easter Celebration* is now available. It contains the proceedings from last year's presentations. Visit [easterconference.byu.edu](http://easterconference.byu.edu) for more information.

### The Tenth Annual BYU Religious Education Student Symposium

This year's presentations took place in the Wilkinson Student Center on Friday, February 22, 2008. The purpose of the student symposium is to provide a forum for students to research, write, and present papers about religious subjects from a faithful perspective.

## Upcoming Conferences

### John Taylor Historical Conference

Now being held annually, this year's Church history conference will honor John Taylor. It will be held October 10 on BYU campus. Last year the focus was Wilford Woodruff and in 2006 it was Oliver Cowdery.

### The Thirty-Seventh Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium

Scheduled for October 24–25, 2008, this Sperry Symposium focuses on "Latter-day Revelations: Text, Context, and Fulfillment." The keynote speaker will present in the Joseph Smith Building, Friday, October 24.



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## Staff Spotlight

### Editorial Board Member

Eric D. Gustafson is originally from Palo Alto, California. He graduated from the University of Utah with a BA in philosophy and a BA in political science. Now, as one of the few “Utes” living in Provo, Eric sells commercial real estate and brokers investment properties for CB Richard Ellis. He is trained in hostage negotiations, which he uses often with his wife and three daughters. His interests include studying gospel doctrine, paragliding, and volunteering with the IASK organization, which provides medical and dental care to children in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.



### Photographer

Richard Crookston grew up in Provo, Utah. He served a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in British Columbia. He received a bachelor of science in business management and a master of information systems management from Brigham Young University. Richard is the systems administrator for Religious Education. He has contributed articles and photographs to several publications, including *Confronting Pornography: A Guide to Prevention and Recovery for Individuals, Loved Ones, and Leaders*, *BYU Religious Education Review*, and *The Tabernacle: “An Old and Wonderful Friend.”* Richard and his wife, Luna Miota, are the parents of a beautiful baby girl.



### Student Editorial Intern

Elizabeth N. Hixson graduated from BYU in April 2008 with an English language major and an editing minor. She will be starting law school this fall, focusing on the area of child advocacy. Elizabeth enjoyed working as the team lead of the editing interns at the RSC, where she edited, indexed, and typeset numerous publications. She loves to spend time with her family and friends. Having lived in several different places, from Oklahoma to Idaho to California, Elizabeth enjoys traveling and expanding her horizons.





## Submission Guidelines

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Manuscripts must be word processed in double-spaced format, including quotations. A minimum of embedded word-processing commands should be used. Authors should follow style conventions of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition, and the *Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 3rd edition, as reflected in a recent issue of the *Religious Educator*.

Those manuscripts that meet all criteria and appear to fill current needs will be peer reviewed and will receive a friendly, but careful, review. Authors will then be notified of the decision about publication. This process generally takes four to six months, and publication will generally occur within a year after acceptance has been received.

If an article is accepted, authors will be notified and asked to provide photocopies of all source materials cited, arranged in order, numbered to coincide with endnotes, and highlighted to reflect the quotations or paraphrases. Photocopies of source material must include title page and source page with the quotations used highlighted.

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ISSN 1536-4720

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