



Come, Follow Me
WITH FAIR 2026
Old Testament
Reading Chart and Study Guide





CFM Reading Guide

A NOTE FROM FAIR

| FAITHFUL ANSWERS, INFORMED RESPONSE |

This guide is not meant to replace the Come, Follow Me curriculum by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This is merely a study tool and a helpful guide to aid in your study as you follow along the church's curriculum. If there are any questions feel free to reach out to us.

We tried to cover some frequently asked questions, include some criticisms that occur often, as well as the answers to them with some helpful resources from our website and of course, the Church's website. While we cannot address every question and criticism and cannot provide every resource, we hope what we have included in this guide will be helpful to you. Also keep in mind that this PDF only has the summarized answer, for the complete answer and resources visit the landing page through the QR code that is included below or visit our website. If you find this guide to be of use please consider donating to our non-profit so that we can continue to provide you with more helpful resources like this in the future.





CFM Reading Guide

THE FIRST TESTAMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

DEC 29 "The Answer Is Always Jesus Christ"

President Russell M. Nelson
April 2023 general conference

DEC 30 "The Miracle of the Holy Bible"

Elder M. Russell Ballard
April 2007 general conference

DEC 31 "Jesus Christ Is the Treasure"

Elder Dale G. Renlund
October 2023 general conference

JAN 1 "The Teachings of Jesus Christ"

President Dallin H. Oaks
April 2023 general conference

JAN 2 Origins of the Book of Abraham

Church and Gospel Questions

JAN 3 "The Everlasting Covenant"

President Russell M. Nelson
October 2022 Liahona

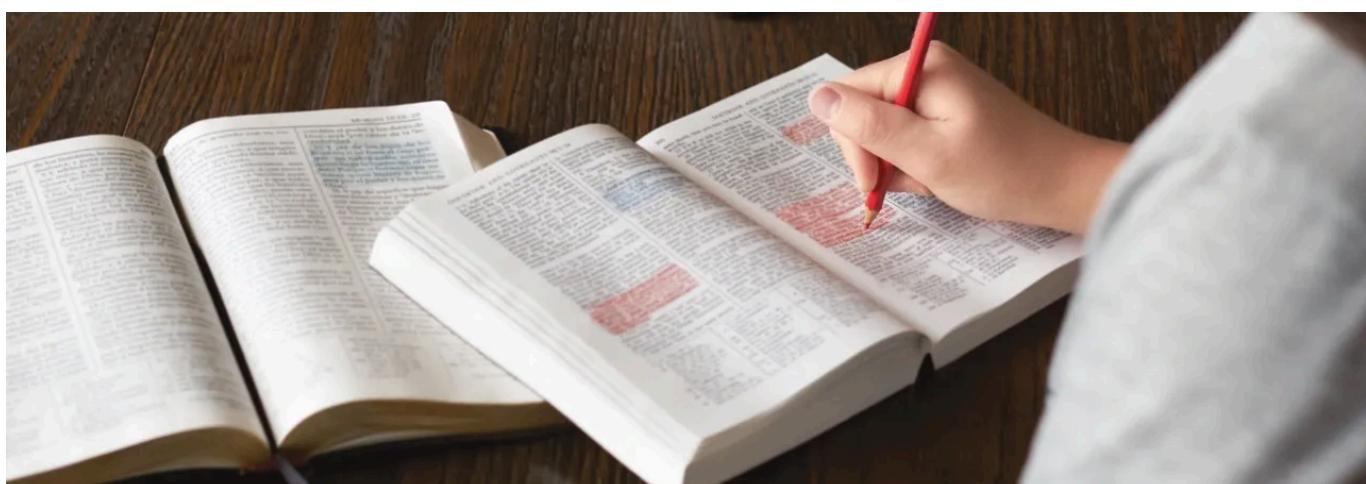
JAN 4 "Types or Symbols of Christ"

Jesus Christ
Guide to the Scriptures

Week 1 : Dec 29–Jan 4:

"We can confidently gain insights from multiple translations [of the Bible], in part because 'we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.' Latter-day scripture, including the teachings of living prophets, is a good standard for evaluating any doctrinal discrepancies that might come up in different Bible translations."

-Elder Dale G. Renlund





CFM Weekly Questions

THE FIRST TESTAMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

Week 1 : Dec 29-Jan 4:

Given the Church's use of the King James Version and its teaching that the Bible is true 'as far as it is translated correctly,' how do Latter-day Saints view the Old Testament's authority and the use of other Bible translations?"

We believe the Old Testament is scripture and the word of God, but we interpret that belief through the lens of the eighth Article of Faith, which states, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." This means the Church acknowledges that translations can affect how accurately the original Hebrew and other texts are conveyed to modern readers. Joseph Smith taught that the Bible's original messages are true, even though the available texts reflect centuries of copying and translation.

The Church officially uses the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible in English because of historical continuity with early Church leaders and because it has been the standard for doctrine and teaching in the Restoration. The Church's preferred editions of scripture are chosen to align with doctrine found in the Book of Mormon and modern revelation, and the KJV remains the official English Bible of the Church.

At the same time, Church guidance notes that members may benefit from other translations that are doctrinally clear and easier to understand, such as ESV, NRSV, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NIrV, and these can be useful for personal study or gaining deeper insight alongside the KJV.



CFM Reading Guide

“THIS IS MY WORK AND MY GLORY”

JAN 5

Moses 1:1–11

Moses sees God and learns of His glory.

JAN 6

Moses 1:12–23

Satan tempts Moses; Moses rebukes him.

JAN 7

Moses 1:24–42

God reveals His creations and purposes.

JAN 8

Abraham 3:1–10

Abraham learns about the stars and Kolob.

JAN 9

Abraham 3:11–18

Discussion of intelligences and spirits.

JAN 10

Abraham 3:19–22

God explains foreordination of noble spirits.

JAN 11

Abraham 3:23–28

Council in Heaven and choosing the Savior.

Week 2 : Jan 5–11

“God showed Moses the workmanship of His hands, granting him a glimpse of His work and glory. When the vision ended, Moses fell to the earth for the space of many hours. When his strength finally returned, he realized something that, in all his years in Pharaoh’s court, had never occurred to him before. “I know,” he said, “that man is nothing.”

-Dieter F. Uchtdorf

“You Matter to Him”

October 2011





CFM Weekly Questions

"THIS IS MY WORK AND MY GLORY"

Week 2 : Jan 5-11

Do members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe God lives on a planet called "Kolob"?

Kolob is described in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 3:3) as the star closest to the throne of God. It serves as a symbolic reference to illustrate a hierarchy in the universe, emphasizing the supremacy of God. The text uses Kolob to teach that just as there are many stars, one is "closest" to God, paralleling the idea that there are many intelligences, with God being the most intelligent.

Kolob is not a focal point in LDS doctrine or practice. Its mention in the Book of Abraham is brief and serves a symbolic purpose. The only other notable reference is in the 19th-century hymn "If You Could Hie to Kolob," which uses the term metaphorically to describe the eternal nature of life and glory.

The concept of Kolob is not intended to be a literal astronomical body. The Book of Abraham describes Kolob's revolution time as one "day" equaling 1,000 Earth years, which is not meant to correspond with physical science but to convey theological principles about God's eternal nature and the measurement of time in a divine context.

How do the teachings in Abraham 3 on pre-mortal "noble and great ones" influence the LDS view of foreordination and personal purpose?

Abraham 3:22–23 teaches that certain spirits were "noble and great" before this life and were chosen for specific roles in mortality. This aligns with the Latter-day Saint doctrine of foreordination, which holds that God, based on foreknowledge, appointed individuals to carry out particular missions on Earth—not as a form of predestination, but as part of a divine plan that still preserves moral agency.

Foreordination does not guarantee that individuals will receive certain callings or blessings but means they were given the opportunity based on their premortal faithfulness. They must still choose righteousness to fulfill those roles. Latter-day Saints reject predestination in the Calvinistic sense. Instead, LDS theology teaches that God's foreordination respects individual agency. People are not compelled by divine decree but are trusted by God with responsibilities they are capable of fulfilling through their choices.

The doctrine inspires a sense of divine purpose while reinforcing personal responsibility and the central role of agency in God's plan.

What is the historical origin of the Pearl of Great Price, and how did its contents come to be accepted as scripture in the LDS Church?

The first published edition of the Pearl of Great Price was released in 1851 in Liverpool, England, by Franklin D. Richards, then president of the British Mission and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. This publication was in response to requests from converts for further information about their new faith. It was later accepted as scripture by the Church in 1880 during a general conference in Salt Lake City.

In 1902, James E. Talmage, divided the work into chapters and verses, added some titles (such as "The Book of Moses"), and eliminated some portions, such as materials also published in the Doctrine and Covenants. These changes were formally approved by Church membership at the October conference of 1902.



CFM Reading Guide

“IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH”

JAN 12 Genesis 1:1-31

God creates the heavens, earth, and all life in six days.

JAN 13 Genesis 2:1-25

Creation of man and woman; Garden of Eden established.

JAN 14 Moses 2:1-25

Spiritual perspective on the six days of creation.

JAN 15 Moses 3:1-25

Adam placed in Eden; commandment given; Eve introduced.

JAN 16 Abraham 4:1-18

Council plans and begins creation (Days 1-5).

JAN 17 Abraham 4:19-31

Day 6 of creation; man and woman created.

JAN 18 Abraham 5:1-21

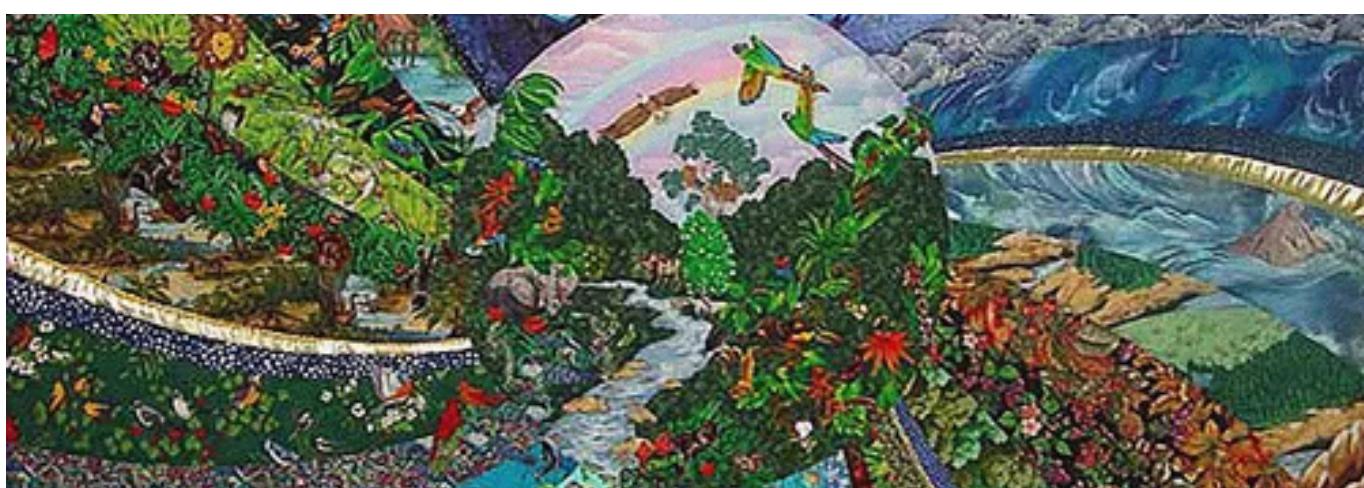
Garden of Eden prepared; man placed there.

Week 3 : Jan 12-18

“Knowing why we left the presence of our Heavenly Father and what it takes to return and be exalted with Him, it becomes very clear that nothing relative to our time on earth can be more important than physical birth and spiritual rebirth, the two prerequisites of eternal life.”

-Elder D. Todd Christofferson

“Why Marriage, Why Family”
April 2015





CFM Weekly Questions

**"IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED
THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH"**

Week 3 : Jan 12-18

How do the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham deepen or clarify our understanding of God's nature compared to the Genesis account?

The Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham, as revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, expand upon the Genesis account to provide a more detailed understanding of God's nature. In Moses 2:1, God declares, "I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God; by mine Only Begotten I created these things," emphasizing the role of Jesus Christ in the Creation. The Book of Abraham introduces the concept of a divine council, stating, "the Gods organized and formed the heavens and the earth" (Abraham 4:1), suggesting a plurality of divine beings involved in creation. These insights align with Latter-day Saint beliefs about the Godhead and the premortal existence, offering a richer perspective than the Genesis account alone.

Do the Creation accounts in Moses, Abraham, and Joseph Smith's Translation of Genesis, suggest that the 'days' of Creation were literal 24-hour periods or symbolic of longer phases of time?

The Creation accounts in Genesis, Moses, and Abraham suggest that the "days" of Creation are symbolic of longer periods rather than literal 24-hour days. In Genesis and Moses, the term "day" is used, while the Book of Abraham refers to these periods as "times," indicating a more flexible understanding of the timeframe. Elder Russell M. Nelson explained that day, time, or age represent phases between two identifiable events, serving as divisions of eternity rather than strict calendar days. This perspective aligns with the view that the Creation was a process involving ordered periods of time. The scriptures are not intended to provide scientific information about the Earth's age or the exact duration of the Creation periods. Therefore, Latter-day Saint teachings accommodate a non-literal interpretation of the Creation timeframe, focusing on the purpose and order of the Creation rather than specific durations.

If the Bible already contains the Creation story in Genesis, why do we need additional Creation accounts in the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham?

We believe in a principle of continuing revelation, where God restores plain and precious truths that were lost or obscured over time. The book of Moses expands what Genesis provides by restoring prophetic insight and context. For example, it includes Moses's dialogue with God about premortal life and divine purpose, which is not present in the Bible.

Similarly, the Book of Abraham enriches our understanding of the Creation by revealing a divine council and premortal spirit children. It clarifies doctrines such as the plurality of gods and the premortal existence which are concepts only hinted at in Genesis.

Having multiple scriptural Creation accounts is similar to New Testament harmony studies. Different prophets provide varied but complementary perspectives, not contradictions. Just as Matthew, Mark, and Luke offer distinct views of Christ's ministry, Genesis, Moses, and Abraham together reveal a richer, fuller picture of divine truth.

These restored accounts are not rewrites. They are revelatory complements that deepen doctrine and reaffirm that God continues to speak through prophets.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE”

JAN 19 Genesis 3:1-24

The Fall: Adam and Eve eat the fruit and are cast out.

JAN 20 Genesis 4:1-26

Cain and Abel; Cain kills Abel; Seth is born.

JAN 21 Moses 4:1-13

Satan's rebellion and temptation in Eden.

JAN 22 Moses 4:14-31

The Fall and its consequences, expanded view.

JAN 23 Moses 5:1-16

Adam and Eve's life after the Fall; gospel taught.

JAN 24 Moses 5:17-36

Cain and Abel; Cain's rebellion and curse.

JAN 25 Moses 5:37-59

Secret combinations and preaching of the gospel.

Week 4 : Jan 19-25

“They could not fulfill the Father's first commandment without transgressing the barrier between the bliss of the Garden of Eden and the terrible trials and wonderful opportunities of mortal life.”

-Elder Dallin H. Oaks
“The Great Plan of Happiness”
October 1993





CFM Weekly Questions

“THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE”

Week 4 : Jan 19-25

Why does the Book of Moses teach that Satan sought to ‘redeem all mankind’ and was cast out for it, when this account isn’t found in Genesis? Doesn’t this contradict the Bible’s narrative of the Fall?

The Book of Moses provides important insights about Satan’s premortal rebellion that go beyond the Genesis account. Satan proposes a plan to “redeem all mankind, that one soul should not be lost,” but his plan was to force obedience and destroy agency. God rejected this plan because it denied the fundamental principle of agency. Instead, God presented His own plan of salvation, which Jesus Christ willingly volunteered to fulfill by offering Himself as the Savior and Redeemer.

This premortal council highlights two opposing plans: God’s plan centered on agency, growth, and mercy through Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and Satan’s plan which sought control and universal salvation without choice. This teaching clarifies why Satan was cast out of heaven and became the adversary in mortality. These additional details enrich and complement the Genesis narrative rather than contradict it. They deepen our understanding of the eternal conflict between good and evil.

If Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply and also not to eat the fruit, why would God give two seemingly conflicting commandments?

At first glance, God’s command to Adam and Eve to both “multiply and replenish the earth” and to avoid eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge may seem contradictory. However, these commandments serve different purposes in God’s plan. The command not to eat the fruit was a test of agency, inviting Adam and Eve to choose obedience and exercise faith. It was not a trick or a setup to fail but an essential part of mortal growth and progression.

The Fall allowed humanity to enter mortality, experience opposition, and develop attributes like faith, knowledge, and empathy. The Gospel Topics essay on the Fall explains that through this experience, humankind gains the opportunity to learn, repent, and progress. Far from setting them up to fail, God’s commandments emphasize choice and agency as essential to His plan. Obedience in mortality is framed as an act of faith leading to growth and eventual return to God.

Moses 5 teaches that Adam offered sacrifices before understanding their meaning. Why would God require obedience without explanation?

The account of Adam obeying The Lord’s commands despite not knowing the reason shows an important principle about obedience in the gospel. God often gives commandments before full understanding comes because obedience is an act of faith that opens our hearts to greater knowledge. Obedience without immediate explanation is not blind faith; rather, it is trust in a loving Heavenly Father who sees what we cannot. Faith and obedience are meant to work together because when we trust God enough to act, He reveals more light and truth.

In Adam’s case, his sacrifice pointed to Christ’s atoning sacrifice, which he could only fully understand once he showed willingness to obey. Obedience builds spiritual capacity to receive revelation. God’s pattern of requiring obedience first invites us to grow closer to Him, trust His wisdom, and receive personal witness of His plan.



CFM Reading Guide

**“TEACH THESE THINGS FREELY
UNTO YOUR CHILDREN”**

JAN 26 Genesis 5:1-32

Genealogy from Adam to Noah.

JAN 27 Moses 6:1-13

Genealogy of Adam's righteous line.

JAN 28 Moses 6:14-25

Enoch is born; wickedness increases.

JAN 29 Moses 6:26-36

Enoch is called as a prophet.

JAN 30 Moses 6:37-47

Enoch preaches repentance to the people.

JAN 31 Moses 6:48-59

Adam learns the plan of salvation.

FEB 1 Moses 6:60-68

Doctrine of salvation; Adam is baptized.

Week 5 : Jan 26-Feb 1

“Adam and Eve taught the gospel to their children.

Today, men and women still have that worthy work to do. But before you can teach, you must first learn of your premortal existence, the Creation, the Fall, the atonement of Christ, and the reason for mortality. Study the scriptures and internalize them.”

-Elder Russell M. Nelson
“Lessons from Eve”
October 1987





CFM Weekly Questions

**“TEACH THESE THINGS FREELY
UNTO YOUR CHILDREN”**

Week 5 : Jan 26–Feb 1

Why do we not believe in the concept of original sin like mainstream Christianity? Doesn't the Fall's consequences imply inherited guilt?

Mainstream Christianity teaches that everyone is born with inherited sin from Adam, more specifically, born into a condition similar to that of anyone who knowingly commits a personal sin. However, this doctrine stems from a mistranslation of Romans 5:12. The Greek text (Ἐφ' ὧ πάντες ἤμαρτον) translates as "because all have sinned," referring to humanity's general fallen nature. The Latin translation (in quō omnes peccaverunt) suggested "in whom all have sinned," implying we all sinned with Adam—a misreading that shaped future developments in Christian doctrine towards the idea of Original Sin. We maintain a high view of human potential and free will while acknowledging our fallen nature and need for Christ. We would agree with Paul in the Greek text of Romans 5: Adam's fall created a fallen, mortal state that included sin and ended in death, but Christ's atonement reconciles us to the Father, overcoming death and enabling sanctification through grace. Latter-day Saints hold that each person is accountable only for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

Did Adam and his descendants literally live for hundreds of years? Doesn't this contradict what we know about human biology and ancient lifespans?

The Biblical Texts, particularly the Old Testament, can be quite complicated when attempting to discern whether something is “literal” (as in, literal history) or scientific in the modern sense. While we might not know for sure if the ages provided in Genesis 5 are accurate, we can glean the message of the chapter by considering what long ages for those who lived in the primeval history would have meant to an ancient audience. For example, it could be that attributing long lifespans to the primeval patriarchs would have communicated to ancient people primarily their great wisdom, righteousness, and authority. Perhaps the numbers of their ages carried symbolism as well. The genealogy as a whole might have indicated to the Israelite audience that they were eventually connected to God at the end of a long chain of great ancestors. If we read the scriptures the way Ancient Israelites would have heard them, rather than with a need to harmonize scripture through modern lenses, we have a much richer capacity to understand the message it conveyed about God and His interactions with his covenant people.

If we are all sons and daughters of God, then what does it mean for God to wish all people to “become” his sons (Moses 6:68)?

The scriptures and modern-day prophets expound the significance of “sons and daughters of god” in two primary ways:

1. We are children of Heavenly Father: God is the father of our spirits. The Family Proclamation emphasizes that we were His children, and that “we knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan.”
2. We can become heirs of God: More often taught explicitly in the scriptures is the potential of us all in mortality to become children of God, “and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ”. This is deeply related to the title of “firstborn” both held by Jesus and offered to those who follow in his footsteps, along with “heir” also indicating the right to inheritance from the Father. By means of sanctification through the Atonement of Christ, we’re enabled in mortality to become worthy of those promises extended to us by God. In this sense, we become “the children of Christ” through the covenant and His Atonement.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE LORD CALLED HIS PEOPLE ZION”

Week 6 : Feb 2-8

FEB 2 Moses 7:1-10

Enoch leads the people in righteousness; enemies fear him.

FEB 3 Moses 7:11-19

Enoch builds Zion; people are of one heart and mind.

FEB 4 Moses 7:20-28

The heavens weep over the wickedness on Earth.

FEB 5 Moses 7:29-39

Enoch sees God's grief and hears the plan of salvation.

FEB 6 Moses 7:40-47

Enoch weeps with God; sees the coming of the Son of Man.

FEB 7 Moses 7:48-59

Earth pleads for relief; Enoch sees the resurrection.

FEB 8 Moses 7:60-69

Enoch sees the last days and Zion's return.

“Come, but come to remain. Come with conviction and endurance. Come permanently, for your sake and the sake of all the generations who must follow you, and we will help each other be strong to the very end...Christ is everything to us, and we are to “abide” in Him permanently, unyieldingly, steadfastly, forever.”

-Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
“Abide in Me”
April 2004





CFM Weekly Questions

"THE LORD CALLED HIS PEOPLE ZION" Week 6 : Feb 2-8

In Moses 7 Enoch gathers people into the city of Zion, but the people there are also called Zion. Is Zion a place that we need to go today, or is it a people?

Much like with the later term Israel, the concept of Zion in Moses 7 is equally applicable to a group of people or a society, and to a physical place. Joseph Smith equated the two definitions often, and was once recorded as having said: "Anyplace where the Saints gather is Zion, which every righteous man will build up for a place of safety for his children." (Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, Jul 19, 1840)

Today, church leaders strongly emphasize the gathering of Israel through encouraging people to participate in the stakes and wards of Zion around the world. This can be done through missionary work, family history, temple work, service, exemplifying church callings, and becoming "of one heart and one mind, and dwel[ling] in righteousness" (v. 18)

Why are the Canaanites described as "black" in verses 8 and 22?

The terminology for "blackness" used in Moses 7 seems reminiscent of the usage of skin as a metaphor in the Book of Mormon and the Bible for countenance and purity. In ancient societies, people weren't divided by skin color nearly as much as they were divided based on ethnicity/ancestry. Human skin isn't strictly "white" or "black", but rather varying shades of pigments. Skin color might be an identifier for different ethnicities in the Ancient Near East, but so is accent, culture, architecture/pottery style, religion, and other day-to-day practices.

Job describes his skin turning or being black in the context of his descriptions of mourning and becoming uncivilized due to his afflictions and pains (Job 30: 27-31). The same metaphor is also used in Lamentations 5:10, where the blackness is caused by heat and famine. This seems to be a similar scenario as in Moses 7:8, where the Canaanites suffer dispersion and famine as a result of their conquest against the people of Shum. Because of these events, the Canaanites became despised, not because they literally had their skin turned black. Rather, there was a cultural separation in light of previous events and the famine, which separated the people based on ethnicity, not skin color.

This is more clearly stated in Moses 7:22 which states that the rest of the people who weren't joined to the people of Zion were "black" and "had no place among them." This could very easily mean that they willingly distanced themselves from the people of Zion, and they remained "black" metaphorically because of their afflictions, moral alignment with Satan (see Moses 1:15), and therefore their separation from God. No one is barred membership from the Church based on race. Moses 7 shows that it is the free-will actions of individuals to reject God that always results in separation from His covenant people.



CFM Weekly Questions

"THE LORD CALLED HIS PEOPLE ZION" Week 6 : Feb 2-8

**Does the fact of God weeping imply that He isn't fully in control of the world?
Is it precarious for God to be susceptible to such strong emotions?**

Some critics of the LDS church will claim that God having a body or/therefore having emotions makes God less powerful and less able to act in the world. The ideal of aseity holds a stronger position in mainstream Christianity than a God who can feel truly human emotions. Latter-Day Saints teach first and foremost that God the Father is "perfect, has all power, and knows all things" even despite having a resurrected body of flesh and bones. The scriptures are replete with depictions of God as having a body (see Genesis 1:27, Exodus 33:11, Isaiah 6:1, and Ezekiel 1:26-28), and are permeated by repeated emphasis of God's sovereignty (see Genesis 18:14, Alma 26:35, and D&C 19:1-3).

Latter-day Saints see great value in the idea that God has such strong feelings. In the way that love is expressed in the scriptures, we can be assured that He loves us perfectly, which motivates us to emulate that perfect love. Similarly, it's taught in Moses that God is truly sad when people fall into sin (Moses 7:36-40). Rather than limiting God, the idea that God feels such strong human emotions teaches us that he wishes people to repent, to return to a relationship with Him, and ultimately to find true happiness.



CFM Reading Guide

“NOAH FOUND GRACE IN THE EYES OF THE LORD”

FEB 9 Genesis 6:1-22

God calls Noah and commands him to build the ark.

FEB 10 Genesis 7:1-24

Noah enters the ark; the Flood begins.

FEB 11 Genesis 8:1-22

The waters recede; Noah offers sacrifice.

FEB 12 Genesis 9:1-29

God makes a covenant with Noah; the rainbow is given.

FEB 13 Genesis 10:1-32

The nations descend from Noah's sons.

FEB 14 Genesis 11:1-32

The Tower of Babel and dispersion of languages.

FEB 15 Moses 8:1-30

Noah preaches repentance; people reject him.

Week 7 : Feb 9-15

“We need to calmly continue to move ahead and to prepare for what will surely come. We need not panic or fear, for if we are prepared, spiritually and temporally, we and our families will survive any flood. Our arks will float on a sea of faith if our works have been steadily and surely preparing for the future.”

-By Elder W. Don Ladd

“Make Thee an Ark”

October 1994





CFM Weekly Questions

“NOAH FOUND GRACE IN THE EYES OF THE LORD”

Week 7 : Feb 9-15

Why is Canaan cursed because of Ham’s actions? Why has this passage been used as a proof-text for slavery and segregation?

Genesis 9:20-25 is a notoriously difficult passage for commentators of the Bible. There have been several proposals for what Ham did to Noah, but it is incredibly unclear what act the author of Genesis 9 had in mind. Even more unclear is why Canaan was cursed by Noah instead of Ham, which the text is silent on. It’s possible that Canaan was a participant in Ham’s act and that the text assumes ancient listeners would be able to make the connection, as well as make sense of Ham’s ambiguous act.

In the absence of access to archaeological research of the Ancient Near East, most people up until the mid-1800’s were limited to the Bible for understanding ancient history and genealogy. Early members of the church could only work with that information, and they often connected that with their prior Christian assumptions about what the curse of Cain was and how it was passed through Ham and Canaan. In the years to come, that curse was asserted to have been a restriction of priesthood and temple to black Africans. Today, we recognize the faulty assumptions that informed the reasons behind the priesthood and temple restrictions. As with the theory of Cain’s or Canaan’s cursed lineage, the Church states that “Over time, Church leaders and members advanced many theories to explain the priesthood and temple restrictions. None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church.”

Both Genesis 11 and Abraham 1 place Abraham in Ur, but isn’t it located in Mesopotamia? How could his culture have Egyptian connections, as implied in the Book of Abraham, if Abraham lived so far east from Egypt?

The precise location of Abraham’s “Ur of the Chaldeans” (Gen 11:28) is still debated amongst scholars. Some scholars believe that the southern Mesopotamian location for Ur makes the most sense because it provides a literary context for the story in light of the babylonian exile. This, of course, assumes a much later dating of the Pentateuch so that themes of exile are readily available to the authors or compilers.

Other scholars (such as Cyrus Gordon and Gary Rendsburg) disagree. Those who disagree might claim that there is a more plausible location for Ur in a northern Syrian-Turkish area just northeast of Haran, and that the Abraham story doesn’t represent anything thematically close to an exile. The new proposed location makes sense of both the Canaanite/Ugaritic literary affinities of Genesis as well as the syncretic Egyptian elements of the Book of Abraham, and it provides a much more plausible route for Abraham’s family traveling from “Ur” through Canaan and into Egypt.

Since there is currently no evidence for Egyptian influence upon the alternative location for Ur in southern Mesopotamia, for Latter-day Saints, the northern Syrian-Turkey location for Abraham’s “Ur of the Chaldees” is the more favorable location.



CFM Weekly Questions

“NOAH FOUND GRACE IN THE EYES OF THE LORD”

Week 7 : Feb 9-15

Do Latter-day Saints believe that the Flood was a global, historical event?

Latter-day Saints are free to hold a wide variety of perspectives about the Flood, and many different perspectives have been voiced over the years. Many have viewed it as either global or local, and in the wake of scientific advancements, viewing the Flood as “cosmological” rather than factually historical is also an option. Latter-day Saints aren’t required to hold a particular perspective, but understanding the Genesis flood in its cultural context is worth considering for ascertaining the story’s message.

What should give people pause when reading the Genesis flood story (and all of the Bible for that matter), is the fact that the Israelite view of the world (cosmology) was radically different from ours. Their model consisted of a flat earth suspended above the underworld (or sheol) and the waters of the deep by the pillars of the earth, and covered by a solid dome (the firmament) to keep out the waters of the heavens. In the flood story, the physical “windows of heaven” open up and “the fountains of the deep” swelled up, flooding the earth. The imagery is vivid for the ancient Israelite audience. The flood occurs as a function of how the Israelites viewed the world. Because of the cosmology that the Flood story presupposes, understanding the flood through a modern scientific lens will always run into difficulties.

What matters most of all is understanding what the Flood story was meant to teach hearers. In other ancient Near-Eastern flood stories, the flood was often caused by the gods being annoyed by humanity. For example, in the Akkadian myth “Atrahasis”, the people on earth get too numerous and too noisy, so the gods decide to wipe them out through various calamities, and eventually a flood. Compare that with the Genesis story, where God is motivated to flood the earth because of wickedness and violence on the earth (Gen 6-11-13). When an Israelite would hear this kind of a flood story, the ultimate message of the Genesis flood story (compared against other flood stories) would be that God cares deeply about the righteousness of humanity and what people do in mortality.



CFM Reading Guide

“TO BE A GREATER FOLLOWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

FEB 16 Genesis 12:1-20

God calls Abram to a promised land.

FEB 17 Genesis 13-14

Abram and Lot separate; Abram rescues Lot.

FEB 18 Genesis 15:1-21

God covenants with Abram and promises posterity.

FEB 19 Genesis 16:1-16

Sarai gives Hagar to Abram; Ishmael is born.

FEB 20 Genesis 17:1-27

God renames Abram and Sarai; institutes circumcision.

FEB 21 Abraham 1:1-31

Abraham's early life and deliverance from idolatry.

FEB 22 Abraham 2:1-25

Abraham journeys and receives priesthood promises.

Week 8 : Feb 16-22

“A covenant is not only about a contract, although that is important. It’s about a relationship... We must remember: it’s not the course alone that will exalt us; it’s the companion—our Savior. And this is the why of covenant relationship.”

-By Sister Emily Belle Freeman

“Walking in Covenant Relationship with Christ”
October 2023





CFM Weekly Questions

“TO BE A GREATER FOLLOWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

Week 8 : Feb 16-22

Why does the Book of Abraham heading state that it was written by Abraham's "own hand upon papyrus" if the papyri in Joseph Smith's possession date to hundreds of years later than when Abraham lived?

It is absolutely true that the Kirtland manuscript as well as modern copies of the Book of Abraham include the heading, “written by his own hand upon papyrus,” and the papyri date from around 300 BC. It’s probably true that some early church members believed the papyri to be as old as Abraham himself, but that might have been an assumption that was well-intentioned, yet inaccurate. For example, most early church members also assumed a hemispheric model for the Book of Mormon, but it’s more likely that the Book of Mormon took place over a smaller geographical area. That doesn’t diminish the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, but it demonstrates that assumptions made about a text have nothing to do with the text’s authenticity.

The phrase “written upon his own hand” could be an Egyptian idiom to denote simply authorship or a way to say “in the authority of” Abraham. So in the Book of Abraham heading, the phrase simply refers to the fact that Abraham was the one who ultimately wrote the book, and what Joseph Smith received was a copy of a more ancient document, or a document that represented the thoughts and traditions of Abraham which was then translated by inspiration similar to the Book of Mormon.

Abraham 1:27 indicates that Pharaoh and his lineage was “cursed. . . as pertaining to the Priesthood.” Is this a basis for the priesthood and temple ban on black Africans?

There are a couple of serious difficulties with this reading of Abr 1:27 that make a reading of the text compatible with the priesthood and temple ban strained. Firstly, the scripture doesn’t explicitly indicate why Pharaoh and his lineage was cursed. It could be implied from verse 26 that it was because of his imitation of the real priesthood held by the patriarchs, but regardless, that reading doesn’t match the particular circumstances of the later priesthood and temple ban. Additionally, the ancient Egyptians aren’t the ancestors of modern-day black Africans; they’re associated with northern Africa and the middle east, a different ethnicity altogether.

While theories can be put together about the origins or reasons of the priesthood ban, scripture and folklore tradition about scripture cannot easily explain why the ban was put into place. Theories also require that the priesthood ban is presupposed and imposed upon prior scriptures. The priesthood ban wasn’t a current policy around the time that books like Abraham, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Book of Mormon were received, so no one passage of scripture can teach the idea or serve as its basis. The scriptures need to be understood in their own context, and in this case, the authorial intent behind the descriptions of Pharaoh’s cursed lineage pertaining to the priesthood is strikingly brief and unclear. What we do know from the preponderance of scriptural witness is that “all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden” from salvation (see 2 Nephi 26:27-28).



CFM Weekly Questions

“TO BE A GREATER FOLLOWER OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS”

Week 8 : Feb 16-22

The covenants made between Abraham and God had almost entirely to do with lineage. How is it possible that people can be a part of that covenant today?

The covenants made in Genesis 12 indeed have a lot to do with lineage (See Gen 13:14-17). Abraham and his future descendants were specifically promised to be made into a great nation, be blessed and prospered, and be a means for the blessing of “all families of the earth” (Gen 12:3). The covenant is later expanded in Genesis 17 under the name “the everlasting covenant” to include blessings for all of Abraham’s offspring, ensuring the transfer of rights to the land from generation to generation.

In modern revelation through the Book of Abraham, we learn that the blessings to and from Abraham would also be with regard to the priesthood and the gospel. “For as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father” (see Abr 2:10-11). Just like there’s a sense in which we are adopted as sons and daughters of God when we enter and keep the covenants associated with the gospel, we are counted among Abraham’s seed whether or not we’re literally descended from him when we belong to the covenant path (see Romans 4:16-25). Russel M. Nelson stated:

“When you and I also enter that path, we have a new way of life. We thereby create a relationship with God that allows Him to bless and change us. The covenant path leads us back to Him. If we let God prevail in our lives, that covenant will lead us closer and closer to Him. All covenants are intended to be binding. They create a relationship with everlasting ties.” (“The Everlasting Covenant,” October 2022)



CFM Reading Guide

“IS ANY THING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?”

FEB 23 Genesis 18:1-15

Abraham and Sarah receive a visit from the angels; prophecy of Isaac.

FEB 24 Genesis 18:16-33

Abraham intercedes for Sodom.

FEB 25 Genesis 19:1-29

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

FEB 26 Genesis 19:30-38

Lot's daughters commit incest with their father.

FEB 27 Genesis 20:1-18

Abraham's deception with Sarah in Gerar.

FEB 28 Genesis 21:1-21

The birth of Isaac and Hagar and Ishmael's departure.

MAR 1 Genesis 22:1-23:20

The sacrifice of Isaac; Sarah's death and burial.

Week 9 : Feb 23-Mar 1

“Dwelling on past lives, including past mistakes, is just not right! It is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. In some ways it is worse than Lot's wife because at least she destroyed only herself. In cases of marriage and family, wards and branches, apartments and neighborhoods, we can end up destroying so many others.”

-By Elder Jeffery R. Holland
“The Best Is Yet to Be”
January 2010





CFM Weekly Questions

“IS ANY THING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?”

Week 9 : Feb 23-Mar 1

In the Pearl of Great Price, Abraham is nearly sacrificed by his father as part of a false religious practice. Why would God later test Abraham with a command that mirrors that traumatic experience?

In the Pearl of Great Price, Abraham's near-sacrifice by the priest of Elkenah represents a false, idolatrous practice tied to Egyptian religious rites, not a divine command (see Abraham 1:12; Facsimile 1). This traumatic encounter shows Abraham's resolve to reject corrupt rituals and to seek the true God.

When God later commanded Abraham to offer Isaac in Genesis 22, the test was entirely different. It was not about condemning a wrongful human sacrifice, but rather about demonstrating Abraham's unwavering faith and willingness to obey divine direction, even when it mirrored past trauma. With this test, God provided the ultimate corrective: Isaac was spared, and a ram was substituted, underscoring divine mercy and illustrating that God never desires innocent death or cruelty, even in testing times.

Together, these accounts portray a God who allows trials calibrated to individual spiritual growth, not reckless repetition of pain. Abraham's earlier brush with evil fortified him, preparing him to pass a far more profound and redemptive test in faith and obedience.

In Genesis 18, Abraham pleads for compassion toward Sodom if righteous people are found there. How do Latter-day Saints reconcile God's justice with showing love and support for LGBT individuals today?

In Genesis 18, Abraham intercedes for Sodom, emphasizing God's willingness to honor and preserve righteousness wherever it is found. This passage underscores the principle that God values individuals and listens with compassion to those who seek Him (Genesis 18:23–32). For Latter-day Saints, this theme connects with how we approach sensitive issues today, including relationships with LGBT individuals.

The Church teaches that every person is a beloved child of God and should be treated with kindness, dignity, and respect regardless of their circumstances. While the law of chastity and the doctrine of marriage remain central in the restored gospel, members are counseled to “create a community where all are welcomed and valued”.

Supporting LGBT individuals does not require compromising faith. Instead, disciples can follow Christ's example by balancing truth with love and standing by revealed teachings while also extending compassion and inclusion. Just as Abraham sought mercy for the righteous, modern Saints are invited to seek ways to honor God's laws while offering friendship, understanding, and genuine support to LGBT individuals.



CFM Weekly Questions

“IS ANY THING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?”

Week 9 : Feb 23-Mar 1

In Genesis 18 God listens to Abraham and spares the righteous, but in other passages He commands destruction. Why does God show mercy in one case yet endorse violence in another?

In Genesis 18, God's willingness to spare Sodom if even a few righteous souls are found highlights His compassion and deference to righteousness. Abraham intercedes, and God listens, demonstrating that the prayers of the faithful can affect divine action. Such texts reflect ancient literary styles which sometimes employ hyperbolic language, and must be read within their specific cultural, archaeological, and moral contexts. These events occurred within a different covenant framework, and records of warfare in the Bible often serve symbolic or theological purposes rather than literal reportage.

Thus, the apparent contrast between mercy and judgment isn't inconsistency in God's character but varying circumstances. When individuals are truly righteous, God's mercy prevails, as we see with Sodom and Abraham's pleading. Judgment is warranted in other contexts, such as pervasive wickedness conveyed in conquest accounts. Through these differing narratives, the Church teaches that God is both just and merciful, responding differently based on the context and individuals involved.



CFM Reading Guide

“LET GOD PREVAIL”

M A R 2 Genesis 24:1-28

Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac.

M A R 3 Genesis 24:29-67

The servant finds Rebekah; Isaac marries her.

M A R 4 Genesis 25:1-18

The descendants of Abraham through Keturah; the death of Abraham.

M A R 5 Genesis 25:19-34

The birth of Esau and Jacob; Jacob sells his birthright.

M A R 6 Genesis 26:1-35

Isaac's struggles and blessings; he makes a covenant with Abimelech.

M A R 7 Genesis 27:1-40

Jacob deceives Isaac to receive the blessing.

M A R 8 Genesis 28:1-33:20

Jacob's dream, marriage to Leah and Rachel, and his return to Canaan.

Week 10 : Mar 2-8

“One of the Hebraic meanings of the word Israel is “let God prevail.”

Thus the very name of Israel refers to a person who is willing to let God prevail in his or her life...

The Lord is gathering those who are willing to let God prevail in their lives. The Lord is gathering those who will choose to let God be the most important influence in their lives.”

-By President Russell M.

Nelson

“Let God Prevail”

October 2020





CFM Weekly Questions

“LET GOD PREVAIL”

Week 10 : Mar 2-8

How can Jacob's act of deceit in regards to Esau's blessing be reconciled with the church teachings on honesty and integrity, especially considering that Jacob is later blessed and becomes a patriarch in Israel?

In Genesis 27, Jacob's actions, disguising himself to receive his father's blessing, may seem deceitful at first. However, within the context of Latter-day Saint teachings, several factors provide clarity.

First, Jacob's receipt of the blessing aligned with God's will. Rebekah, his mother, had received a revelation indicating that Jacob was to receive the birthright over Esau (Genesis 25:23). This shows that the blessing was intended for Jacob, regardless of the method employed.

Second, while the act involved deception, Jacob's life afterward reflects a journey of personal growth and repentance. His experiences, including wrestling with the angel and becoming Israel, demonstrate his striving for righteousness and alignment with God's will.

The scriptures teach that "the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). While Jacob's actions were imperfect, his intentions aligned with God's plan. His story reminds us that God can accomplish His purposes through imperfect individuals and that seeking His guidance helps us act in accordance with His will, even in challenging circumstances.

Can modern temple practices of receiving a new name be justified as connected to the story of Jacob receiving a new name, and is there evidence that the practice actually originates from Jacob's experience ?

In Genesis 32, Jacob's encounter with a divine being, resulting in his name change to Israel, signifies a profound personal transformation and covenantal blessing. This event really shows the importance of divine encounters in shaping one's identity and purpose.

In Latter-day Saint theology, the act of receiving a new name in the temple is deeply symbolic. It represents a personal covenant with God, marking a commitment to follow Him and receive His blessings. This practice aligns with the biblical precedent set by Jacob's experience, where a new name signified a new covenantal relationship and a transformed identity.

The concept of receiving a new name is not unique to Jacob. Throughout scripture, individuals who enter into significant covenants with God often receive new names as a sign of their commitment and transformation. This tradition continues in modern temple practices, reinforcing the continuity of God's covenantal dealings with His people.

The practice of receiving a new name in the temple is deeply rooted in scriptural precedent and reflects a personal commitment to God's covenant. It serves as a reminder of the transformative power of divine encounters and the blessings that come from faithfully following God's will.



CFM Weekly Questions

“LET GOD PREVAIL”

Week 10 : Mar 2-8

If marriage in Genesis 24 depended on divine signs, why do we not practice arranged marriages now?

While Genesis 24 illustrates Abraham's servant seeking divine guidance in selecting a spouse for Isaac, it's essential to understand that the principles of eternal marriage, as taught in our faith, encompass both divine guidance and personal agency.

In our doctrine, marriage is viewed as a sacred covenant ordained by God, not merely a contractual agreement. The Lord has established the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, which is central to His plan for our happiness and eternal progression. This covenant is not just a temporal arrangement but a divine ordinance that extends beyond this life. As President Spencer W. Kimball emphasized, "Marriage is by nature a covenant, not just a private contract one may cancel at will".

Regarding the selection of a spouse, while Abraham's servant sought divine guidance, the process also involved personal choice and agency. Similarly, in our faith, individuals are encouraged to seek the Lord's guidance through prayer and the Holy Spirit when choosing an eternal companion. However, this divine guidance works in harmony with our agency, allowing us to make choices that align with God's will.

The concept of eternal marriage emphasizes the importance of making covenants with God. As we enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, we are not only committing to our spouse but also to God, thereby inviting His presence into our relationship. This sacred union becomes a partnership with God, and it is imperative that we seek His counsel regarding whom to marry.

While the process of selecting a spouse in ancient times may have differed in some respects, the underlying principles of seeking divine guidance and exercising personal agency remain consistent. We believe that by combining personal agency with divine guidance, we can enter into an eternal marriage that aligns with God's plan for our happiness and eternal progression.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH”

M A R 9 Genesis 37:1-11

Joseph's dreams and his brothers' jealousy.

M A R 10 Genesis 37:12-36

Joseph is sold into slavery.

M A R 11 Genesis 38:1-30

The story of Judah and Tamar.

M A R 12 Genesis 39:1-23

Joseph's service in Potiphar's house and his temptation.

M A R 13 Genesis 40:1-23

Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's servants.

M A R 14 Genesis 41:1-14

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream.

M A R 15 Genesis 41:15-57

Joseph's rise to power and his preparation for famine.

Week 11 : Mar 9-15

“You will notice in each situation in which Joseph found himself that the Lord was with him. It was easy to recognize the special spirit in him because of the way he lived and heeded the voice of the Lord to direct him. That same recognition will surely be with each of us as we are led and directed by His Holy Spirit.”

-By Elder L. Tom Perry

“Becoming Men in Whom the Spirit of God Is”

April 2002





CFM Weekly Questions

“THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH”

Week 11 : Mar 9-15

If Joseph was righteous and ‘the Lord was with him,’ why did he still face slavery, false accusations, and prison? Doesn’t that challenge the idea that faithfulness brings blessings and protection?

Joseph’s life shows that righteousness does not shield us from trials, but it does invite God’s sustaining presence. Genesis repeatedly affirms, “the Lord was with Joseph” (Genesis 39:2-3, 21, 23), even during slavery and imprisonment. Joseph’s suffering was not meaningless; it prepared him to save his family and others from famine, becoming a “life-saving sufferer” who foreshadows Christ’s role of redeeming through unjust suffering.

This teaches that God’s blessings are not always immediate comfort or temporal safety, but growth, preparation, and influence beyond what we can see. As the Come, Follow Me manual notes, Joseph’s trials remind us that “adversity can be a means of preparing us for greater blessings”.

The story also resonates with Latter-day Saint history. Joseph Smith, like Joseph of Egypt, was faithful yet imprisoned and falsely accused. He declared that “deep water is what I am wont to swim in,” showing that trials refine God’s servants for their mission. Both Josephs exemplify that God does not abandon His covenant people; rather, He transforms their adversity into instruments of deliverance. Thus, faithfulness brings the greatest blessing of all: God’s abiding presence and eventual deliverance.

Joseph’s dreams predicted his rise and gave him influence over others. Does this suggest that God’s plan is predetermined, and that revelation is only useful when it benefits others? If so, what does that mean for ordinary individuals seeking guidance today?”

Joseph’s life shows that God’s plan can include both foreknowledge and individual agency. While his dreams predicted future events and gave him influence (Genesis 37:5-11), they did not force his brothers’ choices. God’s foreknowledge does not negate human agency; Joseph’s brothers acted according to their own decisions, and Joseph exercised faith and righteousness throughout his trials.

Revelation in Joseph’s life was indeed used to bless others, as he was guided to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams and organize Egypt’s resources to preserve many lives (Genesis 41:14-57). This shows that revelation is often meant for the good of others, but it also demonstrates principles that ordinary individuals can apply. The Come, Follow Me manual notes that God “communicates guidance according to His purposes, often in ways that prepare individuals to help and bless others”.

Thus, ordinary people can seek and receive revelation in their own lives. God’s guidance is available to everyone, even if the timing, form, and impact differ from the extraordinary experiences of prophets like Joseph. Faith, prayer, and obedience allow individuals to receive direction suited to their circumstances.



CFM Weekly Questions

“THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH”

Week 11 : Mar 9-15

If Joseph's coat had such spiritual significance, why did God allow it to be stolen and misused? What does this tell us about how God uses symbols in the Bible to teach or guide people?

Joseph's coat of many colors was more than a symbol of Jacob's love; it represented Joseph's divine calling and birthright. Genesis 37:3 notes that Jacob loved Joseph "more than all his children," which stirred his brothers' jealousy. Some scholars suggest the coat signified Joseph's receipt of the birthright, a position traditionally held by the firstborn son. However, due to Reuben's actions, the birthright was transferred to Joseph, the firstborn of Rachel, Jacob's second wife. This transfer is reflected in the special garment Joseph received.

The coat's significance extends beyond family dynamics. In Latter-day Saint tradition, the "coat of Joseph" is believed to have been passed down through generations, from Adam to Noah, and eventually to Joseph of Egypt, symbolizing God's favor and protection. This illustrates how God often uses tangible symbols in the Bible to teach spiritual truths and reveal His plans.

Thus, the coat teaches that even ordinary objects can carry deep spiritual meaning, pointing to God's hand in guiding His children, preparing them for divine purposes, and revealing lessons for future generations.



CFM Reading Guide

“GOD MEANT IT UNTO GOOD”

M A R 1 6 Genesis 42:1-17

Joseph's brothers go to Egypt for grain.

M A R 1 7 Genesis 42:18-38

Joseph tests his brothers and keeps Simeon.

M A R 1 8 Genesis 43:1-15

Joseph's brothers return with Benjamin.

M A R 1 9 Genesis 43:16-34

Joseph's brothers are hosted by him.

M A R 2 0 Genesis 44:1-17

Joseph's final test: the cup in Benjamin's sack.

M A R 2 1 Genesis 44:18-45:15

Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

M A R 2 2 Genesis 45:16-50:26

Jacob's family moves to Egypt; Jacob's death and blessings to his sons.

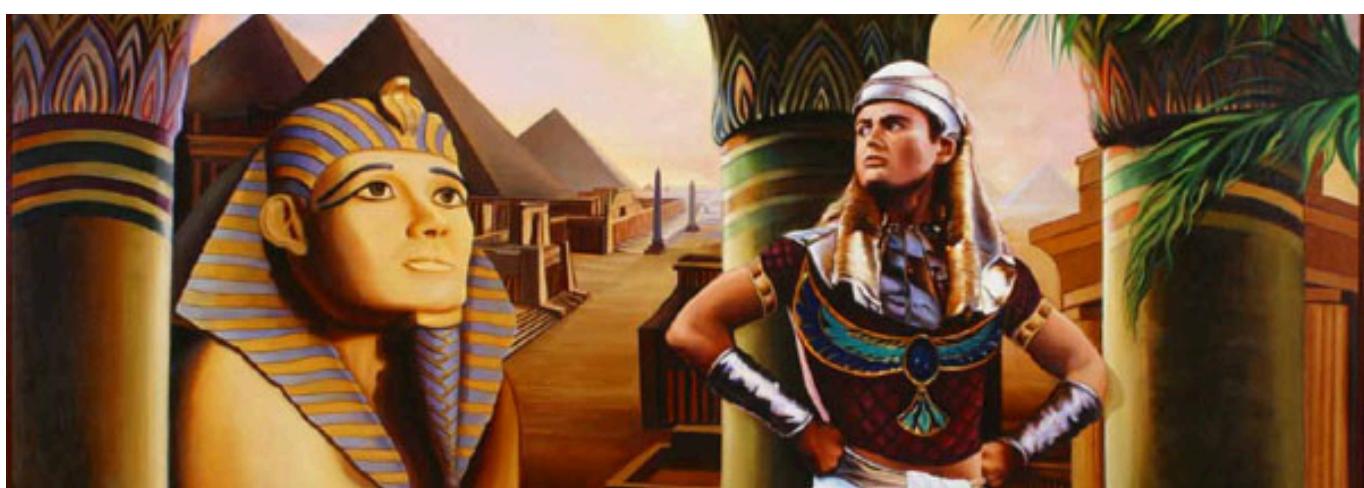
Week 12 : Mar 16-22

“The Lord...forgives whom He will; we are to forgive all. As we come to our Savior, we focus less on ourselves. We judge less and forgive more. Trusting His merits, mercy, and grace can free us from contention, anger, abuse, abandonment, unfairness, and the physical and mental challenges that sometimes come with a physical body in a mortal world.”

-By Elder Gerrit W. Gong

“Happy and Forever”

October 2022





CFM Weekly Questions

“GOD MEANT IT UNTO GOOD”

Week 12 : Mar 16–22

Why did God allow Joseph to withhold his identity and test his brothers instead of revealing Himself sooner? Does God use delayed recognition to teach lessons, and how do we reconcile that with divine love?”

Joseph’s decision to conceal his identity and test his brothers can seem puzzling, but the scriptures show that God was working through Joseph to bring about repentance and reconciliation. Genesis 42–45 records that Joseph’s brothers, who once betrayed him, were given the chance to demonstrate change by protecting Benjamin. Joseph’s actions allowed his brothers to face their past sins and show that their hearts had softened, which was essential for true forgiveness and unity.

Joseph recognized God’s hand in his trials: “God did send me before you to preserve life”. His withholding of identity was not cruelty but part of a divine process that turned tragedy into preparation. This teaches us that sometimes God allows delays, tests, or even confusing circumstances to refine His people and prepare them for blessings. Far from contradicting divine love, Joseph’s story shows that God’s purposes are often larger than immediate relief. In the end, Joseph’s patience and inspired testing led to reconciliation, healing, and the preservation of Israel.

If Joseph’s brothers sinned by selling him, why did God use it for good? Does that mean sin is sometimes part of God’s plan?

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we believe that God never requires us to sin, but He is able to work through and even redeem the consequences of people’s wrong choices. In Joseph’s story, his brothers acted out of jealousy and hatred, and their decision to sell him was still a sin. Yet God, in His foreknowledge and mercy, turned that terrible act into an opportunity for Joseph to save countless lives during the famine. This shows God’s ability to bring good out of human mistakes without excusing the sin itself. Agency is central as God allows people to choose, even if those choices cause pain. What we see in Joseph’s life is that no sin or hardship is beyond God’s power to transform into something meaningful. Rather than meaning sin is part of His plan, it teaches that His plan is bigger than sin, and that through His wisdom and Christ’s atonement, even broken things can be made whole.

What was the significance of the birthright if Joseph had the birthright? Why did Jesus come through Judah’s family line instead of Joseph’s?

Joseph received the birthright blessing because of his faithfulness and his role in preserving Israel during the famine. The birthright meant Joseph’s posterity would receive special temporal and spiritual blessings, including a “double portion” and a responsibility to gather Israel in the last days. This is fulfilled in part through the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who carry the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel and gathering God’s children. On the other hand, the Messiah came through Judah. This was in fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy that “the sceptre shall not depart from Judah”, symbolizing kingship and the covenant line leading to Christ. Thus, Joseph’s birthright prepared his descendants for the work of gathering Israel, while Judah’s lineage provided the royal and Messianic line through which salvation would come. Together, both lineages show that God’s plan distributes sacred responsibilities across His covenant people.



CFM Reading Guide

“I HAVE REMEMBERED MY COVENANT”

Week 13 : Mar 23–29

M A R 2 3 Exodus 1:1-14

The Israelites are oppressed in Egypt.

M A R 2 4 Exodus 1:15-22

Pharaoh orders the killing of Hebrew infants.

M A R 2 5 Exodus 2:1-10

The birth and early life of Moses.

M A R 2 6 Exodus 2:11-25

Moses flees Egypt after killing an Egyptian.

M A R 2 7 Exodus 3:1-12

God calls Moses from the burning bush.

M A R 2 8 Exodus 3:13-22

God reveals His name and promises to Moses.

M A R 2 9 Exodus 4:1-6:1

Moses' concerns and God's signs; Aaron joins Moses.

“My beloved brothers and sisters, Christianity is comforting, but it is often not comfortable. The path to holiness and happiness here and hereafter is a long and sometimes rocky one. It takes time and tenacity to walk it. But, of course, the reward for doing so is monumental.”

-By Elder Jeffery R. Holland

“Waiting on the Lord”
October 2020





CFM Weekly Questions

"I HAVE REMEMBERED MY COVENANT" Week 13 : Mar 23-29

If the Israelites were God's chosen people, why did He let them suffer as slaves in Egypt for so long before sending Moses to deliver them?

The scriptures teach that even though Israel was God's chosen people, He allowed them to suffer in Egypt for many years. This was first because of prophecy and also so their deliverance would display His power and teach enduring truths. In Genesis 15, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be "afflicted," serve in a foreign land, and later be delivered.

Israel's bondage prepared them to become a covenant people who knew God's promises, learned patience, and learned to trust in His timing. The Exodus did not happen immediately because certain conditions needed to be fulfilled. Slavery deepened, their cries for help increased, and their deliverance would more clearly show God's mercy and power.

Joseph's prophecy (as recorded in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis) foresaw that Moses would be raised to deliver Israel out of bondage. This helps us see that God had a long-term plan, and the suffering in Egypt was both foreknown and part of His covenant unfolding. It was not because He willed evil but because He used adversity to bring about greater good and build faith.

Why did the Lord tell Moses he would become 'God to Pharaoh' in the story of the plagues?

When the Lord told Moses that he would be "as God to Pharaoh" (Exodus 7:1), it did not mean Moses was taking God's place. Instead, it showed that Moses would act as God's authorized representative in carrying out His will. The Lord gave Moses power and authority so Pharaoh would recognize that Moses spoke with divine commission, not as an ordinary man.

In scripture, the word "god" can sometimes mean a ruler or one who exercises divine authority when acting under the Lord's direction. In this case, Moses stood in God's place before Pharaoh, with Aaron serving as his prophet or spokesman, just as prophets act in God's name on earth today.

This teaches us that God empowers His chosen servants with authority to represent Him. Just as Moses bore God's word and power before Pharaoh, modern prophets are called to represent the Lord, declare His will, and invite all to recognize His authority.

Did Moses really exist as a historical person, or is he just a legend or symbolic figure?

Many biblical scholars believe there likely was someone like Moses in history. They may doubt or debate some of the miracles attributed to him, but they don't dismiss the possibility that he lived. Evidence includes his Egyptian-style name "Moseh," which means "is born," and that there are signs in archaeology and historical study that support some form of exodus event.

The Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants also affirm Moses as a real person. Also, in 1836, Latter-day Saint belief holds that Moses appeared in the Kirtland Temple and gave priesthood keys to Joseph Smith.



CFM Reading Guide

“HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH IN VICTORY”

MAR 30 Genesis 22:1-14

The Sacrifice of Isaac

MAR 31 Exodus 12:1-14

The Passover Lamb

APR 1 Psalm 22

The Suffering Messiah

APR 2 Isaiah 53

The Suffering Servant

APR 3 Zechariah 9:9-11

The Triumphal Entry and Covenant of Peace

APR 4 Jonah 2

A Sign of the Resurrection

APR 5 Job 19:25-27

“I Know That My Redeemer Liveth”

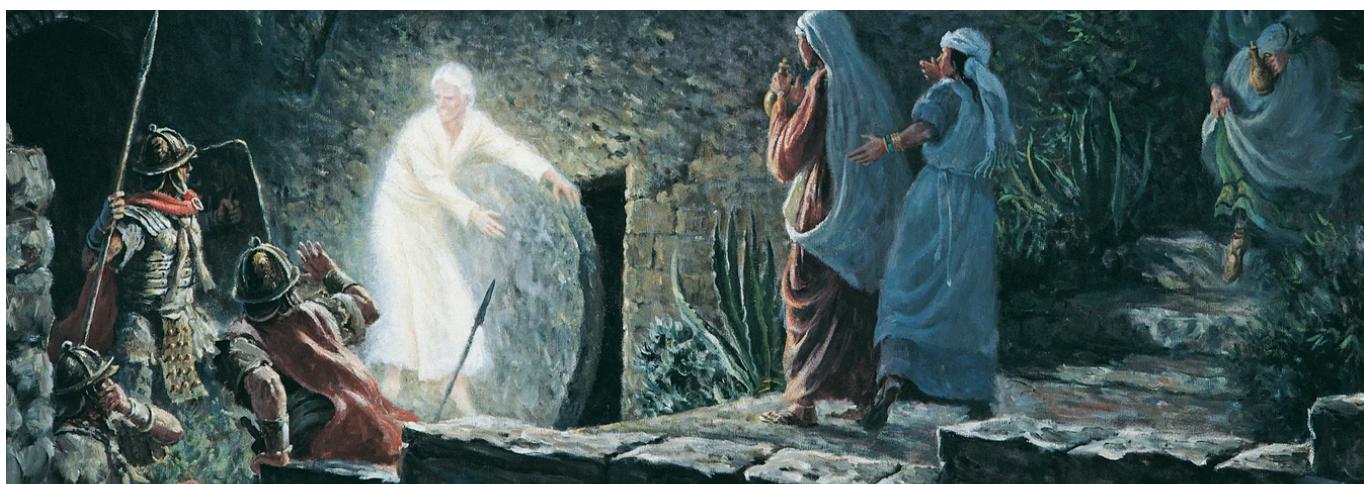
Week 14 : Mar 30–Apr 5

“He carried out His remarkable Atonement, from the agony of Gethsemane to the mockery of His trial, His torture on the cross, and His burial in a borrowed tomb...With the majesty of His calling as the Redeemer of all of Heavenly Father’s children, three days later He stepped forth from that tomb, resurrected, as He had prophesied.”

-By Elder Ronald A. Rasband

“Hosanna to the Most High God”

April 2023





CFM Weekly Questions

“HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH IN VICTORY”

Week 14 : Mar 30–Apr 5

When the Atonement of Jesus Christ was accomplished, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:51). Why should we need temples to access God if the veil was torn and communication with God open to all?

The argument associated with this passage is that, since that moment when the temple veil was rent, access to God through communication or atonement was no longer restricted or limited to the temple. The natural conclusion from this argument is that temples are no longer necessary, and it's a common argument used against Latter-day Saints and their persisted building and use of temples. This misses what the original Apostles are said to have regulated about parts of the Mosaic Law, and what they continued to do after Jesus's ascension. Several scriptures discuss the use of the temple after Christ.

- Acts 2:43-47; 3:1-10 - “all that believed” were in the temple daily, and the apostles taught there often.
- Acts 21:26, 24:18 - Paul participates in purification rites in the temple.
- Acts 22:17 - Paul narrates how he came to Jerusalem, went to the temple to pray, and fell “in a trance” where he received a revelation from Jesus. The passage appears to indicate that Paul sought out the temple as a place to go and consult the Lord directly.

These examples undermine the idea that temples aren't needed or that they were done away with. Instead, when the temple was near, the Apostles used it often, just not for the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law. Access to God was never restricted to the temple, even in Jewish life, so it's wrong to assert from the veil-ripping that the opening of communication with God was in mind. Rather, the veil-ripping has greater parallels with the discussion had by the author of Hebrews. In Hebrews 6-9, the author's point is not that there is no longer a temple or no longer a priesthood, but that the Jewish priesthood is replaced by Christ, his servants, and his law. The old intermediary, the High Priest, was replaced by the new intermediary, Jesus Christ, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (see Hebrews 8:8-13). Temple themes and imagery would throughout Christianity, and even be paralleled in ancient Christian baptismal rituals.

The essential covenantal renewal associated with the new covenant is now performed by Christ, who has granted all of us the chance to be with Him as members of the order of Melchizedek as well through a covenantal relationship (after all, an “order” with only one member can hardly be called an order). Latter-day Saints don't use modern temples for sacrificial purposes, which were done away with in Christ (see Hebrews 10:1-15, Alma 34:11-16). They are, however, repeatedly used for the making and keeping of covenants with God, and are often sought by members for increased access to communication with God, just not exclusive access.



CFM Weekly Questions

“HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH IN VICTORY”

Week 14 : Mar 30–Apr 5

How do we know that Old Testament passages about a suffering servant or a messiah are about Jesus? Is it irresponsible for the New Testament apostles to recontextualize the Old Testament in the way that they did?

There is continued debate about the scope and meaning of the 4 servant songs of Isaiah (found in Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; and 52:13–53:12), which all depict or symbolize a servant of God holding several special responsibilities. Scholars variously identify the servant as Cyrus the Persian, a prophet, a messiah, Israel as a whole, or many other possibilities. Isaiah could have been using a double-meaning while writing these passages, so interpretation of precisely what historical events Isaiah has in mind can be difficult. In the New Testament, the apostle Philip identifies the servant as Jesus Christ when interpreting Isa 53:7–8 for the Ethiopian (Acts 8:27–35). Themes in the passion narratives of Christ in the gospels quite explicitly match up Christ’s experience to what is described by Isaiah in the servant songs, indicating that the authors of the Gospels saw Jesus Christ in the servant role. Additionally, Nephi in the Book of Mormon states that “[Isaiah] verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2). Jacob, Isaiah, and Nephi fulfil the law of witnesses necessary to “establish [God’s] word” (2 Nephi 11:3). Modern prophets and apostles similarly emphasize the fact that Isaiah had the messiah, Jesus Christ, in mind in his descriptions.

There’s a lot of interesting things to be said about the interpretive uses of the Old Testament by both the New Testament Apostles. In fact, the way that New Testament writers used Old Testament passages might even seem strange to modern readers because of how loose or creative they were with their texts. However, once again we see that God talks to people “after the manner of their language” (D&C 1:24), and that includes their interpretive norms. The expansive interpretations of the New Testament mirror the prophetic norm of taking a concept, text, or incorrect idea, and adapting it to fit or reinforce the message of the author or needs of the audience.

To share the truth about Jesus Christ as the eternal God and the one sent to save the world from sin, New Testament writers drew upon the heavy themes of suffering and being brought back into God’s presence. Just as the Israelites were relieved of suffering after the Babylonian exile, Jesus Christ went through immense suffering that allows us to be brought back into the presence of God. So, instead of looking through the Old Testament for precise prophecies of Jesus Christ and his life, it helps to think carefully about how Christ is prefigured in the narratives, poems, and laws of the Old Testament. Adopting the christological interpretive lens of the New Testament Apostles gives us a greater understanding and appreciation for God’s plan of salvation, and ultimately for the savior Jesus Christ.



CFM Weekly Questions

“HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH IN VICTORY”

Week 14 : Mar 30–Apr 5

Why is God in the Old Testament so seemingly violent compared to the New Testament emphasis of Jesus's love, mercy, and atonement?

This is a view of the Old Testament first popularized by an ancient Christian named Marcion, who would split off from the main Christian church to form a sect (the Marcionites) that rejected the Old Testament entirely, and only preserved Luke and several of Paul's epistles as scripture. Similarly, Gnostic Christians used elaborate myths to demonstrate the inferiority of the God of the Old Testament. While a wide range of emotions are felt by the God of the Old Testament, these efforts to put down the Old Testament depictions of God post-dated the great respect and praise that the early disciples and apostles had for the Old Testament scriptures, and misunderstand the full range of the attributes of God in the Old Testament.

While it's written as God saying he "visit[s] the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Exo 20:5), the consequence is apparently canceled out by the ultimate love of God, "[who] keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut 7:9). While at times the God of the Old Testament might be depicted as harsh and immovable, there is a significant aspect of love, mercy, negotiability, and covenantal loyalty that permeates every single text. Modern scripture and revelation identify the God of the Old Testament as Jesus Christ, who exhibited both love (John 15:3) and anger (Mark 3:5, Matthew 21:12-13).

Such identifications of Jesus Christ as the God of the Old Testament are replete throughout restoration scripture (for examples, see 1 Nephi 19:10, Mosiah 3:5-8, Mosiah 13:33-34, Alma 11:38-39, and Doctrine and Covenants 29:1). They all inform us that the same God who was willing to suffer for and atone for our sins was the one who brought Israel out of Egypt, gave them the Law, and remained faithful to His covenant with them. Such attributes tie directly to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and help us understand how much God cares about our lives and our ultimate happiness.



CFM Reading Guide

“REMEMBER THIS DAY, IN WHICH YE
CAME OUT FROM EGYPT”

APR 6 Exodus 7-8

God Begins to Reveal His Power

APR 7 Exodus 9

The Lord Distinguishes His People

APR 8 Exodus 10

God's dominion over creation through plagues

APR 9 Exodus 11

God's final warning and most serious plague

APR 10 Exodus 12:1-20

The Lord establishes the Passover covenant with Israel

APR 11 Exodus 12:21-51

God protects Israel from the destroying angel

APR 12 Exodus 13

Remembering the Lord's salvation

Week 15 : Apr 6-12

“I am impressed with the parallel between the way the Lord blessed His people in this Old Testament account and the way He is also blessing His people today. When President Nelson introduced us to Come, Follow Me..., he invited us to transform our homes into sanctuaries of faith and centers of gospel learning.”

-By Mark L. Pace
“Conversion Is Our Goal”
April 2022





CFM Weekly Questions

“REMEMBER THIS DAY, IN WHICH YE
CAME OUT FROM EGYPT”

Week 15 : Apr 6-12

Some passages in Exodus say that God was the one who hardened Pharaoh's own heart. How can we reconcile the hardening of Pharaoh's heart with the concept of free will?

In the story of the plagues of Egypt, the main theme is a demonstration of the sovereignty of Jehovah over the gods of Egypt. While some passages simply state that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, others are more emphatic that God did the hardening. When those passages crop up, there's almost always a specific reason why.

- For the author of the story, showing how God is a God who can be relied upon more than the gods of the nations is top priority. Demonstrating God's sovereignty is important to the author, and if God is the one doing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, He's totally in control (see Exodus 7:3; 8:19; 9:12; etc.).
- In at least one instance, God hardening the heart of Pharaoh is expressly a demonstration of God's fulfilment of his word about Pharaoh not letting Israel go until the last plague (see Exodus 4:21-23). For example, Exodus 9:12 states, “And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hardened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.” So rather than a historical reality, it could be that the author is emphasizing God's ability to fulfil his word in this instance.
- Other passages, such as Exodus 10:1, emphasize the need for God to show the Egyptians signs of his power, perhaps to deter further military conflicts (which were very common for Israel throughout its entire history because of its location along trade and military-movement routes). This possibility serves both a historical and theological purpose.

The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible adds another level of depth into the debate over the reality of God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The entry for the JST of Exodus 4 states bluntly, “The Lord is not responsible for Pharaoh's hardness of heart.” making a clear historical claim about God's role in Pharaoh's heart hardening. Thus, the emphasis for Latter-day Saints may include all of the aforementioned themes and goals of the Exodus story (sovereignty, God's trustworthiness, and protection), but also a clarification and reaffirmation of our free will through correcting what might have actually happened. Whatever one decides about the Exodus story as a whole, it's clear that both the author and modern-day prophets and apostles want us to focus on the greater themes of the narrative and trust in God's power.



CFM Weekly Questions

“REMEMBER THIS DAY, IN WHICH YE
CAME OUT FROM EGYPT”

Week 15 : Apr 6-12

Why does God say that Moses was made as God to Pharaoh? (Exodus 7:1)

In Hebrew, *natan* (נָתָן) has a range of meanings: give, set up, or put. The best translation for the word in this context is similar to “set up as” or simply “made”. Inserting the indefinite article “a” is also a live option for the translation of the verse, but the Hebrew word for “like” or “as” is not present in the Hebrew, so it is not solely that qualities of God are imparted to Moses in this instance (as in, being only like God). Rather, the idea in question is one of a special relationship that Moses obtains.

In ancient Israelite society and culture, deity was a much more fluid and relational term. For instance, the difference between God and man in the Israelite worldview wasn’t one of kind, but one of degree. Humans had differing degrees of divinity, as did humans in some special statuses (prophets, priests, kings, etc.) that marked them apart from the general populace relationally. Figures like David and Moses held semi-divine status in the writings of people like Philo and Origen of Alexandria in the first few centuries of the common era (see Philo, *Mos.* 1.158, and Origen *Comm. ad Rom.* 2.10, 18 (SC 532, p. 438)).

The same idea of relational divinity is especially clear in the example of Moses, who is an intercessor for God and the Israelites, and Pharaoh in Exodus 7:1. Moses is “god” to Pharaoh because he represents Jehovah, he holds a special relationship with God that makes him holier than Pharaoh, and so Moses says what God would say to Pharaoh. This also reflects the idea that people can become like God through God’s power or holiness, most clearly manifested in our day through the power that the Grace and Atonement of Jesus Christ has towards perfecting us.



CFM Weekly Questions

“REMEMBER THIS DAY, IN WHICH YE
CAME OUT FROM EGYPT”

Week 15 : Apr 6-12

How can God be just in killing all the firstborn in the final plague of Egypt? Is the redemption of Israel's firstborn children related in any meaningful way to the deaths of the firstborn in Egypt?

In the laws of Exodus, God requires that something be done about the firstborn of the Israelites. In Exodus 13:11-16, a legal requirement is described where God asks the firstborn sons to be sacrificed. Rather than have the Israelites go through with this law, the firstborn sons can be redeemed by a different sacrifice according to verses 13 and 15. Verses 15 and 16 provide a direct parallel between the historical episode and the law God is teaching them to circumvent through sacrifice. In the case of Egypt, the firstborn sons were killed as part of the final plague because of Pharaoh's bold refusal to let the Israelites leave Egypt to offer sacrifice. Pharaoh would not let Israel leave, and further threatened Moses with death if he saw him again (see Exodus 10:24-29). God explained to Moses in Exodus 11:1 that the final plague would convince Pharaoh to finally let the Israelites go free. After all of the plagues that hit Egypt, it seems that nothing less would be able to convince Pharaoh to free the Israelites.

While this story may raise questions about God's morality, it's important to contextualize the story along with the previous plagues, which had failed to convince Pharaoh of Jehovah's power or the need to release the Israelites from bondage. It's also important to keep in mind that to an ancient audience, the morality of the killing of the firstborn might not have come up as a concern. Group/community/hereditary punishment was a major element in their eastern worldview, and Israel was constantly engaged in wars and struggles due to their geopolitical situation in the Levant. Later prophets seem to be correcting these ideas of punishment in favor of greater and more equal justice for all people (see Ezekiel 18 and Jeremiah 31:28-30). For a modern audience, the lesson obtained from this story could be one about the patience or mercy of God for how delayed this harsh plague is given out so as to open the opportunity for prior repentance. As implied by Exodus 11:1, the death of the Egyptian firstborn was God's last option, not His first. God is incredibly merciful (see Exodus 34:6 and Psalm 103:8), but he also has a covenant responsibility to support his people and lead them out of captivity in Egypt (see Exodus 2:24-25 and Exodus 6:2-8).



CFM Reading Guide

“STAND STILL, AND SEE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD”

APR 13 Exodus 14:1-14

The Israelites are trapped at the Red Sea.

APR 14 Exodus 14:15-31

Parting of the Red Sea.

APR 15 Exodus 15:1-21

The Song of Moses and Miriam.

APR 16 Exodus 15:22-27

The Israelites complain about the bitter water.

APR 17 Exodus 16:1-36

The manna and quail provided.

APR 18 Exodus 17:1-7

Water from the rock.

APR 19 Exodus 18:1-27

Jethro's counsel to Moses.

Week 16 : Apr 13-19

“Think of the miracles of the Old Testament. Remember Moses and the parting of the Red Sea. For all future generations of Israelites, the great miracles that led to their deliverance from Egypt provided undeniable proof of God’s existence and His love for them.”

-By Sydney S. Reynolds
“A God of Miracles”
April 2001





CFM Weekly Questions

“STAND STILL, AND SEE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD”

Week 16 : Apr 13–19

Is Red Sea a mistranslation of yam suf? Shouldn't it be called the Reed Sea or the Sea of Reeds? Does this mean that the Book of Mormon's "Red Sea" is incorrect?

The translation of yam suf is still a currently discussed and debated topic in Biblical scholarship today. It's difficult to determine the meaning, especially since there are two different renditions based on either the Hebrew, or the Greek Septuagint. The Hebrew suf is a word that has been associated with reeds or plants typical of marshy areas. This poses a problem, since the kinds of reeds that are salt tolerant don't grow near the Red sea or the closest gulfs/canals. The Greek eruthros is most clearly translated as "red", making the identification of the sea in question with the Red Sea dominant in Christian thought, since the Septuagint was the major translation of scripture used by the earliest Christians. It could be that the Septuagint's word choice was based on a Hebrew variant that doesn't appear in our modern texts, or that our understanding of suf is limited by our lack of sources that discuss the word.

The Exodus narrative doesn't give many additional clues that would help discern the location of the crossing, and some have argued that the crossing could have been in a much shallower and shorter point of the Red Sea that leads Israel straight to the Sinai Peninsula (like the Gulf of Suez). Regardless of the historical and geographical concerns, the legendary character of this part of the Exodus narrative served a clear purpose in teaching later Israelites about the great power, mercy, and generosity of their God in leading their ancestors into the promised land. This is precisely Nephi's point when he uses the term "Red Sea" in his exhortations to his brothers in 1 Nephi 17:23-27.

Regardless of the original meaning of yam suf, Nephi's language is likely filtered through Joseph Smith's language and understanding of the story as he's heard or read it in the King James Version of the Bible. This shouldn't affect the meaning or the veracity of the Book of Mormon, since Joseph Smith as a translator only had that KJV language to draw upon when dictating the Book of Mormon text. So "Red Sea" is better understood as a precise translation of Nephi's meaning, accommodated for a 19th century audience who had familiarity with the English terminology for Ancient Near Eastern place names.



CFM Weekly Questions

“STAND STILL, AND SEE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD”

Week 16 : Apr 13-19

Are restrictions for what Israelites could and couldn't do on the Sabbath day compulsive, if not authoritarian? And why is death the penalty for breaking it?

The Sabbath is described in the scriptures as “a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High” (D&C 59:10). In our day, it is an opportunity to have a more strict focus on our relationship with God, our service to members of our ward/community, and also time with our families. On the other hand, early Israelite observance of the Sabbath was focused around similar principles, but with greater cultural emphasis and more serious consequences in the written law. These were probably in order to teach stricter observance and convey the importance of keeping the Sabbath day holy. The Sabbath was one of the items most integral to Israelite identity, much like circumcision and the dietary restrictions. To break it as to be deserving of punishment would have been extremely deliberate. Such an offense symbolized a much deeper revolt against the community and its identity if done seriously and with clear intention.

However, it should not be automatically assumed that death was always the penalty for such Sabbath disobedience (as stated in Exodus 31:14-15). Exodus 16:25-30 is one of the earliest stories about obeying the Sabbath in the Old Testament, and yet there is no punishment given out for the Israelites' disobedience when they pick up manna on that day (but there is a stern warning and chastizement!). In fact, early Jewish tradition consistently negotiated away or erected legal bulwarks to avoid the death penalty as much as possible. Even in the only story in the Bible where a man is killed for disobeying the sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36), many Bible commentators have noted that the offense had to have been a very willful and presumptuous sin, more so a sign of rebellion against the people and against Moses than making a simple mistake in picking up sticks on Saturday. Were the national or tribal Israelite community to rupture in similar widespread disobedience, it might leave them open to invasion by foreign armies or left without a force to defend themselves. The ideal lesson in this scenario was community unity, not death for every disobedience.



CFM Weekly Questions

“REMEMBER THIS DAY, IN WHICH YE
CAME OUT FROM EGYPT”

Week 15 : Apr 6-12

Why are the Israelites promised to see the “glory of the lord” in response to their pleas for food (Exodus 16:7)?

Later in Exodus 16:10 this promise is fulfilled by God, and the Israelites see the glory (Hebrew: kavod) appear over by Moses in the wilderness. When the kavod appears, God is considered to be physically present with the Israelites, much like in the cloud and pillar of fire (Exodus 13:22), and the cloud over the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35). References to or concerns about not surviving God's presence work under the assumption that the kavod is something powerful that cannot be penetrated except by the people that God chooses. In Exodus 24:9-11, it is an enormous privilege and spiritual experience for Moses, his companions, and the seventy elders of Israel to see God, but when the kavod reappears, it's “like devouring fire” (v. 17), and only Moses is allowed up on the mountain.

So for the Israelites, to see the glory of the lord is a blessing significantly disproportionate to their previous complainings for food. They're asking for a basic necessity that they're alleging they had plenty of in Egypt. One might say that they're being terribly hyperbolic and ungrateful. In response to their grumblings, God offers them something spectacular and totally unique. Yet ultimately, they are not worthy of seeing God's glory (see Exodus 32).

This exchange of wants and blessings between God and the Israelites through Moses can teach us quite a bit about God's generosity. His grace is a uniquely sanctifying gift that applies to us as we strive to keep our covenants and grow closer in a relationship with Him. Even in our hardest times when we may complain about our difficult situations, God is still willing to extend to us His greatest blessings to cover our spiritual needs (see also Luke 9:11-13).



CFM Reading Guide

“ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SPOKEN WE WILL DO”

APR 20 Exodus 19:1-25

The Israelites prepare to meet with God at Mount Sinai.

APR 21 Exodus 20:1-21

The Ten Commandments.

APR 22 Exodus 24:1-18

The covenant confirmed with the people.

APR 23 Exodus 31:1-11

Bezalel and Oholiab are appointed to build the tabernacle.

APR 24 Exodus 31:12-18

The Sabbath commandment.

APR 25 Exodus 32:1-35

The golden calf incident.

APR 26 Exodus 34:1-35

God renews the covenant.

Week 17 : Apr 20-26

“Surely there could not be any doctrine more strongly expressed in the scriptures than the Lord’s unchanging commandments and their connection to our happiness and well-being as individuals, as families, and as a society. There are moral absolutes.

Disobedience to the Lord’s commandments will always deprive us of His blessings. These things do not change.”

—By L. Tom Perry
“Obedience to Law Is Liberty”
April 2013





CFM Weekly Questions

“ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SPOKEN
WE WILL DO”

Week 17 : Apr 20-26

Why does the first commandment say “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” instead of simply saying that there are no other Gods?

In the ancient world, the personal existences of various deities was not often questioned, and much less denied. For an Israelite, what mattered was the national God, Jehovah. The other Gods were not relevant to the Israelites and their inheritance or land (see Judges 11:24 and Deut 32:8-9). Since Israel was always reliant upon rains for crops rather than irrigation as in other parts of the Ancient Near East, it would often become tempting to look over the Israelite border (or even within the borders, at earlier stages in history) at Ba’al, a storm god, for rains and agricultural fertility. To teach against this temptation, stories from the Bible often indicate that foreign gods have no power within the boundaries of Israel. The contest between Elijah and the priests of Ba’al is one such demonstration, where the main question is which god is Israel’s (1 Kings 18:21).

Worshiping other gods was a very real temptation in the Israelite worldview, but that might seem strange to us. After all, you won’t hear a Christian or Latter-day Saint professing belief in the existence of Chemosh, Marduk, or other deities, yet this was an element of the Israelite world at least until around the New Testament period or after. This worldview is precisely why the main force of this commandment is only to rely upon and worship Jehovah, over and against any other foreign god. To bolster Israelite claims about the sovereignty of Jehovah over Israel, the scriptures constantly emphasize how incomparably powerful Jehovah is over all other gods (see Exodus 15:11, Deut 32:43 (NRSV), and Psalm 86:8).

What does it mean for Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders to share a meal in God’s presence?

Ancient Near Eastern treaties and covenants were often sealed by a meal representing fellowship with the other party, or in the case of a covenant, fellowship with the gods. This practice continued from ancient times in Syria, Canaan and Mesopotamia into the Iron age when Israel appeared onto the scene, and it lasts until today through Christ’s institution of the Eucharist/sacrament. The most relevant examples of a covenant meal in the Old Testament include Genesis 18:1-8, Genesis 26:26-31, Genesis 31:44-54, and Exodus 24:9-11. As shown from those passages, the same practice between opposing mortal parties is practiced between people and God. This is likely the context for the meal involving those in God’s presence in Exodus 24—an essential element of the covenant bestowed upon the Israelites.

The Sacrament as instituted by Christ in the Last Supper is another example of a covenantal meal. The treaty or covenant to remember in question is Jesus’s sacrifice, or both his body and the “blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). In the early Christian Eucharist, food and drink were eaten as a full meal. These were emblematic of God extending table fellowship and promises to participants, much like the covenant/treaty rituals carried out in the Old Testament. In Corinth, this practice was distorted by wickedness, but corrected by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17-26. In modern times, the sacrament has been simplified through revelation to a time for partaking of water and bread in remembrance of Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 18:1-14, Moroni 4-5, and D&C 20:75-80).



CFM Weekly Questions

“ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SPOKEN
WE WILL DO”

Week 17 : Apr 20-26

What does Moses' request to see God's glory (Exodus 33:18) and God's response about showing His "back parts" teach us about divine embodiment?

There's a very interesting dialogue within the Old Testament about whether or not God can be seen. Universally throughout the Old and New Testaments, God is embodied, but the viewability of God isn't as clear. the episode of Moses being promised to see God's "back parts" is a unique convergence of (1) fears that seeing God directly or seeing His glory could result in death (see Isaiah 6:5, Judges 13:21-22, and Exodus 33:20), and (2) the realities of the patriarchs having intimate experiences seeing or interacting with God (see Genesis 18:1-2, Genesis 26:2, and Genesis 32:30). The norm appears to be that God cannot be seen, yet he still has a body that he permits to be seen by individuals at special moments.

In the case of Moses in Exodus 33, Moses strongly wants to know God (v. 13), to have God's presence follow them in the wilderness in the same way that he has experienced God's presence (v. 15-16), and to see God's glory (v. 18). For a sign, God proclaims to Moses his attributes and tells him "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (v. 19). Despite the fact that Moses can't see God's glory, he still shows Moses his "back parts" as a token of their close relationship. Joseph Smith understood this concept well in his earnest desire for the saints of Kirtland to have visions of God and relish sacred, spiritual experiences to strengthen their relationships with God.



CFM Reading Guide

“HOLINESS TO THE LORD”

APR 27 Exodus 35:1-29

The people bring offerings for the tabernacle.

APR 28 Exodus 36:1-38

The construction of the tabernacle.

APR 29 Exodus 37:1-29

The construction of the ark and other sacred items.

APR 30 Exodus 38:1-31

The altar and other items are constructed.

MAY 1 Exodus 39:1-43

The priestly garments are completed.

MAY 2 Exodus 40:1-38

The tabernacle is erected and God's glory fills it.

MAY 3 Leviticus 1:1-17

Offerings for atonement.

Week 18 : Apr 27-May 3

“If you or I should go to the temple insufficiently pure, we would not be able to see, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the spiritual teaching about the Savior that we can receive in the temple. When we are worthy to receive such teaching, there can grow through our temple experience hope, joy, and optimism throughout our lives.”

-By President Henry B. Eyring

“I Love to See the Temple”
April 2021





CFM Weekly Questions

“HOLINESS TO THE LORD”

Week 18 : Apr 27–May 3

What significance might we find in Exodus providing two full narratives of the Tabernacle in chapters 25–30 and 35–40?

Though the difference may be subtle in the first account of the Tabernacle of Congregation the Lord instructs Moses concerning how He would like the Tabernacle constructed. Chapters 35–40 is Moses commanding the children of Israel and the actual construction of the Tabernacle of Congregation. This repetition is not redundant, but deeply symbolic. The first account (25–30) records pure revelation received on Sinai and the “pattern” shown to Moses, while the second (35–40) shows how the people responded by sacrifice, faith, and obedience to build the house of the Lord. Together, they emphasize that sacred structures (like ancient tabernacles or modern temples) are both revealed by God and built by His people. Moreover, the tabernacle’s design and furnishings teach eternal truths – it symbolizes the journey of returning to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

How does the role of clothing in ancient temples compare with its role in modern temples, and what does this reveal about covenant identity?

In Exodus 35–40, Israel constructs the tabernacle exactly as the Lord revealed, including the sacred clothing of the priests that set them apart for holy service. Leviticus expands on this by showing how these garments functioned within Israel’s covenant worship. In Leviticus 1 and 4, the priests offered sacrifices that symbolized repentance and reconciliation with God, and their consecrated clothing marked their role as mediators. On the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, the high priest wore simple white linen while performing the most sacred ordinances, emphasizing purity and humility before the Lord. Leviticus 19 then calls all Israel to holiness, showing that sacred living extends beyond ritual.

Modern temples follow the same pattern of divine symbolism. Now, we use white temple clothing to represent purity, equality, and unity before God, and the temple garment serves as a personal, daily reminder of covenants. Sacred clothing, ancient or modern, helps disciples “put on Christ” by remembering the commitments that shape their spiritual identity.

Considering the ancient temple practices recorded in Exodus in what ways can we understand the similarities between Latter-day Saint temple rites and Masonic traditions?

Given the sacred nature of the temple as well as an effort to respect Freemason ceremonies it can be difficult to learn more how the two may or may not be connected. While there are some surface similarities between Latter-day Saint temple rituals and Freemasonry, their purposes, doctrines, and origins are notably different. It is a common criticism of the church that Joseph Smith stole the temple ceremony from Freemasonry. This is largely due to the symbolic play performed in both ceremonies, however, Freemasonry is not a religious organization and does not focus on eternal principles such as the plan of salvation which are taught in Latter-day Saint temples. Joseph Smith and other early church leaders did join Freemasonry, however, it is largely speculated they did so because of the good morals of those involved and to seek the help of the Masonic community during this time of great persecution in church history. The core teachings of the temple, including covenants, sealing power, and salvation through Jesus Christ, have no parallel in Freemasonry. In short: while Joseph Smith may have drawn on familiar ritual forms, the temple endowment and associated covenants are rooted in divine revelation, not Masonic tradition.



CFM Reading Guide

“REBEL NOT YE AGAINST THE LORD,
NEITHER FEAR”

M A Y 4 Numbers 11:1-35

God provides for His people even when they complain

M A Y 5 Numbers 12:1-16; 13:1-33

Trust in God's guidance over fear and doubt

M A Y 6 Numbers 14:1-45

Faith and obedience determine the path of God's promises.

M A Y 7 Numbers 20:1-29

Leadership requires humility and reliance on God.

M A Y 8 Numbers 21:1-35

God's mercy delivers His people from trials.

M A Y 9 Numbers 22:1-41; 23:1-30

God's purposes prevail over human intentions.

M A Y 10 Numbers 24:1-25; 27:1-23

God's promises endure through generations and obedience.

Week 19 : May 4-10

“Nothing opens the heavens quite like the combination of increased purity, exact obedience, earnest seeking, daily feasting on the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon, and regular time committed to temple and family history work...Every blessing the Lord has for you—even miracles—will follow. ”

-By President Russell M. Nelson

“Revelation for the Church,
Revelation for Our Lives”

April 2018





CFM Weekly Questions

“REBEL NOT YE AGAINST THE LORD,
NEITHER FEAR”

Week 19 : May 4-10

What does Numbers 11 teach Latter-day Saints about God giving revelation both through appointed leaders and unexpectedly to others like Eldad and Medad?

In Numbers 11, God grants part of His Spirit from Moses to seventy elders so they may help bear the burden of leadership, and the same Spirit rests on Eldad and Medad even though they had not gone to the tent. They prophesy in the camp, showing that God is not limited to formal settings. Revelation is given to ordained leaders who have stewardship to guide the Lord's people, which aligns with teachings on prophetic authority. At the same time, revelation can come in many forms, such as the voice of the Spirit, spiritual gifts, or personal impressions, all meant to draw individuals closer to God. As President Nelson taught, receiving revelation is a privilege for every child of God, not just for those ordained. Numbers 11 supports both ideas. God leads His people through authorized prophets, and He also inspires faithful individuals personally. Together these forms of revelation strengthen God's work.

Does the story of the brass serpent teach that healing and deliverance come through faith in God or through works also?

In the story of the brass serpent God instructs that anyone bitten by the fiery serpents need only look at the serpent on the pole to live. The healing does not come from the serpent itself, but from faith in God's command and reliance on His power. The serpent was a symbol, a type of Jesus Christ, and all who acted in faith and looked were healed.

The Israelites who doubted or hardened their hearts were not healed because they lacked faith. This illustrates that God's deliverance is offered through His power, not through human effort or works. Latter-day Saints understand that spiritual healing, forgiveness, and guidance come as individuals exercise faith, humble themselves, and trust in God's means. The brass serpent story therefore teaches that faith is the essential principle for receiving God's mercy and deliverance. Acting in obedience, relying on the Lord, and trusting His provision allows individuals to access the blessings He offers. Faith, rather than works, is what opens the way for healing and salvation.



CFM Reading Guide

“BEWARE LEST THOU FORGET THE LORD”

M A Y 11 Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Teaching and remembering God's commandments

M A Y 12 Deuteronomy 7:1-26, 8:1-20

Faithfulness to God and His power to deliver

M A Y 13 Deuteronomy 8:1-20

Remembering the God who provides

M A Y 14 Deuteronomy 15:1-23

Generosity toward the poor and needy

M A Y 15 Deuteronomy 18:1-22

True prophecy and God's authorized messengers

M A Y 16 Deuteronomy 29:1-29

Renewing the covenant with God

M A Y 17 Deuteronomy 30:1-20, 34:1-12

Choosing life and honoring Moses' final witness

Week 20 : May 11-17

“When we consider the goodness of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our trust in Them increases... We seek not to change His will but to align our will with His and secure for ourselves blessings that He wants to grant, conditioned on our asking for them. We yearn to be more meek, more pure, more steadfast, more Christlike.”

-By Elder Dale G. Renlund
“Consider the Goodness and Greatness of God”
April 2020





CFM Weekly Questions

“BEWARE LEST THOU FORGET
THE LORD”

Week 20 : May 11-17

If the Shema became a daily prayer for ancient Israel, why is it not used as a formal prayer in Latter Day Saint practice today, and how do Latter Day Saints apply its message?

Although we do not use the Shema as a set daily prayer, its teachings remain central to covenant discipleship. Worship is not tied to fixed liturgy but to principles that guide the heart. The greatest commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind forms the foundation of true discipleship and is reaffirmed by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The Shema expresses this same core truth. Rather than adopting it as a formal prayer, Latter Day Saints apply its message through personal and family devotional practices such as daily scripture study, family prayer, and teaching children to remember the Lord.

Restored teachings place significant focus on agency, individual revelation, and worship that grows from personal covenant relationships. Because of this, the Church encourages worship that is sincere, heartfelt, and adaptable rather than repeated through a prescribed formula. The Shema's central idea, that the Lord is our God and that He invites complete devotion, fits naturally within restoration teachings on covenant loyalty. We can honor the Shema not through recitation but by living its call to love God fully and remember Him in all things.

How do Latter Day Saints relate Deuteronomy 18's ancient tests for true prophets to their belief in a living prophet today?

Deuteronomy 18 is an important foundation for understanding prophetic authority. The passage teaches that God calls and authorizes His prophets and that their role is to declare His word, something emphasized throughout our modern church, which teaches that prophets are chosen by God, not self appointed, and that they guide His people through revelation. Deuteronomy 18 also warns against false prophets who speak in the name of the Lord without divine commission. Restored teachings emphasize this same principle of discernment. True prophets testify of Jesus Christ, teach repentance, and lead people toward covenant faithfulness. False prophets draw attention to themselves or promote teachings that oppose the doctrine of Christ.

Modern prophets are recognized through spiritual confirmation, consistency with scripture, and the fruits of their ministry. Their teachings align with the witness of the Holy Ghost and with the pattern of revelation established in earlier dispensations. Prophetic authority is tied to priesthood keys, which provide a clear line of responsibility and prevent confusion about who may speak for the Lord.



CFM Reading Guide

“BE STRONG AND OF A GOOD COURAGE”

M A Y 1 8 Joshua 1:1-18

God's commission to Joshua.

M A Y 1 9 Joshua 2:1-24

Spies sent to Jericho; Rahab's faith.

M A Y 2 0 Joshua 3:1-17, 4:1-24

Crossing the Jordan River.

M A Y 2 1 Joshua 5:1-15

The Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land.

M A Y 2 2 Joshua 6:1-27

The Battle of Jericho.

M A Y 2 3 Joshua 7:1-26, 8:1-35

Consequences of sin and renewed victory at Ai

M A Y 2 4 Joshua 23:1-16, 24:1-33

Joshua's farewell and choosing to serve the Lord

Week 21 : May 18-24

“He was saying that his decision to serve the Lord was independent of whatever they decided; that their actions would not affect his; that his commitment to do the Lord's will would not be altered... Joshua was firmly in control of his actions and had his eyes fixed on the commandments of the Lord. He was committed to obedience.”

-By Elder Howard W.
Hunter
“Commitment to God”
October 1982





CFM Weekly Questions

“BE STRONG AND OF A GOOD COURAGE”

Week 21 : May 18-24

Why did God require the priests to step into the water before the river parted, doesn't this encourage blind faith?

The account of the priests stepping into the Jordan River before it parted can be understood as an example of acting in faith rather than an instruction to follow blindly. God often invites His people to move forward with trust when the outcome is not yet visible. This pattern appears throughout scripture, including the promise that blessings come after the trial of faith. The Lord frequently works in ways that help His children develop spiritual confidence and reliance on Him rather than on their own power.

Faith in scripture is not the same as blind belief. It is a principle of action and power rooted in prior evidence of God's reliability. The Israelites had already witnessed the Lord's deliverance from Egypt and His guidance through the wilderness. Their step into the water was not without foundation. It was a continuation of a relationship built on previous divine acts.

God often requires an initial act of obedience to prepare His people to receive miracles. By stepping into the Jordan, the priests demonstrated trust grounded in covenant experience. The event illustrates that faith involves informed commitment supported by divine instruction, not unthinking obedience.

Why did God command Israel to take Jericho in such a destructive way, and what does this reveal about trust in divine direction?

God's commands to ancient Israel were tied to covenant purposes, protection from destructive practices, and the establishment of a righteous community in a land promised long before. The people of Jericho were not judged arbitrarily. The inhabitants had long engaged in practices that the Lord had warned against, and Israel's actions were connected to divine justice rather than uncontrolled aggression. The method of conquest, including marching, trumpets, and reliance on the ark, emphasized that victory came through God's power rather than human force.

The story of Jericho teaches trust in divine direction even when instructions seem unusual. Faith in the scriptures is portrayed as action based on a history of God's reliability. Israel had already witnessed miracles and covenant fulfillment, so obeying the Lord's pattern at Jericho reflected informed trust, not blind belief. Difficult Old Testament events must be read in context, recognizing that God's purposes include both justice and mercy.

The fall of Jericho reveals a principle of trusting God's guidance while understanding that His directives serve larger covenant and moral purposes.



CFM Weekly Questions

“BE STRONG AND OF A GOOD
COURAGE”

Week 21 : May 18-24

What was the purpose of the covenant ceremony at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, and why was it important for Israel to publicly recite blessings and curses?

The ceremony at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal was God's way of helping the Israelites solemnly renew their covenant with Him as they entered the promised land. According to the Church's "Gerizim and Ebal" entry in the Bible Dictionary, the two mountains flank the ancient town of Shechem, forming a natural amphitheater ideal for a national gathering: "At Mount Ebal, Joshua erected a monument bearing the law of Moses and then read the law to the Israelites."

Under the direction given in Deuteronomy, half the tribes stood on Gerizim to pronounce blessings and half on Ebal to pronounce cursings. A copy of the Law was publicly read, including both blessings linked to obedience and curses linked to disobedience.

This public enactment served several purposes: it reminded every individual — men, women, children, and foreigners — of the covenant terms; it unified the people under the same divine law; and it confronted them with a real, collective choice between obedience or the consequences of sin.

In that way, the ceremony at Gerizim and Ebal was not just ritual, but a powerful national recommitment to God's law, making clear that their identity and blessings as God's people depended on their choice to obey.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE LORD RAISED UP A DELIVERER”

M A Y 2 5 Judges 2:1-23

Israel's rebellion and God's response.

M A Y 2 6 Judges 3:1-31

Deliverance by Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar.

M A Y 2 7 Judges 4:1-24

Deliverance by Deborah and Barak.

M A Y 2 8 Judges 6:1-40

Gideon's call and testing.

M A Y 2 9 Judges 7:1-25, 8:1-35

Gideon's victory over the Midianites.

M A Y 3 0 Judges 13:1-25, 14:1-20

The birth of Samson.

M A Y 3 1 Judges 15:1-20, 16:1-31

Samson's downfall and death.

Week 22 : May 25-31

“As you come to know and love Him even more deeply, your words will flow more comfortably, as they do when you speak of one of your children or of a dear friend. Those listening to you will feel less like debating or dismissing you and more like learning from you... If the world is going to speak less of Him, who is going to speak more of Him? We are!”

-By Elder Neil L. Andersen

“We Talk of Christ”
October 2020





CFM Weekly Questions

“THE LORD RAISED UP A
DELIVERER”

Week 22 : May 25-31

Who were the Canaanite false gods mentioned in Judges, particularly Baal and Asherah, and why were they so appealing to Israel despite clear covenant prohibitions?

The book of Judges identifies Baal and Asherah as prominent Canaanite false gods who repeatedly drew Israel away from their covenant with the Lord. Baal was a storm and fertility god believed to control rain, crops, and agricultural prosperity, while Asherah was associated with fertility, motherhood, and sacred groves. Worship of these deities was closely tied to the Canaanite economy and daily survival, making them especially appealing to an agrarian society entering a new land.

Israel's temptation to worship Baal and Asherah was not simply religious rebellion but cultural assimilation. The Israelites lived among the Canaanites and were influenced by their practices, which promised immediate, tangible blessings such as fertile fields, healthy livestock, and successful harvests. In contrast, covenant faithfulness to the Lord required trust, obedience, and patience, often without instant visible rewards.

Despite clear prohibitions in the law of Moses, Israel repeatedly turned to these gods because their worship appeared practical and familiar. Judges highlights how this compromise weakened Israel spiritually and politically. This pattern serves as a warning about allowing cultural pressures and material concerns to replace covenant loyalty and trust in the Lord's promised blessings.

How does Deborah's leadership help Latter-day Saints understand why women may be given significant spiritual authority and revelation without priesthood ordination today?

Deborah's leadership in Judges helps us understand that spiritual authority and revelation are not limited to priesthood ordination. Scripture identifies Deborah as a prophetess who received revelation from the Lord, judged Israel, and conveyed God's will to Barak and the nation.

Priesthood authority and spiritual gifts are related but distinct, prophecy, revelation, and divine guidance are gifts of the Spirit that God bestows according to His purposes, not solely through ordination. Deborah's role demonstrates that God has long empowered women to speak and act in His name without holding priesthood office.

Latter-day Saint women are taught that they have access to revelation, exercise priesthood authority when set apart to callings under priesthood keys, and participate fully in God's work. The Church emphasizes that priesthood power is available to all covenant-keeping members, men and women, even though priesthood offices are reserved for men. Deborah's example reinforces the idea that the Lord delegates authority in different ways and that His work depends on obedience, faith, and covenant faithfulness rather than formal titles alone. Her leadership helps frame modern teachings about women's divine roles as consistent with ancient precedent rather than a departure from biblical patterns.



CFM Reading Guide

“MY HEART REJOICETH IN THE LORD”

JUN 1 Ruth 1:1-22

Naomi and Ruth's journey to Bethlehem.

JUN 2 Ruth 2:1-23

Ruth gleans in Boaz's field.

JUN 3 Ruth 3:1-18, Ruth 4:1-22

Ruth seeks Boaz's protection.

JUN 4 1 Samuel 1: 1-28, 2:1-36

Hannah's prayer, Samuel's birth, and Eli's sons

JUN 5 1 Samuel 3:1-21, 4:1-22

God calls Samuel; the ark is taken

JUN 6 1 Samuel 5:1-12, 6:1-21

The ark among the Philistines and its return

JUN 6 1 Samuel 7:1-17

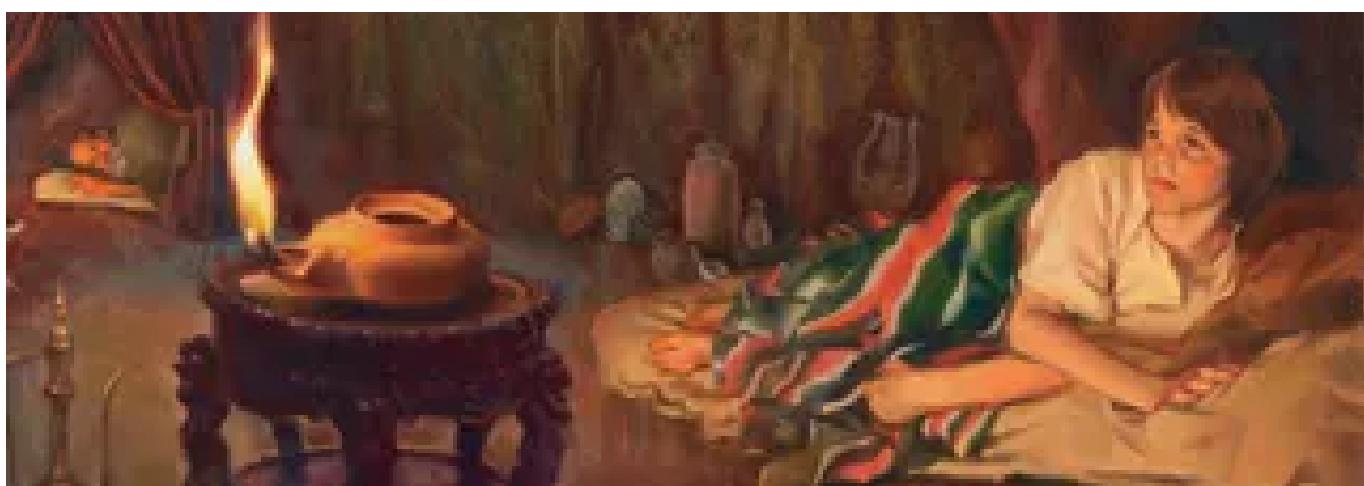
Israel repents; victory at Mizpeh

Week 23 : Jun 1-7

“As you come to know and love Him even more deeply, your words will flow more comfortably, as they do when you speak of one of your children or of a dear friend. Those listening to you will feel less like debating or dismissing you and more like learning from you... If the world is going to speak less of Him, who is going to speak more of Him? We are!”

-By Elder Neil L. Andersen

“We Talk of Christ”
October 2020





“MY HEART REJOICETH IN THE LORD”

Week 23 : Jun 1-7

What are we to make of the seemingly magical/superstitious elements like the Ark of the Covenant causing tumors, golden offerings from the Philistines, etc?

Magic and superstition are words that are very often polemical, meaning that they signal commitment to or against a position and can define boundaries through strong rhetoric. For example, people ridiculing spiritual gifts commonly used in the early decades of the LDS church might polemically value those spiritual expressions as superstitious, or even unhinged. The same goes with early LDS “magical” practices, and by the same interpretive methodology, early Israelite usage of the Urim and Thummim, Ark of the Covenant, casting lots, and other practices that we moderns might label as “superstitious.”

In Ancient Israel, the Ark of the Covenant was a powerful image of the God of Israel, who was invisibly enthroned above the cherubim on top of the box. To have the Ark stolen as in 1 Sam 4 is to lose the protective presence of God. It was a sacred item meant to symbolize God's support (the bowl of manna), God's establishment of priesthood power (Aaron's budded staff), and his role as lawgiver and king (the 10 commandment tablets). These items along with the Ark itself invoked collective, historical memory of God's character and how he would always be on their side. The story of the captured Ark in 1 Samuel is a demonstration to the Israelites that, even when they lose their way and make a mistake, God won't be impotent or lifeless like foreign idols.

How does Ruth's covenant language ("thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God") relate to conversion to the gospel?

Because Israelite cultural/community identity was so tight, a foreigner joining the Israelites was something rare or special. Ruth's words to Naomi show a willingness to abandon her earlier culture and identity in favor of worshipping the God of Israel. Her new situation in Israel might also make her an even greater outcast than she would be if she were at home in Moab as a single woman without any sons. For us in modern times, this reflects the idea that we need to shed our old identities in favor of more Christocentric ones, literally taking upon ourselves the name of Christ.

Despite the struggles that may be involved in such a change of identity, saints who do so have the hope of continued blessings in their lives to support them. The express promise of the holy spirit in the sacramental prayers each week is that “they may always have his Spirit to be with them” represented by increased access to God's help, His grace, and unity with God as we pray and strive to improve each day. There's a sense of covenantal unity in our communities in that wards aren't only places of instruction and participation in ordinances, but opportunities to serve and be served by others. Developing this unity is a step towards a more zion-like society and a step towards Jesus's commands to his disciples to be one. Ruth's conversion to Naomi's Israelite culture is symbolic of what we must do (or give up) in order to be fully converted to the gospel and Christ's church.



CFM Weekly Questions

“MY HEART REJOICETH IN THE LORD”

Week 23 : Jun 1-7

How do we reconcile Ruth's conversion to the God of Israel with the Deuteronomic prohibitions against foreign marriage and Moabite inclusion in Israel (Deut. 23:3-6)?

In many places, the Bible prohibits foreign marriages. However, the reason for the prohibitions seems to always be connected to warnings against worshipping the gods of foreign lands. Spouses from adjacent nations and cultures would typically be attached to their culture and gods, and threaten the worship of the God of Israel, who demanded exclusive worship. At the same time, the Bible also implies through many of its stories that intermarriage was acceptable. This results in a lively debate in the Bible over whether intermarriage is acceptable or not.

The peak of this debate probably centers around the composition of Ruth, where the bloodline that produced King David is explicitly the result of intermarriage. At this time, around the end of the Babylonian exile, there was significant debate over whether Israelites living in Israel had to divorce their foreign wives, regardless of whether they worshiped Jehovah or not. Legal material emphasized the need to be pureblood Israelites, with the exception of Egyptians after the third generation and prisoners of war. This appears to be the case for the purpose of maintaining cultural/racial/communal identity and unity. So, in the cases where the Law is stated, the primary focus is idolatry and community identity/unity, but the fact of legal intermarriage regulations remained.

However, the book of Ruth, the fact of Moses' Midianite and Cushite wives, and Joseph of Egypt's wife (daughter of an Egyptian priest) go without serious questioning in the Biblical texts. Additionally, other stories and passages in the Bible thematically indicate a sense of equality on the grounds of race. Because of these discrepancies, the prohibitions against intermarriage in the Law can be difficult to reconcile with Israelite and even modern reality. For today, modern revelation emphasizes that there are no restrictions on marriage based on race, and teaches the truth that all people are equal in the eyes of God.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE LORD LOOKETH ON THE HEART”

JUN 8 1 Samuel 8:1-22

The people demand a king.

JUN 9 1 Samuel 9:1-27

Saul's anointing as king.

JUN 10 1 Samuel 10:1-27

Saul's public anointing.

JUN 11 1 Samuel 13:1-23

Saul's disobedience and the loss of God's favor.

JUN 12 1 Samuel 15:1-35

Saul's rejection as king.

JUN 13 1 Samuel 16:1-23

Samuel anoints David.

JUN 14 1 Samuel 16:14-23

David in Saul's service

Week 24 : Jun 8-14

“Small errors and minor drifts away from the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring sorrowful consequences into our lives. It is therefore of critical importance that we become self-disciplined enough to make early and decisive corrections to get back on the right track and not wait or hope that errors will somehow correct themselves.”

-By Dieter F. Uchtdorf

“A Matter of a Few Degrees”

April 2008





“THE LORD LOOKETH ON THE HEART”

Week 24 : Jun 8-14

Exodus 19:5-6 indicates that kingship was never God's plan for Israel. How is it that God changed his mind about kings for the Israelites in 1 Sam 8:6-9? How does Samuel's warning about kingship (1 Sam 8:10-18) foreshadow Book of Mormon warnings about kings?

In this passage, God is depicted as someone who can be prayed to, and specifically reasoned with, in order to determine the best course of action. In the case of Samuel's prayer to the lord in 1 Sam 8, God accepts the Israelites' request to have a king like the other nations, accommodating their needs into his purposes. While this may look like a precarious instance of God simply changing his mind, if this scenario were not possible, meaningful petitionary prayer would not be possible either. The whole idea behind petitionary prayer is that by praying we can invoke God's help in situations where he would not have given it if we had not asked—in essence, we're trying to change his mind about something. The Israelites are engaging in a similar effort, petitioning the Lord through Samuel to condescend to their wants for a king like the other nations.

In the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 5:18 seems to imply that kingship wasn't Nephi's intent for his people, who were God's chosen people. Yet, they're condescended to in their given rules for kingship, and kings after Nephi reigned until the death of Mosiah. Later in the reign of Pahoran as chief judge, there is explicit opposition to the idea of kingship, especially since they persecute the existing government and those who believe otherwise. So, interestingly, both perspectives held in the Bible about kingship are represented in the Book of Mormon. Contrast Deuteronomy 17:14-20 with Exodus, which is silent on the issue of kingship, with Exodus, which assumes that God will be Israel's king even on earth.

How can Saul be both God's anointed choice and also a manifestation of Israel's rebellion?

The majority of the time, the subject of critiques of fallibility or claims of inerrancy are centered around prophetic figures. However, one of the clearest divinely sanctioned figures in the historical books of the Old Testament is Saul. Anointed by Samuel, and treated as such until his death, Saul actually seems to hold a position very similar to King Noah in the Book of Mormon. Both are responsible for the priestly and political aspects of society and governing, both are offered repentance in several instances, and both are presented as figures that are semi-protected until an untimely end.

What it means for Saul to be both God's anointed king over Israel and a manifestation of their rebellion doesn't mean that every action he took needed to be as God would have done. That's unrealistic to expect, and precludes the reality of Saul's free will. Put simply: being God's anointed didn't prevent Saul from making bad decisions. While he was to be looked up to in the expected event of him fulfilling his calling righteously, he eventually fell and didn't live up to his potential. His purpose in Israelite textual history is to serve as a wicked precursor to David, the good and righteous king, and to teach the Israelites the importance of doing things in God's way, rather than seeking the ways of the other nations. God accommodated the Israelites through his reluctant acceptance of kingship, but this first episode served as a painful lesson about the dangers kingship posed.



“THE LORD LOOKETH ON THE HEART”

Week 24 : Jun 8-14

What does Samuel's statement "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22) mean in the context of modern LDS ordinances? Does this echo the minor prophets' similar critiques of sacrifice?

In both this passage in Samuel and in some of the minor prophets (Amos, Hosea, and Micah) there's a certain level of dissatisfaction on God's part with the sacrificial offerings of the people. These other passages reflect the priorities of God as being justice, mercy, and love first, and offerings second. It seems in these contexts, for offerings to be correct at all, they must be done with good intent and in purity of conscience, and rulers must be more responsible for the people underneath them. This reflects the broadly Christian belief that the Eucharist or Sacrament should be partaken only by those worthy, and the Latter-day Saint consistent application of this principle across all ordinances.

What these passages and Samuel are not doing, however, is condemning all sacrificial offerings, festivals, and other practices without qualification. It's possible to interpret Amos 5:25-27 as insisting that Israel didn't offer sacrifice during their 40-year wilderness wandering, but this contradicts the record of the period. Alternatives to the rigid interpretation could be that Amos is engaging in hyperbole for rhetorical effect, or maybe that sacrifices to God in the wilderness period weren't as strictly codified as they were in Amos's time. Perhaps that elaborate system of Amos's day was acting as a distraction from things like justice and mercy.

Hosea and Micah reflect similar interests, though less harshly, and all three ought to be seen as rhetorical shocks. Common to the prophetic literature, they shock the reader/listener on something important. In this case, it's to focus on the right order of operations involved in morals, sacrifice, and worship, while maintaining the general essentiality of sacrifices to God. It's also notable that the later prophets are participants in the cult. Amos stood in the council of God, Isaiah had his call vision in the Temple, and Jeremiah came from a priestly family. Prophets aren't always outsiders attacking the system of sacrifices as a whole, they're often insiders demanding it function properly.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE BATTLE IS THE LORD’S”

JUN 15 1 Samuel 17:1-58

The story of David and Goliath.

JUN 16 1 Samuel 17:59-18:16

The victory of David and his rise to prominence.

JUN 17 1 Samuel 18:17-30

Saul's jealousy of David.

JUN 18 2 Samuel 5:1-16

David is made king over all Israel.

JUN 19 2 Samuel 5:17-25

David's victories over the Philistines.

JUN 20 2 Samuel 6:1-23

The Ark brought to Jerusalem.

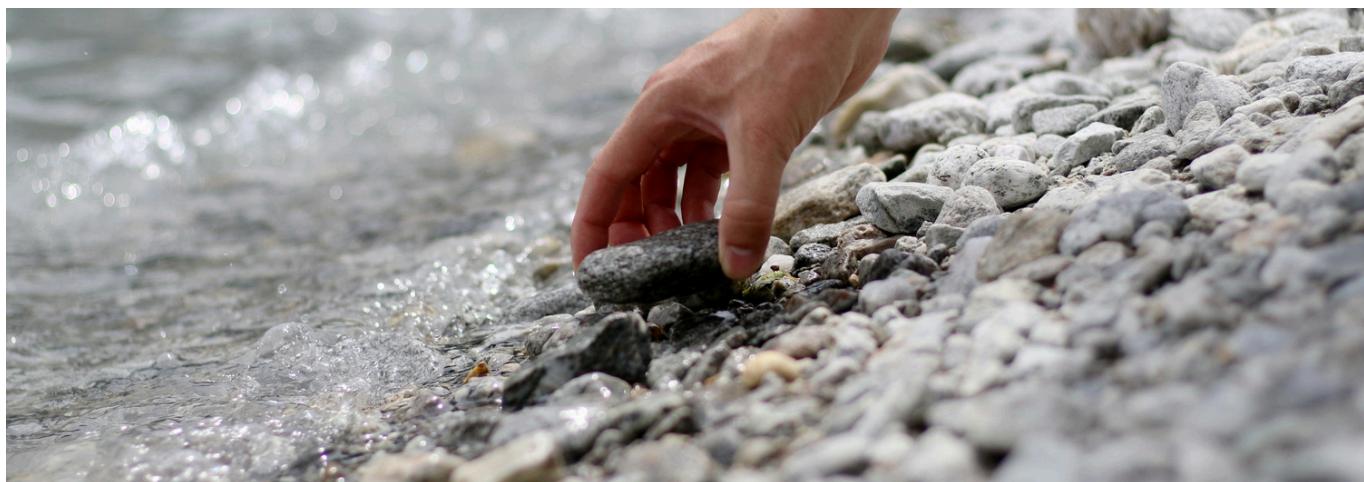
JUN 21 2 Samuel 7:1-29

God's covenant with David.

Week 25 : Jun 15-21

“All he used was a little pebble and a sling and inspiration and revelation. He had courage, he had strength, he had faith in himself, but especially faith in his Heavenly Father, to whom he offered his prayers. The 40 days of challenge and of egotism and boasting had ended for this Philistine in death!”

-By Spencer W. Kimball
 “The Davids and the Goliaths”
 October 1974





“THE BATTLE IS THE LORD’S”

Week 25 : Jun 15-21

Why does Saul seem not to know David in 1 Samuel 17:55-58 when David had already been his musician?

The Bible is the result of a long history of textual transmission and translation. In the course of the recording of Israelite history in 1 Samuel, it appears that there are a couple of traditions regarding that history that have been stitched together. In one, David is only known to Saul through his confrontation of Goliath, and in another, David is personally conversed with and dressed in armor by Saul. Little can be done with these internal contradictions without conjecturing that there were multiple traditions about David's heroic origins and his confrontation with Goliath.

Interestingly, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, doesn't contain the latter verses, so Saul seems to consistently understand that it's David who's going out to fight Goliath. Post-dating the Greek, it's actually the verses from the Masoretic text that add the texts that create a contradiction. The Masoretic text represents a later expansion that combined different traditions about how David came to Saul's court. In the earlier tradition represented by the Greek, David was a musician/armor-bearer first, but in the later Hebrew additions, he was an unknown shepherd boy who defeated Goliath.

While some stories may be contradictory or inaccurate, it's important to recognize that this shouldn't overthrow our beliefs in the principles behind many of these stories, much less damage faith in God. The earlier traditions demonstrate David's closeness with Saul and the court, while the later traditions emphasize the awe-inspiring power of God that David commanded. This is just one example of how the Bible is full of different layers of textual depth. Uncovering all the layers and how they're mixed together can tell us how Biblical figures were viewed by their recorders and audiences.

David declares "the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47) yet still has to use his sling to take down Goliath. How does this reflect divine investiture and authority in the scriptures?

One parallel to this kind of instance is the LDS idea of divine investiture of authority, which actually reflects ancient understandings of divine authority and action. When Jesus acts under the direction of the Father, or if an angel speaks as if they were God, it's an instance of a divine being assuming the authority of God the Father in a valid sense. In an ancient Israelite context, divine direction was occasionally obtained, and often assumed in Israel's actions with regard to warfare.

For the battle to have been “the Lord's” in the instance of 1 Sam 17, would mean that God was supportive of David's effort to slay Goliath and bring peace back to Saul's kingdom. This would facilitate David's increasing fame and allow him to rise to the status of a righteous king in contrast to the failed king Saul.



“THE BATTLE IS THE LORD’S”

Week 25 : Jun 15-21

Is God’s promise to David through Nathan about the continual kingdom (2 Sam 7:15-17) a failed prophecy in light of the Babylonian captivity and the cessation of the Davidic dynasty?

This text is a prominent source for both expectations of the invulnerability of the Davidic dynasty in the Hebrew Bible, and predictions for a Messiah particularly in later Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls) and Christian communities. From a historical perspective, it may appear that this was a false prophecy, since the Davidic dynasty ended at the time of the Babylonian exile. Further, no Davidic king was ever restored after the exile. Judah remained under Persian, Greek, and eventually Roman rule. The Hasmonean dynasty that came to sit on the throne came from priestly lineage, not David’s bloodline. There gradually ceased to be a way to determine Davidic descent with further catastrophes such as the destruction of the second temple in 70AD.

One way to look at this guarantee is as a conditional prophecy. All prophecies seem to be contingent on obedience or repentance (see Jonah 3:4, 10, where no condition for avoiding destruction is given), and the same might be for the guarantee in 2 Samuel 7. Verse 14 states that God will “chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men” even despite David’s explicitly exalted status. This could mean that the guarantee isn’t absolute, and subject to change. The guarantee could be viewed as a reassurance that God would remember his covenantal obligation to restore and preserve his people. This might be something fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his Atonement, and/or also a promise that God’s relationship with Israel would be preserved (as in Isaiah 55:3).



CFM Reading Guide

“HEAR THOU IN HEAVEN THY
PRAYER”

JUN 22 2 Samuel 11:1-27

The story of David and Bathsheba.

JUN 23 2 Samuel 12:1-25

Nathan's rebuke of David and his repentance.

JUN 24 2 Samuel 12:26-31

The defeat of the Ammonites.

JUN 25 1 Kings 3:1-15

Solomon asks for wisdom.

JUN 26 1 Kings 6:1-38

The building of the temple.

JUN 27 1 Kings 9:1-9

God's promise to Solomon.

JUN 28 1 Kings 11:1-13

Solomon's sin and God's judgment.

Week 26 : Jun 22-28

“Armed with the Spirit of the Lord, Solomon became God's instrument in building the holy temple for which Israel had hoped and prayed for many generations. But with the passage of time Solomon took him wives outside of Israel... From Solomon we can learn that knowledge and wisdom alone do not qualify people to lead.”

-By Spencer J. Condie
“Some Scriptural Lessons on Leadership”
April 1990





“HEAR THOU IN HEAVEN THY PRAYER”

Week 26 : Jun 22-28

What is the writer telling us by mentioning the fact that the story is set at the time of the year when “kings go forth to battle” but David sent his army to battle, yet “tarried still at Jerusalem”?

This is the beginning of the story of David and Bathsheba, one of two stories to explain how David fell short of a perfect kingship (the second at 2 Samuel 24:10). In the seasons of war in the Ancient Near East, usually around spring/summer time, it was usually expected of monarchs or leaders to accompany their armies. Verse one of chapter 11 highlights the fact that David was not joining his army. This is probably meant to imply that David is already in the wrong place to begin with, and that as one thing leads to another with his affair with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, sin or negligence often cascades into greater sin.

Does the phrase "given unto thee" in 2 Samuel 12:8 suggest divine sanction of plural marriage in the Old Testament? How does this align with Jacob 2:30's exception clause?

Apart from the implicit sanction of plural marriage through most levirite marriage situations in the Torah, 2 Samuel 12:8 is strong evidence that plural marriage was not prohibited, and that it was likely commanded in certain instances. The passage doesn't give a lot of specific information, but it informs us a little about what might have been going on:

- Nathan, or the prophets generally, gave David both his kingdom and his kingship
- Nathan gave David plural wives
- If either of those didn't satisfy David, then Nathan would have given him more of both.

This is incredibly interesting for latter-day saints, who not only find biblical precedent for plural marriage in the stories of the Patriarchs and such, but also believe that plural marriage is sometimes a commandment by God, as in the days of the LDS Church in the 19th century. In 2 Samuel 12:8, Nathan implies that it's his prophethood that allows him to permit David's plural marriages.

Jacob 2 is often used as a proof-text against plural marriage. However, this is committing two serious errors. The first is in assuming that Jacob's denunciations of polygamy are supra-cultural, meaning that they are universally applicable, even to the later LDS practice of plural marriage in the 19th century. Jacob had a specific audience and culture he was addressing, and ours is very different. His sermon indicates that his prohibition of plural marriage was to guard against evil motivations for taking additional wives. The second is disregarding the exception clause in Jacob 2:30, where God states that if the need arises, “I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.” 2 Samuel 12:8 suggests something similar, at least that if plural marriage is to occur, it would be through a prophet of God.



“HEAR THOU IN HEAVEN THY
PRAYER”

Week 26 : Jun 22-28

What does the prologue about Solomon's activities in 1 Kings 3:1-2 say about the attitude of the author towards Solomon's overall performance?

The first important thing to note is that the books of 1 and 2 Kings were written during or after the Babylonian exile. It was a time for much reflection over Israelite religious practice, especially over the things that were believed by many to cause both the demise of northern Israel centuries prior and their own captivity. Those practices were principally marriage with foreign women (and therefore, usually idolatry or worship of foreign gods), and sacrifices outside of the land of Jerusalem. Both of these are highlighted in 1 Kings 3:1-2.

To have married the daughter of Pharaoh was significant. In this case, though it appears the marriage would be for alliance's sake, it also indicated that Solomon was falling into worshipping other gods. The pharaoh's daughter carried royal, divine blood, so passing her off to a foreign ruler would be exceptionally rare and mark the beginning of Solomon's slips into breaking the first of the ten commandments. It was also a statement about alliances, showing how Egypt considered Israel to be a significant enough power to deal on equal terms with their own weakened political state.

High places were not an issue religiously before the time of the reforms of Josiah, which consolidated worship of Yahweh/Jehovah to the Jerusalem temple. It's incredibly unrealistic to expect all of Israel to uproot themselves and travel to Jerusalem several times a year, so local temples were anciently established at other sites (like Bethel, Shiloh, Gilgal, Shechem, etc.) to facilitate local worship. Later biblical writers often viewed the earlier multiple shrines through a complex lens. They were legitimate in their time, but superseded by the new temple in Jerusalem. These “high places” would only later be corrupted by syncretic worship practices, so the inclusion of this detail by the Deuteronomistic historian is positioned to display another way in which Solomon's grip on “correct” Ancient Israelite religious practice was slipping.



CFM Reading Guide

“IF THE LORD BE GOD, FOLLOW HIM”

JUN 29 1 Kings 12:1-33

A divided kingdom and the cost of unwise counsel

JUN 30 1 Kings 13:1-34

A prophet's disobedience.

JUL 1 1 Kings 17:1-24

The story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.

JUL 2 1 Kings 18:1-46

The Lord alone is God

JUL 3 1 Kings 19:1-21

God meets His servants in weariness and quiet faith

JUL 4 1 Kings 20:1-43

God shows mercy and sovereignty over nations

JUL 5 1 Kings 21:1-29, 22:1-53

Corruption, consequences, and the certainty of God's word

Week 27 : Jun 29-Jul 5

“We are then ready to ask our Heavenly Father sincerely, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, if the things we have learned are true. Most of us will not see God, as the prophets have, but the still, small promptings of the Spirit...will give us an undeniable knowledge that He lives and that He loves us.”

-By Spencer W. Kimball
 “Seeking to Know God, Our Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ”
 October 2009





“IF THE LORD BE GOD, FOLLOW HIM”

Week 27 : Jun 29–Jul 5

Prophets like Shemaiah, Elijah, and the unnamed man of God speak directly with God and perform miracles. Yet, the Bible also says "no man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). How do you reconcile these accounts?

When the Bible says “no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18), it refers specifically to God the Father in His full glory. No one can see Him as He is, without being changed or being in the presence of His divine glory. However, prophets in the Old Testament, such as Elijah, the man of God in 1 Kings 13, and others, did see manifestations of God through His Son, Jesus Christ, or were visited by angels acting in God’s name.

The Church teaches that God can reveal Himself in ways appropriate to mortals, allowing prophets to receive guidance, perform miracles, and testify of His will. The Church’s Gospel Topics essay on the nature of God explains that these experiences do not contradict John 1:18 because seeing God the Son or a theophany is different from seeing God the Father in His complete, glorified form.

In this way, our doctrine harmonizes scripture, showing that prophets can have real, direct encounters with God while upholding the truth that no one has fully seen the Father.

Why did God command the man of God in 1 Kings 13 not to eat or drink in Bethel, and then allow him to be deceived and killed when he disobeyed? Does that mean God’s prophets can fail, or that God’s instructions are sometimes unclear?

The story of the man of God in 1 Kings 13 teaches important lessons about obedience and trusting God’s commands. God’s instruction not to eat or drink in Bethel was a test of complete obedience. Even prophets can make mistakes if they fail to follow God’s direction fully. The man of God’s tragic death was not because God’s instructions were unclear or faulty, but because he chose to ignore them when tempted by another prophet.

Church teachings emphasize that God does not cause His servants to fail. Instead, He gives clear guidance and expects individuals to exercise their agency in following it. When we disobey, consequences can result, even for those who are prophets. This story illustrates that God’s instructions are always just, and that obedience is essential, regardless of personal feelings or outside influences. It also teaches us the importance of courage and steadfastness in following the Lord’s direction.



“IF THE LORD BE GOD, FOLLOW HIM”

Week 27 : Jun 29–Jul 5

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah heard God's voice as a 'still small voice.' How can we tell the difference between the Spirit's quiet promptings and our own thoughts or feelings?

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah discovered that the Lord's voice was not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but in a "still small voice." This teaches us how God often speaks—through quiet impressions to the mind and heart rather than dramatic signs. Revelation is usually a gradual process, like light growing brighter, helping us understand truth a little at a time.

The Spirit communicates in many ways: peace, clarity, a sense of love, or thoughts that encourage us to do good. These impressions will never lead us away from God's commandments. Over time, as we pray, study the scriptures, and strive to live righteously, we learn to recognize that these feelings come from the Lord and not simply from ourselves.

This requires humility and practice. Sometimes the Spirit's voice is so gentle that it could be mistaken for our own thoughts, but as we act on these promptings and see the good fruits that follow, our confidence in recognizing them grows. Elijah's experience reminds us that God's voice is often quiet, but it is always sure, guiding us if we are willing to listen and follow.



CFM Reading Guide

“THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL”

JUL 6

2 Kings 2:1-25

The ascension of Elijah.

JUL 7

2 Kings 3:1-27

Elisha's prophecy of victory.

JUL 8

2 Kings 4:1-44

Elisha helps a widow and raises a son.

JUL 9

2 Kings 4:38-44

Elisha's miracles of provision.

JUL 10

2 Kings 5:1-27

Naaman's healing and Gehazi's greed.

JUL 11

2 Kings 6:1-33

Elisha causes an axe head to float.

JUL 12

2 Kings 7:1-20

Elisha promises food and the Syrians flee

Week 28 : Jul 6-12

“The Lord has a different standard by which he measures a person. ... He does not take a tape measure around the person's head to determine his mental capacity, nor his chest to determine his manliness, but He measures the heart as an indicator of the person's capacity and potential to bless others.”

-By Marvin J. Ashton
“The Measure of Our Hearts”
October 1988





“THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL”

Week 28 : Jul 6-12

If the scriptures condemn human sacrifice, why are there biblical stories that appear to allow or even demand extreme actions involving human life?

While the scriptures clearly condemn human sacrifice, there are accounts that describe extreme actions involving human life, such as vows, judgments, or prophetic commands. These accounts do not indicate that God approves of arbitrary violence. Rather, they reflect specific historical, cultural, and covenantal contexts. God sometimes allowed consequences for sin, warned of destruction, or instructed prophets to act in ways that preserved His covenant people or demonstrated His justice.

The Lord consistently emphasizes mercy, love, and obedience. Actions that may seem harsh to us are often tied to God's long-term purposes, not casual endorsement of violence. Modern Church teachings stress that God's commandments must be understood in context, and that His ultimate desire is for life, not death.

Ultimately, these stories teach principles of accountability, faithfulness, and the serious consequences of sin, while reminding us that God's nature is just and merciful. The examples are descriptive of history, not prescriptive of human behavior today.

Why did Elisha perform healings using symbolic actions, like having Naaman dip seven times in the Jordan River or stretching himself over a child? Do these actions hold deeper spiritual meaning?

Elisha's healings often involved symbolic actions, such as instructing Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan River or stretching himself over a child. These actions were not merely ritualistic or arbitrary. They serve as outward, tangible expressions of faith that invite the participants to exercise obedience and humility. The symbolism underscores that God often works through physical means to teach spiritual truths, showing that healing, deliverance, or blessing comes as individuals align their actions with His instructions.

The Lord frequently uses simple, symbolic acts to teach profound lessons. For instance, Naaman's initial reluctance to follow Elisha's instructions demonstrates how pride can hinder blessings, while his eventual obedience leads to healing. Similarly, Elisha's act of stretching over the child symbolizes the power of the priesthood and the importance of faith in bringing about miracles.

These symbolic actions underscore the principle that obedience to God's commands, even when they seem simple or unusual, is crucial in receiving His blessings. They also remind us that God often works through ordinary means to accomplish His purposes, teaching us to trust in His wisdom and timing.



“THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL”

Week 28 : Jul 6-12

Why did Elisha call down bears to maul youths who mocked him? Does this reflect God's justice or mercy?

The story of Elisha and the bears in 2 Kings 2:23–25 is challenging for many readers. It emphasizes the seriousness of mocking or rejecting God's prophets rather than encouraging random violence. Prophets were God's authorized servants, and disrespecting them was equivalent to rejecting God's authority. The Lord uses such accounts to teach that sin and rebellion have real consequences, especially when persistent or defiant.

The story should be understood in its historical and cultural context. In ancient Israel, prophets were central to guiding the covenant people, and public disrespect could threaten the community's spiritual welfare. While the account is stark, it does not reflect God's usual dealings with individuals; He is merciful and patient, offering repeated chances to repent.

This story teaches respect for God's servants, the reality of accountability, and that rejecting divine guidance can have serious consequences. It is descriptive of God's justice in a specific time and place, not prescriptive for our daily behavior.



CFM Reading Guide

“HE TRUSTED IN THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL”

JUL 13 2 Kings 16:1-20

Ahab's sin and Ahaz's reign.

JUL 14 2 Kings 17:1-41

Israel's exile.

JUL 15 2 Kings 18:1-37, 19:1-37

Hezekiah's faith and the Lord's deliverance

JUL 16 2 Kings 20:1-21

Hezekiah's illness and God's mercy.

JUL 17 2 Kings 21:1-26

Manasseh's wicked reign.

JUL 18 2 Kings 22:1-20, 23:1-37

Renewal through God's word and covenant reform

JUL 19 2 Kings 24:1-20, 25: 1-30

Judah's fall and the hope that remains

Week 29 : Jul 13-19

“These fiery trials are designed to make you stronger, but they have the potential to diminish or even destroy your trust in the Son of God... These trials are often camouflaged, making them difficult to identify. They take root in our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities, our sensitivities, or in those things that matter most to us.”

-By Neil L. Andersen

“Trial of Your Faith”

October 2012





“HE TRUSTED IN THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL”

Week 29 : Jul 13–19

Hezekiah stayed faithful even when the Assyrians mocked his trust in God. But if God doesn't always deliver people from their trials the way He did for Hezekiah, why should someone still choose to stay true to the Lord?

When we look at the example of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18–19, we see a king under intense external pressure who “trusted in the LORD our God” (2 Kings 18:22) and whose faith helped drive reforms and reliance on God alone. Today, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are encouraged to follow that same pattern of trust and steadfastness when faith is challenged. For example, one article teaches: “To exercise faith is to trust that the Lord knows what He is doing ... and that He can accomplish it for your eternal good even though you cannot understand how He can possibly do it.” Additionally, we are instructed that when trials come, we should stay within the safety and security of the household of God, through scripture study, prayer, repentance, and righteous service.

Thus, when someone asks, “Why stay true to the Lord if the outcome isn’t guaranteed?” a doctrinal response is: Because true discipleship isn’t measured solely by visible deliverance, but by our faithfulness, our covenant-keeping, and our trust in a loving Heavenly Father whose purposes extend beyond this life. The scriptures and modern prophets teach that we are refined through trial, helped “step by step” as we trust, as we commit to being “true ... faithful and true we will ever stand.” We trust the Lord not only for the miraculous outcome, but for the transformation of our hearts and the strengthening of our souls.

If God truly prosters the righteous, why did He allow these wicked leaders like Ahaz and Hoshea to rise and even conquer His covenant people? Doesn't that contradict the idea that righteousness brings blessings?

The reigns of Ahaz, Hoshea, and later kings show that worldly success does not always equal divine favor. Scripture and modern prophets teach that prosperity in the Lord’s eyes means spiritual growth and covenant faithfulness, not temporary power or wealth. The Old Testament manual explains that “the Lord permitted Israel to suffer under unrighteous kings because of their own wickedness and refusal to hearken to His prophets.”

In 2 Kings 17, when the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, it was not proof that God favored the conquerors but that “they rejected His statutes ... and followed vanity” (2 Kings 17:15). God allows human agency to play out even when it results in temporary dominance of evil, because His purposes unfold over time, not always immediately in visible justice.

God still keeps His covenant promises: those who remain faithful will ultimately prosper in ways that matter eternally. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught that while “the righteous are not promised freedom from trials,” they are promised strength, peace, and eternal reward.

Thus, the success of wicked rulers serves as a sobering reminder that earthly triumph is fleeting, but the Lord’s covenant blessings are sure for those who remain steadfast in righteousness, regardless of present appearances.



“HE TRUSTED IN THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL”

Week 29 : Jul 13–19

King Ahaz sacrificed his own son, following the evil practices of surrounding nations. If God is all-powerful and loving, why did He allow something so horrific to happen among His own covenant people?

In 2 Kings 16:3 we are told that Ahaz “made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen.” This horrific act demonstrates a covenant-people king departing far from righteous worship and engaging in the idolatrous practices of the surrounding nations, rejecting the Lord’s guidance and covenant path.

Why does God allow such things among His covenant people? A key principle is that divine law includes agency, and when individuals and societies choose rebellion, they bring upon themselves the consequences of those choices. Ahaz “did evil in the sight of the Lord ... by sacrificing his son to the heathen gods and by offering sacrifices in the high places.” The Lord’s restraint does not mean endorsing or causing the act, but shows He allows the moral agency of individuals to act and the natural consequences to follow.

This account demonstrates two important doctrinal truths: first, that any practice, even among the covenant people, that departs from ordained and revealed law is full of risk; second, that the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the law of sacrifice have been refined so that we offer up as sacrifice a broken heart and a contrite spirit rather than the shedding of blood. When we understand that the Lord’s ultimate purpose is our spiritual growth, covenant-keeping, and return to Him, not just temporal deliverance, then the presence of evil, even among His people, becomes part of the larger context in which we must choose faith, obedience, and reliance on Christ.

In short: the account of Ahaz is a stark warning, not an endorsement of human sacrifice; it shows what happens when covenant people turn to the ways of the world. Church teachings remind us of a higher law of sacrifice and covenant keeping that transcends such horrors and directs us to follow the Savior in all things.



CFM Reading Guide

“OUR EYES ARE UPON THEE”

JUL 20 | 2 Chronicles 14:1-15

Asa's reforms and victory over Zerah.

JUL 21 | 2 Chronicles 15:1-19

Asa's continued reforms.

JUL 22 | 2 Chronicles 16:1-14

Asa's failure and consequences.

JUL 23 | 2 Chronicles 17:1-19

Jehoshaphat's reforms and victories.

JUL 24 | 2 Chronicles 18:1-34, 19:1-11

Jehoshaphat's alliance and rebuke

JUL 25 | 2 Chronicles 20:1-37

Jehoshaphat's prayer and victory over enemies.

JUL 26 | 2 Chronicles 26:1-23, 30:1-27

Uzziah's reign and passover celebrated

Week 30 : Jul 20-26

“Our Father is willing to guide each of us along His covenant path with steps designed to our individual need and tailored to His plan for our ultimate happiness with Him. We can anticipate a growing trust and faith in the Father and the Son, an increasing sense of Their love, and the consistent comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

-By D. Todd Christofferson
“Our Relationship with God”
April 2022





“OUR EYES ARE UPON THEE”

Week 30 : Jul 20-26

2 Chronicles 20:34 mentions 'the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat,' which were in the book of Jehu, but are not included in our current canon. Doesn't this raise questions about whether the Bible we have today is complete, and how can believers trust a closed canon when scripture itself points to other works?

The reference in 2 Chronicles 20:34 to "the rest of the chronicles of Jehoshaphat" acknowledges that additional inspired writings once existed but were not preserved in the current biblical canon. This omission does not diminish the completeness or reliability of the Bible; rather, it underscores that God's revelation was not confined to the texts we possess today.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we an "open canon," meaning it accepts the possibility of additional scripture and ongoing revelation. This perspective aligns with the understanding that God continues to communicate with His children, providing guidance and instruction beyond the ancient texts. The doctrine of a closed canon or the belief that no further scripture or revelation is needed, is not explicitly found in the Bible. In fact, the Bible itself contains references to other writings and prophecies not included in the current canon, suggesting that God's word is not limited to a fixed set of scriptures.

Therefore, the absence of certain writings, like those mentioned in 2 Chronicles 20:34, does not imply a deficiency in the Bible's completeness. Instead, it highlights the dynamic nature of divine revelation and the Church's openness to receiving further guidance from God.

If we're supposed to stay true to the Bible, how can the Church teach that the priesthood is open to everyone when scripture seems to show that God restricted it to only the Levite priests?

The account in 2 Chronicles 26:18–19 illustrates that King Uzziah was punished for attempting to perform priestly duties reserved for the descendants of Aaron, highlighting the strict limitations on priesthood authority in ancient Israel. However, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that God's plan has unfolded progressively, with priesthood authority being restored in the latter days to all worthy men, regardless of lineage.

In the Old Testament, priesthood authority was indeed restricted to the tribe of Levi, specifically the descendants of Aaron. This restriction was part of the Mosaic law, which was fulfilled and superseded by the coming of Jesus Christ. The Book of Hebrews explains that Jesus Christ, as the great High Priest, established a new covenant, rendering the old covenant and its associated priesthood obsolete (see Hebrews 7:11–12).

The restoration of the priesthood in the latter days, as taught by the Church, is seen as a fulfillment of prophecy and a return to the original authority given to God's servants. This restoration is not a contradiction of the Bible but a continuation of God's plan, ensuring that all worthy men have the opportunity to hold priesthood authority and serve in His name.



“OUR EYES ARE UPON THEE”

Week 30 : Jul 20-26

In 2 Chronicles 18 it says that the Lord allowed a ‘lying spirit’ to deceive the prophets of Ahab so that he would go up and fall. If God is perfectly truthful and cannot lie, why would He allow or even send a lying spirit to carry out His plan?

The account in 2 Chronicles 18 (verses 19–22) records that a spirit volunteered to become a lying spirit, and the Lord said, “Thou shalt entice him ... go out, and do even so.” This passage can seem troubling at first. How could a God of truth permit or direct a lie? However, both doctrinal principles and the Joseph Smith Translation help clarify what is happening.

In the JST, verse 22 shows that “the Lord hath suffered a lying spirit to be put in the mouth of these thy prophets.” The phrase “hath suffered” indicates that God allowed the deception rather than personally sending or inspiring it. This aligns with the doctrine that God cannot lie and that He honors moral agency, even when people choose evil.

Passages like this must be understood in context. The Bible sometimes uses human language to describe divine actions, meaning the Lord “permits” events that unfold according to agency and consequence rather than directly causing them.

Ahab and his prophets had repeatedly rejected true revelation. The lying spirit became part of their judgment which was a result of their willful blindness. God’s justice allowed deception to take its natural course, but He also provided Micaiah’s true warning, proving His fairness and mercy.

Ultimately, God remains a God of truth while allowing agency to operate. Through the Joseph Smith Translation and modern understanding, we see that the Lord does not lie or manipulate but permits individuals to follow the path they choose, even when that path leads to their own downfall. His purpose is to uphold agency, reveal truth, and accomplish His will through both justice and mercy.



CFM Reading Guide

“I AM DOING A GREAT WORK”

JUL 27

Ezra 1:1-11

King Cyrus's decree to rebuild the temple.

JUL 28

Ezra 3:1-13

The rebuilding of the altar and foundation of the temple.

JUL 29

Ezra 4:1-24, 5:1-17

Opposition arises, but God's work continues.

JUL 30

Ezra 6:1-22, 7:1-28

God completes His work and raises faithful leadership

JUL 31

Nehemiah 2:1-20

Nehemiah receives permission to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

AUG 1

Nehemiah 4:1-23, 5:1-19

Perseverance amid external threats and internal challenges

AUG 2

Nehemiah 6:1-19, 8:1-18

Completion of the wall and renewal through God's word

Week 31 : Jul 27-Aug 2

“There are few members of the Church who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith –even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty. Faith is to hope for things which are not seen but which are true.”

-By Dieter F. Uchtdorf

“Come, Join with Us”

October 2013





“I AM DOING A GREAT WORK”

Week 31 : Jul 27–Aug 2

**Why does God prioritize temple reconstruction immediately upon return?
Isn't this a burden for such poor people returning back to their land?**

For the Ancient Israelites, and other Ancient Near Eastern religions, the temple was central. It was the location of proper worship in the Israelite cult at least from the time of Josiah and afterwards, so rebuilding the complex after returning from exile would be paramount. Ezekiel narrated a vision of God leaving the temple because of the idolatrous practices of the Israelites prior to the exile. With the return from exile, there would be a newfound religious fervor, and desire to conform to the law as Israelites were restored to their promised land, community, and identity as the people of God. The excitement of recommitment to the law and the temple is described in Nehemiah 8:1-18.

The building of the temple was much more a privilege than a financial burden. The presence of Jehovah in their land defined an important part of their identity, and would have been the highest of everyone's priorities. In an ancient world where death and disease was very common, trust in God and performance of ritual practices would have been paramount. We in the modern day might have trouble understanding this different order of priorities since we have the capacity to live longer and at higher standards, but ancient populations that had their eye primarily focused on God needed the temple in their lives. In similar but better circumstances, the early prophets of the LDS church required a lot of the saints to build the temples for similar reasons as the Ancient Israelites. While God might not have physically dwell within the temple, it became an axis mundi between heaven and the earth for individuals to experience the glory of God and gain meaningful and spiritual visionary experiences.

A very large number of Israelites were exiled to Babylon, so why did few return from the captivity to Israel?

The Babylonian captivity was different from the Assyrian expulsion of northern Israelite peoples in the way that the people were kept under rule. Israelites expelled by Assyrian were deliberately spread across the empire to have them assimilated to local culture and develop new lands. Israelites under Babylon were able to keep their group identity, allowing for a proper return to Israel once Cyrus the Great took control of the nation. Regardless, without a proper centralized religious authority and with additional difficulties the captivity might have brought, it seems like there was still Israelite assimilation with foreign cultures in Babylon and the surrounding areas, abandonment of covenant identity, and slips into faithlessness.

For one example of trouble, it's unlikely that many who lived in Israel prior to the exile in 586 would have come back to their homeland in 538 because of death by old age. Very few people from before the exile were able to see their land again, so mostly descendants of exiles were the ones to return and recover a land that they were unfamiliar with. This could have resulted in reluctance to travel to a practically foreign land, on top of the other aforementioned factors of assimilation with other religions/cultures.



“I AM DOING A GREAT WORK”

Week 31 : Jul 27–Aug 2

How do we understand the exclusion of Samaritans from temple building (Ezra 4:1-3) and the dissolution of mixed marriages (Ezra 9-10) in light of modern values of inclusion? What principles guided these difficult decisions?

While these rules set out for those who were married to foreign women are startling to any reader (see how upset the people were in Ezra 10), it's important to remember that ideas of innate inferiority or racism were not necessarily at play. For the Ancient Israelite, boundaries were usually social, religious, or ethnic, and for the primary purpose of maintaining cultural and group identity. The Jews were God's chosen people, so the image produced by an intermarriage with someone from outside the group might be one of rebellion against God or the community, or idolatry (see for example, the main concern of Exodus 34:15-16). Therefore, it is certainly possible that these marriage break-ups were related to concerns about faith and practices rather than simply racial purity and prejudice. Verses throughout Ezra 9 emphasize the deliberate adoption of negative foreign practices, making this option plausible.

Alternatively, it's possible to see this as a well-intentioned mistake, but we should be wary of presentism and ensure that we have all the context possible on hand. In the case of this possibility, it's unfortunate that the Samaritans were unjustly excluded. This would sow centuries of discord between Samaritans and Jews, which continued far past even the New Testament period. It's important to remember that even prophets are fallible, and often have to make what they believe are the best decisions for the situation. But remember that with the inclusion of non-Jews/gentiles into God's chosen people, we have a renewed perspective that requires us to be accepting of all of God's children into the kingdom.



CFM Reading Guide

“THOU ART COME . . . FOR SUCH
A TIME AS THIS”

AUG 3

Esther 1:1-22

Queen Vashti's refusal and the decision to find a new queen.

AUG 4

Esther 2:1-23

Esther is chosen as queen.

AUG 5

Esther 3:1-15

Haman's plot to destroy the Jews.

AUG 6

Esther 4:1-17

Esther's decision to approach the king.

AUG 7

Esther 5:1-14

Esther prepares her request.

AUG 8

Esther 6:1-14

Haman's humiliation and honor for Mordecai.

AUG 9

Esther 7:1-10, 8:1-17

Esther reveals Haman's plot, and the Jews are saved.

Week 32 : Aug 3-9

“When we are righteous, willing, and able, when we are striving to be worthy and qualified, we progress to places we never imagined and become part of Heavenly Father's “divine design.” Each of us has divinity within us. When we see God working through us and with us, may we be encouraged, even grateful for that guidance.”

-By Ronald A. Rasband

“By Divine Design”
October 2017





“THOU ART COME . . . FOR SUCH
A TIME AS THIS”

Week 32 : Aug 3-9

Why does this author emphasize the role of women so strongly in saving Israel? What does that tell us about how women were perceived in Persian Israel?

Esther is another fascinating instance in the scriptures of authors giving high places to women in exempliative roles meant to be imitated. Esther's courage is inspiring, and her actions are instrumental in saving the Jews from the evil plot meant to kill them. While Mordecai's passive resistance is noticeable, it's really Esther's confrontation with the king that results in the Jews' victory over their enemies within the Persian government. Similar stories have been told in Israel as well, such as Deborah in Judges 4-5, Ruth, and Judith in the apocryphal book after her name.

This seems to reflect that there were a variety of perspectives about women and their roles throughout Ancient Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. Scripturally, women were instrumental in nearly all of the major stories. The actions of women ensured the successes of each of the patriarchs, protected the infant Moses, brought forth David's dynasty, and later were the first ones to testify of the resurrection of Jesus. Unfortunately, history is marked with plenty of sexism and misogyny based on other parts of the Bible as well, particularly portions of the Torah and some New Testament passages (see for example, Genesis 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). So, while there were varying views on the role of women throughout ancient history in Israel, the stories contained in the scriptures assigned them high roles and still teach us of the capacity of both men and women for equal greatness today.

What do we do with the fact that we don't have much historical evidence for Esther?

While the book of Esther has some verisimilitudes to the Persian court and other practices, there isn't clear evidence of a Jewish Persian queen and the events described in Esther. This does not mean that Esther is meaningless and trivial. It also doesn't mean that Esther is a fraudulent work of pseudo-history. Esther preserves a fascinating cultural memory of exile and captivity that runs through a large part of the Hebrew Bible. The Jews after the exile were very familiar with foreign powers reigning over them in the various places in the diaspora, and books like Esther and Daniel provided valuable lessons for people who may have been struggling in those political atmospheres. To enrich our study of Esther, searching for meaning and reading them the way that an Ancient Israelite would is paramount.

Unlike the Book of Mormon and some other restoration scripture, there isn't much at stake in LDS readership for a historical Esther. Regardless, there could be more discovered about the book of Esther in the future that supports its historicity, so it's important to keep an open mind and avoid strict dogmatism. There's plenty of room in the LDS church for people to hold either view, or to hold a completely different perspective on the book of Esther.



“THOU ART COME . . . FOR SUCH
A TIME AS THIS”

Week 32 : Aug 3-9

Why is there no mention of God or religious observances at all throughout the book of Esther?

The book of Esther, curiously, doesn't mention God or any specific Jewish practices, though this book is the basis for a later festival of Purim, celebrated by Jews yearly. In fact, it might go out of its way in certain parts to avoid mentioning God or related concepts. This is still a far cry from the book being atheistic, since God is implied to be behind the scene (see Esther 4:13-14) and the Jews are certainly God's covenant people who are in need of saving from annihilation. Rather, the book might be read to serve a purely temporal purpose, in teaching the Jews of the day how to stay strong despite outside and apostate cultural influences, how to have courage in the face of danger and death, and finally teaching about God's ability to preserve his people through unexpected means.



CFM Reading Guide

“YET WILL I TRUST IN HIM”

AUG 10 Job 1:1-11, 2:1-13

Satan challenges Job's integrity; Job loses everything but remains faithful

AUG 11 Job 3:1-26

Job laments his birth and wishes for death

AUG 12 Job 12:1-25, 13:1-28

Job responds to his friends, defends his understanding and pleads his case before God

AUG 13 Job 14:1-22, 19:1-29

Job reflects on mortality and declares hope in a living Redeemer

AUG 14 Job 21:1-34, 22:1-30

Job questions why the wicked prosper; Eliphaz offers harsh rebuke

AUG 15 Job 23:1-17, 24:1-25

Job longs to find God and questions the delay in justice

AUG 16 Job 38:1-41, 39:1-30, 40:1-24, 42:1-17

God answers Job from the whirlwind; Job repents and is restored

Week 33 : Aug 10-16

“If we looked at mortality as the whole of existence, then pain, sorrow, failure, and short life would be calamity. But if we look upon life as an eternal thing stretching far into the premortal past and on into the eternal post-death future, then all happenings may be put in proper perspective.”

-By Spencer W. Kimball
Teachings of Presidents of the Church
 2011





“YET WILL I TRUST IN HIM”

Week 33 : Aug 10-16

**How is it just for God to make a bet with Satan to prove how great Job is?
Isn't this an immoral and atypical thing for God to do?**

The book of Job is best identified with the other poetic books of the Old Testament such as Psalms and Proverbs. What this means is that they're read as poetry and/or wisdom literature. The purpose of these texts is to convey wisdom or principles of life and worship, so Job is right at home in the genre. The introduction to Job in chapter 1 is troubling, because it portrays God as taking up a bet against Job proposed by a satan/accuser (the Hebrew isn't clear that the personal figure "Satan" or "the Devil" is in mind). So in this story, Job is on the unfortunate end of a god trying to prove himself right to one of his underlings. This is typical of the treatment that other figures in Ancient Near Eastern texts would receive from gods in places like Ugarit and Mesopotamia. So while this behavior is strikingly different from the usual actions of God in the Hebrew Bible, the story's narrative similarity to earlier texts could show that Job is an ancient, yet mostly mythological story.

However, for the Book of Job to be mythological doesn't necessarily mean that it's fiction. Ezekiel 14:14, 20 seems to imply that a certain Job (among Noah and Daniel/Danel) was a real person, though their existing stories have likely been embellished over centuries of textual transmission. It's at least probable that his original story of faithful suffering was expanded into a poetic work and framed by a narrative about God contesting with His satan. Therefore, the Book of Job may be mostly ahistorical, while Job the person could maybe be historical. Latter-day Saints are free to hold any perspective on the subject, especially keeping in mind not to degenerate Job by asserting ahistoricity.

Should Job be considered historical in light of scriptures like Doctrine and Covenants 121:10?

In the likely case that the book of Job is mostly ahistorical, it doesn't mean that the book can't provide us with meaning. In the modern day, we draw plenty of inspiration from fictional stories in the form of books and movies. These stories are valuable to us as entertainment and character role models, and just so might have been the case with the book of Job. Allusions are made to figures throughout the scriptures, but they don't necessitate that everything written about them is true.

Doctrine and Covenants 121:10 is one such example of an allusion, which relates Joseph Smith's experience to that of Job's. But claiming that this means everything written about Job is factually historical misses the mark. After all, we make allusions to fictional characters all the time without implying that everything about them is journalistic history. We probably wouldn't say that Bilbo Baggins is a historical figure just because Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf related his experience in The Hobbit to our trials in mortality. Similarly, we wouldn't go hunting in the archaeological record for a historical good Samaritan after reading Jesus's parable. Both lines of thinking would be confusing genres and misunderstanding how people make references to fictional characters to teach valuable lessons.



“YET WILL I TRUST IN HIM”

Week 33 : Aug 10-16

If the book of Job undermines the claim that suffering is always deserved, what are we to make of God's response, which doesn't vindicate Job's innocence but simply asserts God's authority?

The Book of Job is especially beautiful as a poetic book because of the way that it explores this controversial idea: Is good and evil divided out by God according to righteousness? Job's conversation with his friends doesn't necessarily answer the question, yet it engages in a style typical of wisdom literature, posing possibilities and stacking contradictions against one another. This is much like Proverbs 26:4-5, where the first bit of advice is “Answer not a fool according to his folly” followed directly by, “Answer a fool according to his folly,” seemingly contradictory advice! The exercise of wisdom is meant to deepen one's understanding of the world and how to grow in character, not to provide answers to any and all questions.

It's possible that Job's conclusion is meant to be so anti-climactic that it borders on the point of irony. Job criticizes the righteousness=reward and wickedness=suffering framework for the majority of the poetic section, and in the end Job is bluntly rewarded for his faithfulness, just what the whole book was criticizing! The frame of the story may be contradicting the poetic dialogue such as to draw attention between the two much like the previous example from Proverbs. The juxtaposition of contraries encourages the reader to go back and study them both deeper. Understanding the scriptures in their context and genre will greatly help us see past difficulties or ambiguities for what the book really means. In this case with Job, careful analysis of the context and the plot devices in the story will teach us how ancient Israelites would have discussed the problem of evil, God's sovereignty, and a host of other subjects expressed throughout.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD”

AUG 17

Psalms 1:1-5, 2:1-12

The righteous vs. the wicked; the reign of God's anointed

AUG 18

Psalm 8:1-9

Praise for God's majesty and human dignity in creation

AUG 19

Psalm 19:1-14

God's revelation through creation and His Word

AUG 20

Psalms 20:1-9, 21:1-13, 22:1-31

Prayer for victory; trust in God; suffering of the righteous

AUG 21

Psalms 23-26

The Lord as Shepherd; trust, worship, and integrity

AUG 22

Psalms 27-30

Confidence in God amid trouble; thanksgiving for deliverance

AUG 23

Psalms 31-33, 40, 46

Trust and praise; deliverance; God as refuge

Week 34 : Aug 17-23

“God loves us as we are, but He also loves us too much to leave us this way. Growing up unto the Lord is what mortality is all about. Change is what Christ’s Atonement is all about. Not only can Christ resurrect, cleanse, console, and heal us, but through it all, He can transform us to become more like Him.”

—By Bradley R. Wilcox
“Worthiness Is Not Flawlessness”
October 2021





"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"

Week 34 : Aug 17-23

Does the imagery of God as a shepherd encourage blind faith in God or our leaders?

Latter-day Saints are not compelled to be obedient in the strict sense that most critics have in mind when they make this critique. Rather, most obedience is borne out of an understanding that the principles and practices of the Church lead to better living and an eternity with God and their families. We're taught that one of the primary purposes of entering into a mortal experience was so that we could learn obedience and learn to enjoy it. Obedience isn't something that limits what we can do like a list of do's and don'ts, but a paradigm that allows us to internalize the things that will bring us lasting happiness and avoid the things that will not.

Psalm 23 is representative of this in a couple ways. Everywhere the worshipper (the sheep) is led, is for his own protection and good. In verses 3 and 4, the ways that the worshipper is led are comforting, pleasing, and even described as being guided through the dark. We're not sheep blindly following the shepherd; rather, we're following a path that each of us believes is the right way to peace and security. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to gain experiential testimonies of rules and practices, learning the good that comes from keeping God's commandments and following them willingly.

Is the language of Psalm 29 a sign that Israel had incorrectly adopted Canaanite influences?

It's important to remember when approaching the Old Testament that the language will often very closely resemble the cultural environment of the Ancient Near East. The ancient Israelites were still people living in their ancient context, which meant that they would interact with stories, motifs, and themes in a variety of ways. Sometimes the differences between parallel stories can teach us the differences that were most emphasized by Israelite authors, such as when comparing Genesis 1 to the Babylonian Enuma Elish or focusing on Jehovah's concerns toward humanity in the Genesis flood story versus the Gilgamesh epic or Atrahasis, where the gods' view of humanity is mostly negative.

In compositions like Psalm 29, the author is borrowing terms and motifs that could accurately be used to describe Ba'al and mixing them with references to the God of Israel (Psalm 29:7-8). This isn't indicative of breaking any commandments or uncritically accepting bad or foreign influences, but rather an Israelite reappropriation of terms to exemplify ancient values towards God. Ancient peoples conceived of holiness not only in terms of righteousness, but also in might or strength, divine action in nature, and being a ruler who brought both strength to the people and peace and safety to the nation (see especially Psalm 29:10-11). It's another reminder that God will always speak to people in certain time periods in "the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding."



"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"

Week 34 : Aug 17-23

Are the worthiness standards reflected in Psalm 24, but primarily in LDS temple recommend questions, too strict or high of a standard?

Worthiness standards are not meant to be exclusive so that only a person of a certain status can access necessary blessings. In ancient Israelite religion connected to the 1st temple, the journey to become holy through the ritual and practices associated with the Torah was a gradual one built out of habit and diligence. This is comparable to our day, where we strive to be aligned with Christ's character. In practice, this is through learning how to follow the stipulations of our baptismal and temple covenants better over time so that we change ourselves and our desires. The goal for this is so that we can learn how to live a celestial life.

Psalm 24 is poignant in this area, stating quite simply, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" is one who can "stand in [Jehovah's] holy place" (Psalm 24:3-4). Standing in the holy place of the temple is a ritual action representative of one's confidence and personal worthiness. While "standing in the holy place" literally referred to priestly service, Psalm 24 applies this standard of worthiness more broadly to all who seek to approach God. Matters of conscience and intent were important for all people. Latter-day Saints are taught that worthiness isn't a lofty goal out of reach for most people, but a perfectly reachable standard for reflecting on our progress and closeness with God. This is possible because God desires that we continually improve ourselves and utilize repentance when (not if) we falter.



CFM Reading Guide

“I WILL DECLARE WHAT HE HATH DONE FOR MY SOUL”

A U G 2 4 Psalms 49:1-20, 50:1-23, 51:1-19

Warnings against trusting wealth; David's repentance

A U G 2 5 Psalms 61:1-8, 62:1-12, 63:1-11

Crying out to God for refuge and satisfaction

A U G 2 6 Psalms 64:1-10, 65:1-13, 66:1-20

Praise for God's protection, justice, and mighty deeds

A U G 2 7 Psalms 69:1-36, 70:1-5

David's suffering and plea for rescue

A U G 2 8 Psalms 71:1-24, 72:1-20

Plea for lifelong deliverance; prayer for the king's righteous reign

A U G 2 9 Psalms 77:1-20, 78:1-72

Remembering God's wonders and Israel's history

A U G 3 0 Psalms 85:1-13, 86:1-17

Prayers for revival and mercy

Week 35 : Aug 24-30

“Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. Repentance is not an event; it is a process. It is the key to happiness and peace of mind. When coupled with faith, repentance opens our access to the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”

-By Russell M. Nelson
“We Can Do Better and Be Better”
April 2019





“I WILL DECLARE WHAT HE HATH DONE FOR MY SOUL”

Week 35 : Aug 24-30

Does Psalm 82:6 support the Latter-day Saint doctrine of the Godhead and the idea we can become like God?

Often, critics of the Church coming from a different Christian background will criticize Latter-day Saints for using Psalm 82 as support for either (1) the view that there's more than one god quantitatively, or (2) views about deification or becoming like God. These critiques are well-intentioned attempts to harmonize the Bible with ideas about monotheism, but they ultimately fall short in some crucial areas.

The first critique is mistaken about the composition of the divine realm in ancient Israelite thought. It's common to hear that the gods of verse one are merely "judges" (as the prominent BDB Hebrew lexicon incorrectly includes under "אֱלֹהִים" as a possible definition). However, as demonstrated by the vast majority of Hebrew scholars since the mid 20th century, there is no context in the Hebrew Bible where "judges" is an appropriate translation for elohim, there is no linguistic basis for the definition, and the usage of "judges" is usually theologically motivated. Translating it as judges also obscures the role that the presence of God and personal judgement of God played in local legal matters in the law (see Exodus 21:6, 22:8-9, and 22:28). Especially here, in Psalm 82, translating elohim as "judges" obscures the ancient view of the divine realm that's corroborated by the Dead Sea Scrolls variant of Deuteronomy 32:8-9. In that strand of thought, multiple gods are considered to exist and have various influences over people and places, but only the head God or the national God matters to Israel in terms of worship (see Deuteronomy 6:4). This develops over time (with greater revelation on the subject) into the Latter-day Saint view where a multiplicity of perfectly unified divine beings, existing co-eternally, form the basis of the Godhead.

As for the second objection, technically there's nothing in the original context of the psalm that implies the potential of humans to reach godhood. While the High God (Heb: Elyon) has children who are called gods (v. 6), they are sentenced to "die like men" in the following verse, which doesn't square exactly with the Latter-day Saint understanding of deification. We don't believe that we're sentenced to a mortal experience because we've ruled the earth unjustly, as the gods of Psalm 82 were. In the New Testament, Jesus reappropriates this passage in John 10:34-35 to demonstrate how it isn't blasphemous for him to claim godhood (or at least divine sonship). This, according to his argument, is because those who receive the word of god share that godly status as well. And following the lead of Jesus, Early Christians used this psalm to support varying degrees of deification (like Justin Martyr, in *Dialogue with Trypho*, 124). This was standard interpretive practice for early readers of the Biblical texts, so creative interpretations such as this one shouldn't surprise us. It's under that Jewish-Christian interpretive hermeneutic that Latter-day Saints can find themselves in agreement with ancient hearers of and commentators on the psalm.



**“I WILL DECLARE WHAT HE
HATH DONE FOR MY SOUL”**

Week 35 : Aug 24–30

How do the authors of Psalm 50 and 51 understand the connection between sacrifices and keeping the commandments?

Much like the material found in the collection known as the minor prophets (Amos, Hosea, Joel, etc.), Psalm 50 and 51 have a very strong focus on correct moral behavior seemingly over sacrifices or ritual requirements. For example, Psalm 50:23 states, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.” The rhetoric gets as extreme as Psalm 51 when the psalmist declares, “thou desirest not sacrifice.” These should not be misunderstood as denials of the temple cult, but hyperbolic expressions emphasizing the need to perform them with correct intent. That psalm ends with a reminder that after a broken heart and spirit is offered, then are sacrifices and other offerings pleasing to God. So, rituals and ordinances are necessary, if accompanied by following the commandments.

Did David really write most of the Psalms, or were they written much later and only attributed to him?

The psalms are a very large and diverse group of hymns and poems that (by their own admission) are not solely written by David. Only about 50% of the psalms have explicit attributions to David, while others are either ambiguous, unmentioned, or attributed to people like the sons of Korah or Asaph. What's important to keep in mind is that authorship was generally not a huge concern for an ancient audience of scripture, and so we should not expect to see everything connected with a prophetic/kingly figure. Such is the case with the Psalms, which come from at least half a dozen individuals, and probably more. What makes something scripture is a mix of canonicity and inspiration, so theoretically scripture could come from a variety of sources. We can draw useful instruction from the Psalms in many ways that point us correctly to God.



CFM Reading Guide

“LET EVERYTHING THAT HATH BREATH PRAISE THE LORD”

AUG 31 Psalms 102:1-28, 103:1-22

Warnings against trusting wealth; David's repentance

SEP 1 Psalm 110:1-7, 116:1-19, 117:1-2

The Messiah's reign and gratitude for deliverance

SEP 2 Psalm 118:1-29

Give thanks to the Lord; His steadfast love endures

SEP 3 Psalm 119:1-88

Love for God's law and guidance in affliction

SEP 4 Psalm 119:89-176

Delight in and dependence on God's Word

SEP 5 Psalms 127-128, 135-136

Blessings of family and worship of God's greatness

SEP 6 Psalms 137-139, 146-150

God's presence, justice, and a call to praise

Week 36 : Aug 31-Sep 6

“Though choices may have taken you far away from the Savior and His Church, the Master Healer stands at the road that leads home, welcoming you. And we as members of the Church of Jesus Christ seek to follow His example and embrace you as our brothers and sisters, as our friends. We rejoice and celebrate with you.”

-By Dieter F. Uchtdorf
“The Prodigal and the Road That Leads Home”
October 2023





“LET EVERYTHING THAT HATH BREATH PRAISE THE LORD”

Week 36 : Aug 31–Sep 6

Psalm 110 says the Lord will make Christ's enemies His footstool, but evil still seems to rule the world. If this prophecy isn't fulfilled yet, how can you be sure Christ really reigns with power and authority right now?

Psalm 110 prophesies of the Messiah who would reign with divine authority as “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Although it may appear that evil still prevails, the Lord’s reign is both present and future. Jesus Christ began His reign following His Resurrection and Ascension, sitting at the right hand of the Father (see Mark 16:19). His rule is currently spiritual, governing the hearts of the faithful, and will become universal when He returns in glory during the Millennium.

Psalm 110 points to both the present ministry of Christ and the ultimate triumph of His kingdom. The apparent delay in the prophecy’s complete fulfillment reflects God’s timing, not the weakness of His power.

Christ’s Melchizedek Priesthood authority is active today through His restored Church, blessing and guiding individuals through revelation, ordinances, and covenant power. While evil temporarily exists, believers trust that the Savior’s promises are sure, that He reigns now in righteousness and will one day reign physically over all the earth.

Psalm 118 talks about ‘the stone which the builders rejected’ becoming the cornerstone, which Christians say refers to Jesus. But how can we be sure that’s really a prophecy about Him and not just poetic language about Israel or King David?

Psalm 118:22–23 declares, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.” While some interpret this as referring to David or Israel, both ancient and modern revelation confirm its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Savior Himself quoted this passage to describe His rejection by the Jewish leaders and His role as the foundation of God’s kingdom (see Matthew 21:42).

Jesus Christ is symbolized throughout scripture as “the chief cornerstone,” meaning He is the essential foundation of faith and salvation. The apostles also applied this psalm to Him, affirming that although He was rejected, His Resurrection and exaltation fulfilled the prophecy (see Acts 4:11).

Messianic psalms like Psalm 118 often have layered meanings including immediate historical context and later prophetic fulfillment. The psalmist’s words, inspired by the Spirit, pointed beyond David to the Messiah.

This prophecy’s enduring truth lies not just in poetic symbolism but in its witness that Christ, once rejected, reigns as the cornerstone of God’s eternal plan.



“LET EVERYTHING THAT HATH BREATH PRAISE THE LORD”

Week 36 : Aug 31–Sep 6

How do we excuse the violence of verses like Psalm 137:9 (“Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones”)?

Psalm 137 is the best-known exilic composition, and it describes the heavy feelings that were had initially in Babylonian captivity. It's important to keep in mind that the Israelites are experiencing a grave theological crisis, since they were without their temple/sanctuary, and completely under foreign rule. There's a real question in the psalm whether Jehovah could even be worshipped in a foreign land (Psalm 137:4). They felt as though their promises had been broken, and they possessed guilt that they might not have lived up to their side of the covenant. These feelings powerfully manifested themselves in the violent frustration of the end of this psalm. But this type of rhetoric/expression is typical of ancient poetry. If it seems shocking to us today, then that means that the psalm is working as intended. We should refrain from taking the passage literally and seek to understand the intent and literary device behind the passage.



CFM Reading Guide

“HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS”

SEP 7 Proverbs 1:1-33, 2:1-22

The purpose of Proverbs; the value of wisdom

SEP 8 Proverbs 3:1-35, 4:1-27

Trust in the Lord and the path of wisdom

SEP 9 Proverbs 15:1-33, 16:1-33

Words, humility, and God's sovereignty

SEP 10 Proverbs 22:1-29, 31:1-31

Practical wisdom and the virtuous woman

SEP 11 Ecclesiastes 1:1-18, 2:1-26

The meaninglessness of earthly pursuits

SEP 12 Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

There is a time for everything in life

SEP 13 Ecclesiastes 11:1-10, 12:1-14

Live joyfully and remember your Creator

Week 37 : Sep 7-13

“ We can be blessed to hush our fears because His doctrine provides purpose and direction in all aspects of our lives. His ordinances and covenants fortify and comfort in times both good and bad.

And His priesthood authority gives assurance that the things that matter most can endure both in time and in eternity.”

—By David A. Bednar
 “Therefore They Hushed Their Fears”
 April 2015





“HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS”

Week 37 : Sep 7-13

Why is the tone and outlook on life in Ecclesiastes so radically different from Proverbs?

Both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes find themselves in the “writings” portion of the Old Testament. Within that category, these two books are often called wisdom literature, which passes on a tradition of seeking after wisdom and pondering over religious practice to arrive at wisdom. As such, it’s perfectly normal for separate books to differ in opinion (even by a lot!), and even for the same book to disagree with itself in certain ways (see Proverbs 26:4-5). The goal of these books is to provide lessons and examples to guide the reader or listener towards wisdom. They are not primarily occupied with giving exact answers to life’s questions.

To many people, Ecclesiastes represents a somewhat nihilistic view of the world (“What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?”), while Proverbs is perceived as more exact and instructive, like a set of rules and recommendations to master. In reality, both are more concerned with providing separate outlooks on life (wisdom) that should be carefully wrestled with and related to one’s own experience. That they sometimes disagree with one another can also teach us about the concerns of ancient authors with regard to scripture and their intellectual diversity. Both books invite us to ponder over how to do the right thing in various situations in life and bring ourselves closer to God.

Is Ecclesiastes 12:7 a good proof-text for a premortal existence?

Maybe. Latter-day Saints should be careful using single verses as evidence for certain beliefs in the Bible and the surrounding time period. This is especially recommended since we don’t ultimately derive our belief about the premortal existence from the Bible, but from modern revelation (see Abraham 3:22-23, Doctrine and Covenants 138:55-56, Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, Doctrine and Covenants 49:17). The wording of the verse is somewhat ambiguous, since “spirit” or “ruah” could either mean a spirit behind the physical body, or simply one’s “breath” or “life” as in Genesis 2:7. If the former, it would mean that spirits are generally from God, or at least given by him. If the latter, then the verse is better read as a parallelism where life or breath returns to its source (God) in the same way that dust returns back to the earth. Though either readings don’t particularly impact LDS belief in the premortal existence, it is ultimately up to the reader and interpreter to decide which interpretation is more plausible.

Could Proverbs 8:22-31, where Wisdom speaks of being present at creation (“When he established the heavens, I was there.”), support the idea of things preexisting material?

The Bible, much less the Old Testament, doesn’t contain any explicit reference to the Christian doctrine of Creatio Ex Nihilo (creation out of nothing), since it was developed later in the second century CE. The way that the author of Proverbs talks about personified wisdom shows that there were no issues with conceiving of things existing before or at creation. In this instance, there’s no indication that wisdom is created out of nothing. Wisdom was appointed by God even before creation (Proverbs 8:23), and the “created” verb used for it in verse 22 has a larger range of possible translations, including “get” or “acquire.” It’s important to remember that verbs used to describe creation were never given the extra meaning “out of nothing” until Christians began to read their doctrinal developments into the scriptures in the absence of verses that taught it explicitly.



CFM Reading Guide

“GOD IS MY SALVATION”

SEP 14

Isaiah 1:1-20

God's call to repentance and sincere worship

SEP 15

Isaiah 2:1-22, Isaiah 3:1-26

The coming judgment and the hope of God's future reign

SEP 16

Isaiah 4:1-6, Isaiah 5:1-30

God's holiness and the consequences of injustice

SEP 17

Isaiah 6:1-13

A vision of God's holiness and Isaiah's calling

SEP 18

Isaiah 7:1-25, Isaiah 8:1-22

Trusting God amid fear and uncertainty

SEP 19

Isaiah 9:1-21, Isaiah 10:1-34

Judgment tempered with messianic hope

SEP 20

Isaiah 11:1-16, Isaiah 12:1-6

The promised King and songs of salvation

Week 38 : Sep 14-20

“ The Savior can provide protection and peace to guide you ultimately to safety and shelter from life's storms...I testify and provide my personal apostolic witness that Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, leads and guides His restored Church. His life and atoning mission are the true source of peace. He is the Prince of Peace.”

-By Quentin L. Cook
 “Personal Peace in Challenging Times”
 October 2021





“GOD IS MY SALVATION”

Week 38 : Sep 14-20

Why is Isaiah commanded by God to “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.”? (Isaiah 6:9) Is this instruction limiting the peoples’ abilities to repent?

Though chapter 6 is about Isaiah’s call, its place within the book of Isaiah is important for understanding its context. Chapter 5 includes a parable, denunciations of the peoples’ behavior, and predictions of what will befall them in the coming Assyrian invasion. It’s already known that Assyria is coming and that Israel is in peril, so there’s very little hope for the peoples’ political security. All that can be done for northern Israel is a plea for repentance and possible escape. Isaiah 6 simply reflects what is true about the future given the current historical circumstances—he’s not limiting the peoples’ ability to repent.

Isaiah is prophesying very much like how Jonah is described prophesying, where declarations of destruction are made without much qualification or condition for salvation (Jonah 3:3-5). Despite this narrow formula for prophesying, destruction or other punishments are not across the board applications, nor are they absolute and inalterable (Jeremiah 18:8-10). Prophecies are always contingent upon repentance. It’s possible that many in the large influx of refugees into Judah and Jerusalem at the end of the 8th century BCE were those who had listened to Isaiah’s prophesying and repented (probably including Lehi’s extended family).

How do the titles listed in Isaiah 9:6-7 match up with both the idealized king (in the historical context) and Jesus Christ’s life and purpose?

Christians, using the hermeneutics typical of early Jewish interpretation, saw in Isaiah 7 and 9 important images of Jesus Christ, who would be born several hundred years after Isaiah is making these pronouncements. With these methods, Isaiah 9:6-7 can be read as teaching a lot about not just the current coming king in Isaiah’s day, but also the coming Savior of the world.

- Wonderful Counselor - Emphasizes the wise and benevolent rule that each figure would have. “Counselor” in the Hebrew indicates something like an advisor, and so such a counselor would be a great and wise teacher.
- Mighty God - (Heb: “El Gibor”) Refers to the saving and divine aspect of Jesus Christ. He would be a representative of God the Father and be someone who could save others from trouble.
- Everlasting Father - “Father” in the Ancient Near East connotes a special kind of relationship of just leadership and responsibility to lower family members, showing that this figure would reign justly in perpetuity/forever (Heb: “ad”).
- The Prince of Peace - The figure in mind would also be someone who would rule in peace and prosperity due to the blessings of Jehovah upon him (see also verse 5).



“GOD IS MY SALVATION”

Week 38 : Sep 14-20

Why does Isaiah 10:5-7 depict Assyria as the tool of God against Israel and Judah when it causes so much death and destruction?

The message that Isaiah is trying to convey in these chapters is that God is in control (see also Amos 3:1-6). This also means that God is responsible for the destructions that occur, but it's better to read this as the prophet being assigned a responsibility by God to give these destructions purpose and a way to avoid them (in other words, the prophets are privy to God's "secrets" as in Amos 3:7). This is clearly the case with Assyria, where the destruction of Israel and parts of Judah are being turned into powerful lessons for Judah: if they don't turn from their ways, they will be destroyed as well. So it's unlikely that God is actually controlling Assyria, but Isaiah is using a device typical of prophetic literature to convince people to turn back to Jehovah.



CFM Reading Guide

“A MARVELLOUS WORK AND A WONDER”

S E P 2 1

Isaiah 13:1-22, 14:1-23

God's judgment on Babylon and restoration of Israel

S E P 2 2

Isaiah 22:1-25

Judgment on Jerusalem for misplaced trust

S E P 2 3

Isaiah 24:1-23

Global judgment and the earth's devastation

S E P 2 4

Isaiah 25:1-12

Praise for God's deliverance and future hope

S E P 2 5

Isaiah 26:1-21,27:1-13

Songs of trust and promise of restoration

S E P 2 6

Isaiah 28:1-29, 29:1-24

Warnings to leaders and the blindness of the people

S E P 2 7

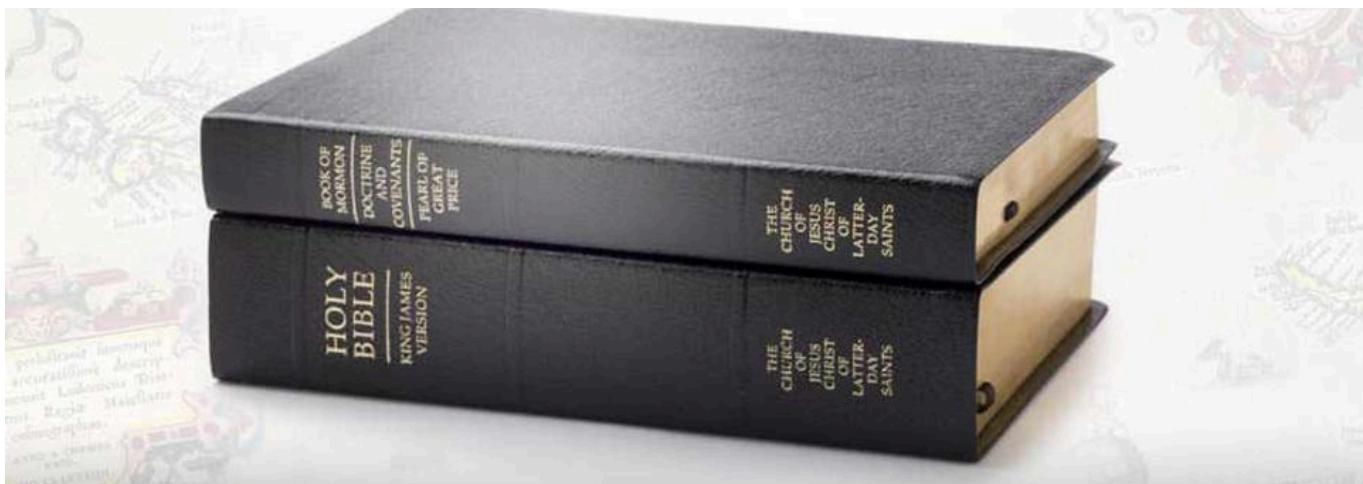
Isaiah 30:1-33, 35:1-10

Warning against alliances and promise of future glory

Week 39 : Sep 21-27

“To marvel at the wonders of the gospel is a sign of faith. It is to recognize the hand of the Lord in our lives and in everything around us. Our amazement also produces spiritual strength. It gives us the energy to remain anchored in our faith and to engage ourselves in the work of salvation.”

-By Gérald Caussé
“Is It Still Wonderful to You”
April 2015





“A MARVELLOUS WORK AND A WONDER”

Week 39 : Sep 21-27

How does Lehi extrapolate a Satan/Devil figure from Isaiah 14 when that understanding wouldn't be fully developed until the time of late second temple Judaism?

Remember that the Book of Mormon was also translated partly through Joseph Smith's theological language, so he has to choose what kinds of words and concepts will most closely match what's on the golden plate text. This may apply to the explicit personification of the "the satan", which doesn't happen very often until later periods in Judaism. For instance, in Job 1, the satan (hasatan) is an adversary that's under God's command, not a rebellious opponent to God and his plan. This would shift in meaning to the Devil in early Christianity. Joseph Smith may understand conceptually that in the text there's a being of some sort that fights against God, and he chooses to give it the English meaning of devil.

Also and perhaps alternatively, Lehi and his family, because of their cultural heritage from the north and from pre-exilic Israel, likely had exposure to ancient Israelite and Canaanite myth that Isaiah 14 presupposes knowledge of. Isaiah is drawing off of a myth about the arrogance of 'Athtar, a lower divine being, to rise to the stature of the most high god and to change or do away with his decrees. Lehi determines logically (2 Nephi 2:17) that this must have been a real occurrence of some sort in the Israelite schema of the cosmos and that this angel "became a devil" for seeking and doing evil. In short, the understanding of Book of Mormon authors about the devil may stem from Lehi's interpretation of Isaiah as indicating a real change in the divine hierarchy. This then resulted in the Devil close to how we might understand it today. This is an idea that was certainly developed bit by bit over time with more revelation, so we shouldn't expect ancient people to understand it exactly the same way that we do.

Is Isaiah 29 really about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as Nephi uses it?

Isaiah 29 isn't specifically about the Book of Mormon, but Nephi is authoritatively adopting its themes and wording to teach a lesson about how God will preserve their history for the future. Nephi's use of Isaiah 29 in the Book of Mormon is very unique compared to his other quotations of Isaiah. Rather than quoting Isaiah 29 in full with several differences along the way, the Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 17 is more integrated into Nephi's sermon. For example, the short pericope in Isa 29:11-12 is extended into an impressively long expansion detailing events such as the three witnesses of the gold plates, the Charles Anthon episode, and the diffusion of the Book of Mormon into the whole world in 2 Nephi 27:6-22. This is a much more extreme instance of "likening" where Nephi is doing something like a prophetic adaptation of Isaiah's message into something totally new for his ancient audience, and potentially for an audience in the latter-days.



“A MARVELLOUS WORK AND A WONDER”

Week 39 : Sep 21-27

What does it mean to learn “precept upon precept; line upon line” (Isa 28:13) in the context of hearing “the word of the LORD”?

Revelation from God isn't always universal, and therefore must be accommodated to the time and place of both the author and audience. We see this most clearly in how Joseph Smith's revelations are received gradually over time as Joseph Smith continues to work on the New Translation, or in the way that ancient prophets still retained their ancient view of the cosmos (flat earth, firmament, tiered realms upwards until God). Isaiah in this passage is proclaiming repentance to rulers in Jerusalem (Isa 28:14) and Isaiah is rhetorically asking who could teach people enough to bring them out of their wicked practices (Isa 28:7-9). Isaiah commands the people to hear the word of the word, which comes bit by bit, and maybe not in the way that they would expect. The same is for us, where we need to be conscious of how God speaks to us through modern prophets and apostles little by little over time.



CFM Reading Guide

“COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE”

S E P 2 8

Isaiah 40:1-31

God's comfort and promise of strength for the weary

S E P 2 9

Isaiah 41:1-29

God promises to strengthen Israel

S E P 3 0

Isaiah 42:1-25

The servant of the Lord, a light to the nations

O C T 1

Isaiah 43:1-28

God's redemption of Israel and His unending love

O C T 2

Isaiah 44:1-28

God's promise to Israel; the foolishness of idols

O C T 3

Isaiah 45:1-25, 46:1-13

Cyrus as God's instrument and the futility of idols

O C T 4

Isaiah 47:1-15, 48:1-22, 49:1-26

Judgment on Babylon and Israel's restoration

Week 40 : Sep 28-Oct 4

“[Y]ou have already been saved—by the One who has suffered the very torment you are suffering and endured the very agony you are enduring. Jesus has overcome the abuses of this world...to completely rise above the pain, the misery, the anguish, and see them replaced by peace.”

-By Patrick Kearon

“He Is Risen with Healing in His Wings: We Can Be More Than Conquerors”
April 2022





“COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE”

Week 40 : Sep 28-Oct 4

Does Isaiah 43:10 preclude the possibility of becoming like God?

Like the majority of the texts in Isaiah 40-49, Isaiah is concerned with the worship of foreign deities and absolute loyalty to Jehovah. The primary objection to Latter-day Saint doctrine brought up from Isaiah 43:10 is the last line, which states “before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.” But, to use this as a proof-text against deification/exaltation would be to divorce the verse from its context and therefore misconstrue its application. Isaiah doesn’t have in mind some future cultures that would blasphemously declare themselves gods.

When Isaiah talks about “forming” gods, he’s explicitly polemicising the practice or fashioning idols out of wood and stone (see Isaiah 42:17). The text is ordered so that though God formed Israel, Israel went and formed other gods, and this broke God’s trust in Israel. In response, God is emphatically declaring that he’s the only one who can save them, and that there was no god formed before or after Him that has the capacity to save. So this text in no way precludes the Latter-day Saint belief in exaltation.

Are the declarations contained in Isaiah 40-49 (like “no one beside me” in Isa 45:6) monotheistic and exclusive statements against the existence of other divinities?

In this period of Israelite history, there is a much larger struggle against the worship of foreign gods than ever before. The Israelites commonly acknowledged the threat of idolatry, but would sometimes refer to the deities of other nations as though they existed. There are a couple examples of this. In Judges 11:24 and 2 Kings 3, Chemosh is assumed to be a real entity that has power and dominion over the land of Moab. In the conflict with the prophets of Ba’al in 1 Kings 18, Elijah doesn’t contest the existence of Ba’al, rather, only his influence over Israel is in question. And lastly, Namaan taking dirt from Israel might be a sign that he needed Israelite soil to worship Jehovah upon, since the common cultural understanding of deities disallowed him from worshiping Jehovah in a foreign nation dominated by a foreign god.

Paramount for the ancient Israelites wasn’t denying the existence of other gods, but rather exclusivistic worship of Jehovah over other gods (Deut 6:4). What Isaiah is doing is very similar to other writers of Biblical literature, where Jehovah is incomparably greater than all of the other gods (see Exodus 15:11, Exodus 18:11, Psalm 86:8, Psalm 29:1, Psalm 95:3, Psalm 96:4-5, Deuteronomy 32:43, etc). Isaiah is utilizing a more extreme “one-god-rhetoric” where other gods are so insignificant compared to Jehovah that they are nowhere on the same level. This rhetoric isn’t only used for deities in the scriptures. Consider the line from the very same portion of Isaiah where Babylon says “I am, and none else beside me” (Isaiah 47:8). Is Babylon the only city in existence? No. Clearly Isaiah was very familiar with this type of rhetorical language, and used it on a variety of subjects to strengthen his message. Latter-day Saints don’t think in the same terms as ancient Israelites (you’d be hard pressed to find one expressing a belief in Chemosh!), but the Israelite paradigm for divinities didn’t disallow for multiple beings to hold godlike status, or even for a father God to be above Jehovah (see NRSV Deut 32:8-9).



“COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE”

Week 40 : Sep 28-Oct 4

Does the issue of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) pose a problem for the Book of Mormon?

Deutero-Isaiah is a complicated problem that Biblical scholars have been publishing work on for a very long time. Because of the seemingly abrupt shift in context and theme between chapters 1-39 and 40-55, it's been proposed that there was a second author of the book of Isaiah who wrote during the exile, and perhaps even a third author that wrote the rest of the chapters (called "Trito-Isaiah"). The Book of Mormon notably contains chapters of Isaiah from Deutero-Isaiah (48-51 and portions of 52 and 53), but none from Trito-Isaiah. This issue is important for determining whether brass plates containing these Deutero-Isaiah chapters would be possible.

There are a multitude of theories that one could adopt in order to account for the problem. One is simply to insist from the Book of Mormon that Isaiah is mostly a complete work, or at least the portions cited in the Book of Mormon are authentic to the 8th century BCE prophet. This can be supported by arguing that changes in content and theme don't determine different authorship. Alternatively, one could accept the Deutero-Isaiah separation and still hold that the portions of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon were known as either additional writings of Isaiah, and/or independent compositions that represented older traditions about a suffering servant that Isaiah preserved. All theories have their strengths and flaws and deserve to be researched, so it's up to the believer to determine what theory accounts best for the data.



CFM Reading Guide

“HE HATH BORNE OUR GRIEFS,
AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS”

O C T 5

Isaiah 50:1-11

The servant of the Lord's suffering and trust in God

O C T 6

Isaiah 51:1-23, 52:1-15

God's comfort for the afflicted; the coming salvation

O C T 7

Isaiah 53:1-12

The suffering servant—prophecy of Jesus' atoning sacrifice

O C T 8

Isaiah 54:1-17

Promise of restoration and blessing for Israel

O C T 9

Isaiah 55:1-13

Invitation to salvation and the joy of seeking God

O C T 10

Isaiah 56:1-12

God's invitation to all nations and a call to righteousness

O C T 11

Isaiah 57:1-21

Warnings against idolatry and promises of peace for the humble

Week 41 : Oct 5-11

“By voluntarily taking upon Himself the sins of all mankind, being cruelly nailed to the cross, and victoriously conquering death on the third day, Jesus gave a more sacred significance to the Passover ordinance that had been bestowed upon Israel in ancient times. In fulfillment of prophecy, He offered His own body and precious blood as the great and last sacrifice.”

-By Ulisses Soares

“Jesus Christ: The Caregiver of Our Soul”

April 2021





“HE HATH BORNE OUR GRIEFS, AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS”

Week 41 : Oct 5–11

Is Jesus Christ the servant identified in Isaiah 52 and 53?

When approaching Old Testament texts that can be framed as prophecies, as these chapters are, it's important to keep in mind that there is usually a dual fulfillment to these ancient texts and predictions. Important questions arise if we consider Isaiah to be speaking only about the future. If Isaiah was not speaking relevant things in his own time and place, then would his writings be preserved by his audience? If people simply couldn't understand what Isaiah meant, then why would Isaiah preach these things? After all, Isaiah doesn't have an eye solely on the future, as most modern conceptualizations of prophetic duties would make it seem. First and foremost, Isaiah is a spokesperson for God, and his prophetic book reflects his authority to issue divine commands and guidance. This is the same case with the identity of the servant in these Isaiah passages. It's likely that Isaiah is personifying Israel in the original context of the passage, as many other prophets have done before. Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all portray Israel as the bride of God in similar analogies to teach about fidelity. These analogies were carried over into the Christian period to substitute Israel for the church, so the idea that a servant/son/bride of God could be a personification of the covenant community never really died out. However, the interpretation of the servant being Jesus is a fuller expression of the perfect servant of God, or a perfect manifestation of what Israel could be. Later apostles and prophets had the authority to give this passage its fullest meaning in a Christological sense. In the Christian dual-interpretation of this prophecy, Christ is the pinnacle of service to God, and both a savior and model for Christian believers.

How do Nephi's and Abinadi's commentaries on these Isaiah chapters provide interpretive keys unavailable in the Bible alone?

Nephi and Abinadi famously interact with Isaiah in the text of the Book of Mormon in creative ways. Nephi says that the scriptures he recites should be likened unto “all men” (2 Nephi 11:8), while Abinadi is expounding Isaiah 53 for his audience's understanding. Both are ultimately focused on drawing their audiences to Christ and to a correct understanding of his future role in providing an atonement for mankind. Since Isaiah isn't directly speaking about a Messiah (but perhaps indirectly, or in the sense of a dual-fulfilling prophecy), Nephi and Abinadi are using an interpretive convention of their day to give the text new or hidden meaning for their context. They, like the authors of the New Testament, have already revealed to them that Christ subverted the common expectations of a Messiah, instead fulfilling a view of the Messiah more focused on vicarious suffering as depicted in Isaiah 53. This was a perfectly legitimate form of interpreting the scriptures, and Latter-day Saints and prophets still use it today to teach lessons based on verses in a way that may be a non-contextual or even allegorical interpretation.

How do Isaiah 56:3-8 (inclusion of foreigners and eunuchs) anticipate the universal scope of the gospel?

In a tightly knit covenantal and ethnic community, group identity for the Israelites was essential to cultural survival. Integration of foreigners was viewed as somewhat dangerous as a threat from the standpoint of idolatry, yet prophets always looked ahead to a future time when gentiles would share in Israel's blessings, fulfilling God's covenant to Abraham. Isaiah has one such vision where anyone who accepts and keeps the covenant can be a part of God's people. This was fulfilled in the time of Christ, where the new covenant was extended to gentiles regardless of circumcision.



CFM Reading Guide

“THE REDEEMER SHALL COME TO ZION”

O C T 1 2 Isaiah 58:1-14

True fasting and the call to justice

O C T 1 3 Isaiah 59:1-21

God's indictment of sin and His promise of redemption

O C T 1 4 Isaiah 60:1-22

The glory of the Lord and the future restoration of Israel

O C T 1 5 Isaiah 61:1-11

The Messiah's mission to proclaim good news

O C T 1 6 Isaiah 62:1-12, 63:1-19

God's salvation and judgment; the righteous reign of God

O C T 1 7 Isaiah 64:1-12, 65:1-25

Prayer for mercy and God's promise of a new heaven and earth

O C T 1 8 Isaiah 66:1-24

God's final judgment and the glory of the new heavens and earth

Week 42 : Oct 12-18

“The ordinances of baptism by immersion, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the sacrament are not isolated and discrete events; rather, they are elements in an interrelated and additive pattern of redemptive progress. Each successive ordinance elevates and enlarges our spiritual purpose, desire, and performance.”

-By David A. Bednar

“Remission of Your Sins”

April 2016





“THE REDEEMER SHALL COME TO ZION”

Week 42 : Oct 12-18

How do these chapters distinguish between external religious performance and genuine discipleship?

This final segment of Isaiah is very concerned with the far, idealized future when Israel will be freed from their oppression and exile. As such, the author is interested in promoting the correct practice for God's chosen people. Isaiah 58 is a warning and critique of people who might fast and do other religious observances while yet neglecting the correct moral actions. Just to name a few missteps, the people are oppressing workers, quarreling, and fighting, though they completely neglect things like loosing the bonds of wickedness, freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, etc. (Isaiah 58:3-7).

Like many other parts of the Hebrew Bible, the author is providing an exhortation to remember the matters of the heart before performing any kind of ritual practices or expectations. Isaiah 58:10-14 responds even stronger with an exhortation to realign oneself with the covenant, and even with a specific expectation that the ritual requirements of sabbath observance be kept righteously. While the religious observances often seem to get overshadowed by the moral emphasis of the prophets, there is still a high expectation for the covenant people of God to obey the commandments.

Are passages like Isaiah 63:1-6 (and related passages like Doctrine & Covenants 76:107 and 133:46-51) overly violent and merciless?

Ancient Israelites often conceived of holiness in terms very different from modern readers and worshippers. To be a conqueror and a strong warrior were valued attributes and showed that God was a reliable protector and worthy of admiration. We typically see God differently and describe his holiness in different terms, so approaching the Old Testament with charity and examining its context is vital.

Israel's geopolitical position was consistently perilous, with major empires on all sides and trade routes running through Israel's territory. This would strongly inform their depictions of God in the Hebrew Bible. God being splattered in blood was typical language for a successful and powerful warrior deity (similar to that used for the goddess 'Anat in Ugaritic literature), and taught the Israelites that ultimately, God would prevail over their enemies and outside threats to their existence. The Doctrine and Covenants was received in a similar cultural context, so this language would resonate with the early Saints as well. Though the text may be violent, focusing on the principles that those depictions were meant to teach is essential for understanding the scriptures.



“THE REDEEMER SHALL COME TO ZION”

Week 42 : Oct 12-18

How does Isaiah 66 emphasize the importance of temples in worship?

Though Isaiah offers a scathing critique of temple worship absent of correct moral behavior once again (v. 1-4), his ultimate prophecy is the gathering of all peoples to the “house of the Lord” or the temple. Isaiah 66 explains that all people will be invited to worship and sacrifice, and only the transgressors or rebels (probably of the covenant or God’s commandments) will be left out of the opportunity (v. 20-24). This is an expansive view of both salvation and permission to sacrifice, since it was probably understood at this time that only priests and Levites could engage in sacrificial practices (though there’s certainly a debate over whether or not this was always the case in Ancient Israel). For the author to emphasize personal righteousness so strongly as to give outsiders a chance at sacrificial worship placed a high and open view on the temple. He even says that “all flesh” will worship before God, meaning the temple. Latter-day Saints have recognized this prophecy, and built temples in order to make those blessings a possibility.



CFM Reading Guide

“BEFORE I FORMED THEE IN
THE BELLY I KNEW THEE”

O C T 1 2 Jeremiah 1:1-19

God's call to Jeremiah as a prophet; his commission

O C T 1 3 Jeremiah 2:1-37

Israel's unfaithfulness and God's call to repentance

O C T 1 4 Jeremiah 3:1-25

God's plea for Israel's repentance and His promise of restoration

O C T 1 5 Jeremiah 7:1-34

God's message of judgment and the call for true repentance

O C T 1 6 Jeremiah 16:1-21

God's judgment on Judah and His call to repentance

O C T 1 7 Jeremiah 17:1-27, 18:1-23

God's judgment on sin; the sovereignty of God as the potter

O C T 1 8 Jeremiah 20:1-18

Jeremiah's suffering and his faith in God's justice

Week 43 : Oct 19-25

“In the Council in Heaven, all the spirit children of God were introduced to the Father's plan, including its mortal consequences and trials, its heavenly helps, and its glorious destiny. We saw the end from the beginning. All of the myriads of mortals who have been born on this earth chose the Father's plan and fought for it in the heavenly contest that followed.”

-By Dallin H. Oaks

“The Great Plan”

April 2020





“BEFORE I FORMED THEE IN THE BELLY I KNEW THEE”

Week 43 : Oct 19–25

Is Jeremiah 1:5 solid evidence for an Ancient Israelite belief in a pre-existence?

This verse is a controversial part of Jeremiah's call. Critics might claim that the “know” in this verse on the part of God is merely a foreknowledge. However, *yādā'* is a Hebrew verb that has to do with acquiring wisdom or gaining intimate knowledge/acquaintance. Languages like Spanish have different verbs for knowing intellectually (*saber*) and personally (*conocer*), and *yādā'* more closely resembles the latter. So it's certainly possible to read the verse according to the traditional LDS reading, that God knew Jeremiah before he was born and called him to be a prophet before his mortality.

However, it's very important with isolated verses like these to remember the basis for an LDS belief in a premortal existence. We don't believe in premortality because one verse in Jeremiah implies it, but rather we know it because it has been revealed by revelation (see Abraham 3:22-23, Doctrine and Covenants 138:55-56, Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, Doctrine and Covenants 49:17). The Old Testament is relatively atheological, meaning it doesn't present a systematic set of beliefs like we might see in later developments in Christianity. Thus, we should be careful putting the whole weight of the LDS belief in a preexistence on only Jeremiah 1:5, and stick to citing passages that explicitly lay out the doctrine.

Does the potter and clay analogy (Jeremiah 18) imply a low view of individual humans?

Applying a narrow interpretation to the potter and clay analogy often goes against the context and the main point of Jeremiah's oracle in this chapter. Firstly, it ought to be understood that this analogy isn't being used in an individual sense. God isn't fashioning individual humans to turn them into anything in particular, but he's shaping Israel into the greatest form that it can be. God is so flexible with Israel and the other nations that he may even change his mind about prophecies he's already given (Jer 18:7-10). And rather than a tyrannical dictator over every single person on the Earth, God is a careful guide and planner for the proper destiny of Israel, blessing them should they maintain their side of the covenant or casting them off if Israel rejects Him.

Secondly, the rhetorical effect of this metaphor on apostate Israel pertains to idolatry. With the prevalence of clay as material for figurines and idols in ancient Israel, the message of a clay potter might have conveyed something about God's covenant relationship with Israel, and Israel's obligations to obey and worship God. According to the critiques of prophets like Jeremiah, God forms Israel and shapes them the way they should be like a careful potter, but Israel itself makes clay idols and images to worship instead. Mankind (as in, humanity) is made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), so for humanity to turn around and make idols is disrespectful.



“BEFORE I FORMED THEE IN
THE BELLY I KNEW THEE”

Week 43 : Oct 19–25

Does Jeremiah 17:9, “the heart is deceitful above all things” mean that we shouldn’t trust our feelings?

Latter-day Saints will often describe feeling the spirit as a “burning in the bosom” in the sense that it’s felt in our heart. When ancient peoples (including Jeremiah) are describing how the heart is deceitful, they don’t necessarily mean that feelings are deceitful and untrustworthy. Heart (Heb: *lēb*) signified the center of intellect and thoughts as well (similar to the brain in our modern understanding). This cannot refer to merely a depraved heart in the sense of original sin or just feelings. The scope of “heart” in this passage is much more expansive than is made to appear by critics, since it could really apply to any frail human faculties. Relating to the complicated nature of the heart, the Greek Septuagint actually describes the heart as “deep” meaning that the earliest interpreters of the Hebrew Bible probably didn’t believe that the heart was so deeply sinful that it was impossible to trust.



CFM Reading Guide

“I WILL TURN THEIR MOURNING INTO JOY”

O C T 2 6 Jeremiah 31:1-40

God's promise of a new covenant with Israel and Judah

O C T 2 7 Jeremiah 32:1-44

God's prophecy of the return from exile and His promise of restoration

O C T 2 8 Jeremiah 33:1-26

God's promise of a righteous Branch and the return of Israel

O C T 2 9 Jeremiah 36:1-32

Jeremiah's scroll read to the king, and the king's rejection of it

O C T 3 0 Jeremiah 37:1-21, 38:1-28

Jeremiah's imprisonment and his continued prophecy to King Zedekiah

O C T 3 1 Lamentations 1:1-22

The desolation of Jerusalem and Israel's grief

N O V 1 Lamentations 3:1-66

God's faithfulness and hope amid affliction

Week 44 : Oct 26–Nov 1

“The gospel net to gather scattered Israel is expansive. There is room for each person who will fully embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each convert becomes one of God's covenant children, whether by birth or by adoption. Each becomes a full heir to all that God has promised the faithful children of Israel!”

-By Russell M. Nelson

“Let God Prevail”

October 2020





“I WILL TURN THEIR MOURNING INTO JOY”

Week 44 : Oct 26–Nov 1

The book of Lamentations in part presents mourning and confusion over whether the Judahites in exile are truly God's people. Who are God's people now?

God's covenant people originally referred to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of the House of Israel. God made sacred promises with them, including blessings of posterity, land, and most importantly a chosen role in bringing God's purposes to pass, such as the Messiah coming through the tribe of Judah. Even after being scattered among the nations, God promised to gather His covenant people in the last days, both spiritually and physically, as part of His eternal plan. Isaiah 49:22–23 and Ether 13:12–14 speak of this gathering and the restoration of Israel in the latter days. This is a central theme of God's teachings in the Bible as well as present throughout the scriptures unique to the Restored Gospel.

In modern times, the LDS Church teaches that God's covenant people are not limited to just the recognized or literal descendants of Israel. All who make and faithfully honor sacred covenants, particularly through baptism and temple ordinances, are considered part of His covenant people. This expansion emphasizes that a covenant relationship and allegiance to God defines our relationship with God rather than solely lineage. As God's covenant people, individuals are called to live faithfully, share the gospel, and assist in gathering Israel, and they may receive God's guidance, protection, and blessings in return.

How can we understand the Hebrew concept of “hesed” in Jeremiah despite the Babylonian captivity applying to all Judahites regardless of personal righteousness?

hesed is a multifaceted term that appears frequently in the Old Testament. The term encompasses a range of meanings, including loyalty, covenant faithfulness, kindness, and love. Hesed is a central theological concept in the Hebrew Scriptures, reflecting God's character and His covenantal relationship with His people. It also signifies God's unwavering commitment to His promises, despite Israel's frequent unfaithfulness. As in other prophetic books, hesed (חֵדֶד) in Jeremiah is framed in the context of a marriage relationship that requires fidelity.

One passage says, “The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy (Heb: hesed) endureth for ever.” (Jeremiah 33:11) Because the Judahites kept looking to foreign powers to save them militarily (Egypt in particular), or other gods to defeat their enemies (Jeremiah chapter 2), they were invaded, and eventually destroyed or carried away captive. It was a startling theological and political crisis that surely shocked Israel into greater piety towards God. On an individual level, the exiled peoples' Lamentations are very real representations of a seeming failure of hesed. However, it's essential to remember that ancient Israelites were significantly less individualistic than we are, and always thought of things in terms of community and group identity. Not only do the people need to retain their allegiance to God, but they also need to be one and unified, just like a Zion people and society should be.



“I WILL TURN THEIR MOURNING INTO JOY”

Week 44 : Oct 26–Nov 1

Why is Jeremiah told to buy land in Jeremiah 32:6-15?

Even though Judah was facing war and her people the dispossession of their land, God commands Jeremiah to redeem his cousin's land even if Jeremiah himself will never get a chance to use it. This allows the land to stay in Jeremiah's family, but this was done even though he was in prison at the time. The symbol of Jeremiah storing it in a hefty jar was given as a sign of God's promise that Israel wouldn't be lost forever, and a reassurance that God would redeem His people. It shows us that there is nothing too hard for the Lord if we call upon him, a concrete sign of the hope God wants Jeremiah and his people to have.



CFM Reading Guide

“A NEW SPIRIT WILL I PUT WITHIN YOU”

NOV 2

Ezekiel 1:1-28

The vision of God's glory and the living creatures

NOV 3

Ezekiel 2:1-10, 3:1-27

Ezekiel's call to be a prophet and his responsibility to deliver God's messages

NOV 4

Ezekiel 33:1-33

God's watchman and the call for repentance

NOV 5

Ezekiel 34:1-34

God condemns Israel's corrupt leaders and promises to be their Shepherd

NOV 6

Ezekiel 36:1-38

God's promise of Israel's restoration and the new heart given to His people

NOV 7

Ezekiel 37:1-28

The valley of dry bones and the promise of Israel's resurrection

NOV 8

Ezekiel 47:1-23

The river of life from the temple and the boundaries of the restored land

Week 45 : Nov 2-8

“[T]his mighty change of our spiritual hearts is just the beginning. Repentance, baptism, and confirmation are necessary but not sufficient. Indeed, equal, if not greater, care must be taken with a spiritually changed heart than with a physically transplanted heart if we are to endure to the end. Only by doing so can we be held guiltless at the time of judgment.”

—By Dale G. Renlund
 “Preserving the Heart's Mighty Change”
 October 2009





“A NEW SPIRIT WILL I PUT WITHIN YOU”

Week 45 : Nov 2-8

What is the meaning of the four creatures and God's image in Ezekiel 1?

While likely not literal, existing beings, these creatures are shown to Ezekiel to convey information about God through ancient near eastern imagery. The four faces each creature may symbolize cosmic unity, or represent divine attributes. Each of the four faces, the wheels, and the wings may represent a level of divine omniscience and mobility, assuring Ezekiel that God is aware of his and Israel's situation. God's image in Ezekiel 1 is also very interesting, since emphasis is made on similarity or “likeness” throughout the relevant portion of the chapter. This serves to separate God from Ezekiel in degrees, since God is depicted within layers of the heavens and clouded in his glory (Heb: kavod), even though God is described as a human figure (Ezekiel 1:25-28). He's thoroughly anthropomorphized, yet seemingly more distant than in other appearances or visions in the Old Testament. Repeated use of the word “likeness” (Heb: demut) is a strong nod towards Gen 1:26, where humankind is made in the image (demut) and likeness of God.

In modern times, the LDS Church teaches that God's covenant people are not limited to just the recognized or literal descendants of Israel. All who make and faithfully honor sacred covenants, particularly through baptism and temple ordinances, are considered part of His covenant people. This expansion emphasizes that a covenant relationship and allegiance to God defines our relationship with God rather than solely lineage. As God's covenant people, individuals are called to live faithfully, share the gospel, and assist in gathering Israel, and they may receive God's guidance, protection, and blessings in return.

What is the significance of the two sticks in Ezekiel 37? Do they represent the Bible and the Book of Mormon?

A contextual interpretation of Ezekiel's “two sticks” would bear out that they're symbols of Judah and Israel being reunited. Historically, a popular LDS interpretation for both sticks has been to imagine them as prophecies about the Bible and the Book of Mormon, but this belief isn't necessitated by the scriptures or modern prophets and apostles. For instance, D&C 27:5 speaks of the Book of Mormon as the record of the Stick of Ephraim, not the stick itself. The modern, popular interpretation of Ezekiel 37 is probably an example of “likening unto us,” which modern prophets and apostles certainly have the authority to do. As spokesmen for God, prophets and apostles are authorized to creatively reinterpret the scriptures in order to bring relevance to older text and teach lessons, even if those interpretations are uncontextual (i.e: eisegesis).

This likening in Ezekiel 37 expands the basic reunification of Israel and Judah to the unification of scriptural writings from different tribes. The purpose of this is to share a message about the universality of both modern compilations of scripture and to indicate a divinely sanctioned backing for the Book of Mormon. But like other proof texts from the Bible, Latter-day Saints should be careful about relying on them for matters of faith. We don't have to rely upon the Bible as the source for all of our beliefs, and much less for determining what's scripture and what isn't. We don't rely upon scripture alone, or even one interpretation of scripture alone.



“A NEW SPIRIT WILL I PUT WITHIN YOU”

Week 45 : Nov 2-8

Why is Ezekiel called “son of man” (Ezekiel 2:1) and what does this tell us about the way that Christ used it?

This phrase “son of man” (Heb: ben adam) can refer to a mortal man, to someone in the end times, or to Jesus Christ, depending on the context. Here it is to differentiate between Ezekiel and the divine beings he is seeing, accentuating the vast difference between the description of God in the last chapter and Ezekiel’s humility and subservience. This is similar, but a little different from the usage in the Book of Moses, where it is used in almost a derogatory way by Satan (Moses 1:12). When Christ is using the term “son of man” in the gospels, he’s referring to Daniel, which itself is probably drawing off of Ezekiel. The title teaches us valuable things about Christ, not just eschatologically. Christ too was humble, and also an obedient servant of God. Christ did the things that the Father told him to, and prophesied to the people what they needed to do to restore their relationship with God and also what would come in the future.



CFM Reading Guide

“THERE IS NO OTHER GOD
THAT CAN DELIVER”

NOV 9

Daniel 1:1-21

Daniel and his friends' faithfulness and God's favor in exile

NOV 10

Daniel 2:1-49

Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation

NOV 11

Daniel 3:1-30

The fiery furnace: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's faith

NOV 12

Daniel 4:1-37

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a tree and his subsequent humility

NOV 13

Daniel 5:1-31

Belshezzar's feast and the writing on the wall

NOV 14

Daniel 6:1-28

Daniel in the lion's den; God's deliverance from harm

NOV 15

Daniel 7:1-28

Daniel's vision of four beasts and the coming of God's kingdom

Week 46 : Nov 9-15

“On earth we experience joy and sorrow as we are tested and proven. Our victory comes through faith in Jesus Christ as we triumph over our sins, difficulties, temptations, unfairness, and the challenges of this mortal life. As we strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ, we see beyond our struggles to the blessings and promises of eternity.”

-By Neil L. Andersen
“The Triumph of Hope”
October 2024





“THERE IS NO OTHER GOD THAT CAN DELIVER”

Week 46 : Nov 9–15

In Daniel chapter 1, why did Daniel and his friends refuse to eat the king's meat and asked instead for pulse (vegetables)?

The king's meat would likely not have been prepared according to Jewish dietary rules (see Leviticus 11) as the animals need to be slaughtered and prepared in certain ways to be seen as kosher. It is also possible that prior to being given to the king's household, the meat and wine were dedicated to Babylonian gods or idols and thus were impure for that reason. If Daniel and his friends ate such meat, they would no longer be ritually pure. Water would not have such ritual connections or implications.

The underlying social implication of eating the food is that Daniel and the others were dependent on the king's grace. By rejecting the food and living in obedience to Jewish dietary laws, Daniel and his friends showed that God's will took precedence in their lives even if they were willing to respect the king's commands when there was no conflict. Water and vegetables were appropriate choices not only to maintain ritual purity, but demonstrated symbolic refusal to compromise on their moral and religious principles.

Are we not promised certain blessings if we are faithful like Daniel (see the stories in Daniel 2, 3, and 6)? Why don't we see more healings and other miracles in the Church?

Latter-day Saints believe that God promises blessings to those who are faithful, but those promises are not given as guarantees of immediate healing or constant visible miracles. Latter-day Saints are taught that blessings are given according to God's laws and purposes, not human timetables, and that many promised blessings are spiritual or eternal rather than physical. Scripture repeatedly shows that righteous people suffer without clear purpose or reward, like Job, Paul, and even Jesus Himself. The Restoration does not reinterpret faithfulness as a guaranteed protection from illness, pain, or death. Mortal life is a period of testing and growth, where bodies remain subject to weakness. Full healing, physical, emotional, and spiritual is ultimately promised in the Resurrection rather than always in mortality.

Healing in the Church is also always sought subject to the will of God. Priesthood blessings are given with humility and trust, acknowledging that God's purposes may include growth through suffering rather than immediate relief. God is not to be viewed as a vending machine where if we obey in a certain way, we will automatically be given a certain blessing, such as if we pay tithing, we will be given wealth or if we live the Word of Wisdom, we will always be healthy.

Latter-day Saints believe that God values faith that persists without signs, signs will follow faith rather than create it. Many modern miracles are therefore quiet and personal, such as gradual recovery, unexpected endurance, peace, guidance, or strength to carry burdens, sometimes small, tender mercies. These experiences are deeply meaningful to those who live them, but not easily visible or verifiable to others. Faithfulness can bring God's presence and sustaining grace, even when dramatic miracles do not occur, though sometimes we may even lack through no fault of our own the ability to sense this.



“THERE IS NO OTHER GOD THAT CAN DELIVER”

Week 46 : Nov 9–15

If the Ancient of Days is identified as Adam in D&C 27:11/D&C 116, then doesn't that mean that he holds a position higher than Jesus Christ, implying a form of the Adam-God theory?

In Daniel 7:13–14, the “Son of Man,” an eschatological divine figure, is presented as going before the Ancient of Days and being given dominion and glory. This episode can seem quite strange if approached with modern LDS paradigms that identify the Son of Man as Jesus Christ (see Matthew 8:20; 9:6; 12:8; 16:13; etc.) and the Ancient of Days as Adam/Michael (D&C 27:11; 116). This is an issue, because the majority of Biblical scholarship sees a parallel between the description of the Ancient of Days (an old, white bearded figure, sitting on a throne) and Ugaritic/Canaanite El ('ilu). El was the father of the Gods in both Canaanite and Israelite conceptualizations of the cosmos (see Deut 32:8–9 NRSV), but the idea of a “son of man” figure is unique to second-temple Judaism. Combining the LDS and scholarly perspectives on ancient Israelite belief, one could probably conclude that Adam/Michael is God the Father.

However, rather than interpret as these persons literally taking upon themselves the eschatological and hierarchical roles shown in Daniel 7, what Joseph Smith may be teaching when describing Adam/Michael as the “Ancient of Days” is something similar to Paul’s teaching on Christ as the second Adam (see both 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49, and Romans 5:12–21). So in the modern LDS reinterpretation, a divinized Adam would be presenting Christ with keys, dominion, and glory over mankind after the Atonement had been completed. Consistently applying Joseph Smith’s interpretive methods (according to his revelations) makes the Adam-God theory very unlikely.



CFM Reading Guide

“I WILL LOVE THEM FREELY”

NOV 16 Hosea 1:1-11, 2:1-23

God's call to Hosea, his marriage to Gomer, and Israel's unfaithfulness

NOV 17 Hosea 3:1-5, 4:1-19

God's restoration of Israel and the charge against Israel's leaders

NOV 18 Hosea 5:1-15, 6:1-11

God's judgment on Israel and the call for repentance

NOV 19 Hosea 10:1-15, 11:1-12

The destruction of Israel and God's unchanging love for His people

NOV 20 Hosea 12:1-14, 13:1-16

Israel's pride and the consequences of sin

NOV 21 Hosea 14:1-9

God's call to Israel to return, with promises of healing and restoration

NOV 22 Joel 1:1-20, 2:1-32

Judgment upon the land and the call for national repentance

Week 47 : Nov 16-22

“Miracles, signs, and wonders abound among followers of Jesus Christ today, in your lives and in mine. Miracles are divine acts, manifestations and expressions of God's limitless power, and an affirmation that He is 'the same yesterday, today, and forever'..The magnitude does not distinguish a miracle, only that it came from God.”

-By Ronald A. Rasband

“Behold! I Am a God of Miracles”

April 2021





“I WILL LOVE THEM FREELY”

Week 47 : Nov 16–22

How are the prophecies of spiritual outpourings in Joel being fulfilled?

Latter-day Saints believe Joel 2:28–32 began to be fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2) when the Holy Ghost was poured out on the early Saints, but that its complete fulfillment is happening in the last days. That fulfillment is manifested in Joseph Smith and continued revelation since his day, the translation of the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God, the restoration of the ordinances of baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost, as well as additional spiritual experiences given to both church leaders and its members. These all demonstrate the broad outpouring of spiritual power Joel described when he said sons, daughters, young, and old would prophesy, dream dreams, and receive divine guidance.

This prophecy is also seen in the worldwide increase of spiritual sensitivity, knowledge, and technological progress that enables the gospel to spread globally. Missionary work, temple building, and the gathering of Israel all reflect the fulfillment of Joel's words, while the “wonders” and upheavals Joel foresaw are understood as signs of the last days leading to Christ's return. Thus, Latter-day Saints see their own era as the time when Joel's prophecy is being fully realized.

Why does God command Hosea to marry “a wife of whoredoms” at the beginning of chapter 1?

In the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, it was very common for prophets to perform symbolic actions to teach the people various principles. For a couple other examples, Jeremiah wore a linen belt which wore to teach about Israel's former closeness to God (Jeremiah 13:1-11), and Ezekiel laid on his side for 390 + 40 days to represent the siege of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 4:1-17). We even see this in the New Testament in the way that Jesus used parables to teach. One necessary element of these actions was the shock value that could accompany it. Hosea's marriage, in classic Hebrew prophetic style, is emblematic of the relationship between Israel and Jehovah. Like an unfaithful marriage partner, Israel strayed away from their initial blessed relationship with God and turned to other Gods, with whom they committed adultery.

What does Hosea mean when he emphasizes so strongly the “knowledge of God” in Hosea 4:1-6?

Included in this grouping of things Israel lacks is both faithfulness (Heb: emet) and loyalty (Heb: hesed), so there's a strong concern for things that Israel needs to properly worship God. Knowledge is positioned in these verses to inform or make possible the other two attributes. This lack of knowledge makes people stumble (v. 5), and therefore, the people are rejected by God. Jesus Christ also taught the importance of knowledge of the Father (John 17:3), and Latter-day Saint scripture emphasizes obtaining knowledge of basic truths through the witness of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:5). Perfect knowledge of all correct doctrine and belief is not necessary to be or remain a Latter-day Saint, but the pursuit of knowledge and greater faith is an essential element of growth in our mortal experience (D&C 88:118).



CFM Reading Guide

“SEEK THE LORD, AND YE SHALL LIVE”

NOV 23 Amos 1:1-15, 2:1-16

God's judgment on the nations and Israel's unfaithfulness

NOV 24 Amos 3:1-15, 4:1-13

God's call for repentance and the consequences of Israel's sins

NOV 25 Amos 5:1-27, 6:1-14

The call for justice and righteousness, and woe to the complacent

NOV 26 Amos 7:1-17, 8:1-14

Visions of judgment and the unheeding response of Israel

NOV 27 Amos 9:1-15

Restoration of Israel after judgment

NOV 28 Obadiah 1:1-21

Prophecy of judgment against Edom and the restoration of Israel

NOV 29 Jonah 1:1-17, 2:1-10, 3:1-10, 4:1-11

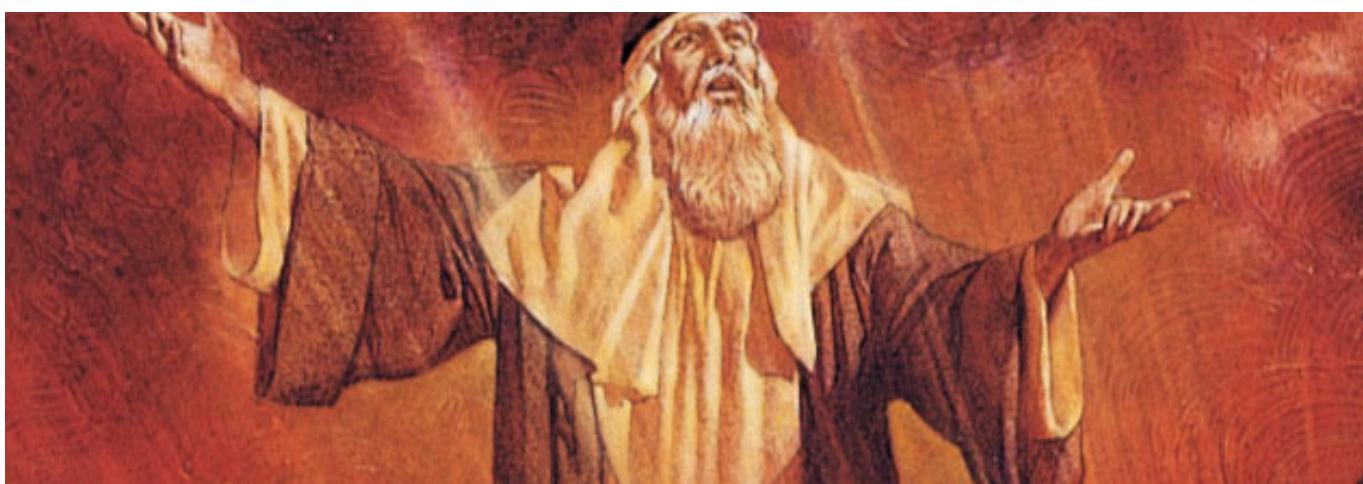
Jonah's mission to Nineveh and God's mercy on the repentant

Week 48 : Nov 23-29

“It is comforting to know that we are not alone in the world, despite the challenges we face in life. Having prophets is a sign of God's love for His children. They make known the promises and the true nature of God and of Jesus Christ to Their people. I have learned that through my personal experiences.”

-By Ulisses Soares

“Prophets Speak by the Power of the Holy Spirit”
April 2018





“SEEK THE LORD, AND YE SHALL LIVE”

Week 48 : Nov 23–29

Isn't it arrogant to call ourselves “saviors” (Obadiah 1:21) since only Christ is our Savior?

It is not arrogant to appropriate the way Obadiah uses the term (an active participle, “Saviors” in the Hebrew) or in the way President Hinckley applied it in October 2004. “Saviors on Mount Zion” is a functional description, not a claim of divine status. We do not save anyone by our own power and we do not take the Savior’s place by becoming instruments of salvation. Instead, we participate in His work as individuals and as a community by acting as helpers and proxies for people who cannot do ordinances for themselves. Just as the Savior opened the way for our salvation, we open the way through fulfilling the work as directed by Christ for our ancestors to receive the blessings he has already made possible. We provide the opportunity; he provides the redemption.

Doing temple work mirrors Christ’s mission in a small way because it involves selfless service that blesses others. We stand in for someone who cannot act for themselves, just as Christ stood in for us when we could not overcome sin and death on our own. Many Latter-day Saints feel closer to the Savior through family history and temple ordinances because the work brings the Spirit of Christ and his love and compassion into their hearts. It turns their focus outward, helps them feel the reality of God’s mercy and invites them to experience the joy of helping in his redeeming work.

How historical is the book of Jonah?

In the Bible itself, Jonah is presented as a real prophet from the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25), which suggests a historical setting, but leaves open the question of how closely and accurately the book of Jonah relates to this figure. Latter-day Saints and most traditional Christians accept that God can work miracles, even ones that seem unlikely or impossible to us, so a miraculous preservation inside a great fish is not a significant reason to doubt the story. At the same time, many scholars view the book of Jonah primarily as a (satirical) parable meant to teach repentance and God’s mercy, regardless of the historical nature of the book of Jonah. There are good reasons for understanding the book’s genre in this way. In this view, the power of the book comes through its message of hope, repentance, and the love of God for all peoples in Jonah chapters 3 and 4, not merely because of its popular story elements.

A helpful way to see Jonah’s calling is that God often chooses imperfect people to teach powerful lessons, sometimes through the prophet’s weaknesses as much as through his strengths. Jonah’s reluctance and anger toward Nineveh show that he struggled with prejudice, nationalism, and resentment, but those very flaws become part of the message. By calling someone who didn’t want Assyrians to repent, God highlights that His mercy extends even to those we might consider enemies, and that His prophets must learn compassion, not just obedience. Jonah also shows that God works patiently with His servants. Jonah eventually obeyed, even if reluctantly, and his experience reveals that prophets are still human, still growing, and still capable of being corrected by God. The book ends not with Jonah’s triumph, but with God teaching him that divine love is broader than human boundaries. In that sense, Jonah’s imperfections are exactly why his story is so valuable. Only beyond these important themes is the question of historicity, and Latter-day Saints are free to believe what they want about it.



“SEEK THE LORD, AND YE SHALL LIVE”

Week 48 : Nov 23-29

Why would God only hope for repentance? Wouldn't he know if someone is going to repent?

Amos 4:6-13 shows a pattern: the Lord sent famine, drought, disease, and other hardships hoping Israel would “return unto me.” These verses repeatedly say, “yet have ye not returned unto me,” showing that the purpose of the trials was to awaken the people spiritually and invite them to repent. The message is that God uses chastening as a merciful call back to covenant faithfulness.

This doesn’t mean God is uncertain about the future. Amos in particular portrays God as one in control of the happenings of Israel, or at least very aware of their current trajectory. Rather, scripture often describes God’s actions in the same way a perfect parent would, giving them opportunities to change even if He knows they ultimately will or will not. The wording (“I hoped,” “I called,” “I sent these things so that...”) reflects God’s desire for his people to repent, not a lack of knowledge. Amos emphasizes that God lovingly provided chances for Israel to turn back, but they refused, highlighting both divine mercy and human agency.



CFM Reading Guide

“HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY”

NOV 30

Micah 1:1-16, 2:1-13

God's judgment on Israel and Judah for their sin and injustice

DEC 1

Micah 3:1-12, 4:1-13

God's judgment on Israel's leaders and His future kingdom

DEC 2

Micah 5:1-15, 6:1-16

The coming ruler from Bethlehem and God's case against Israel

DEC 3

Micah 7:1-20

God's judgment and mercy, and the promise of restoration

DEC 4

Nahum 1:1-15, 2:1-13, 3:1-19

Judgment on Nineveh for its cruelty and wickedness

DEC 5

Habakkuk 1:1-17, 2:1-20, 3:1-19

Habakkuk's dialogue with God about injustice and God's response

DEC 6

Zephaniah 1:1-18, 2:1-15, 3:1-20

Zephaniah's prophecy of judgment and hope

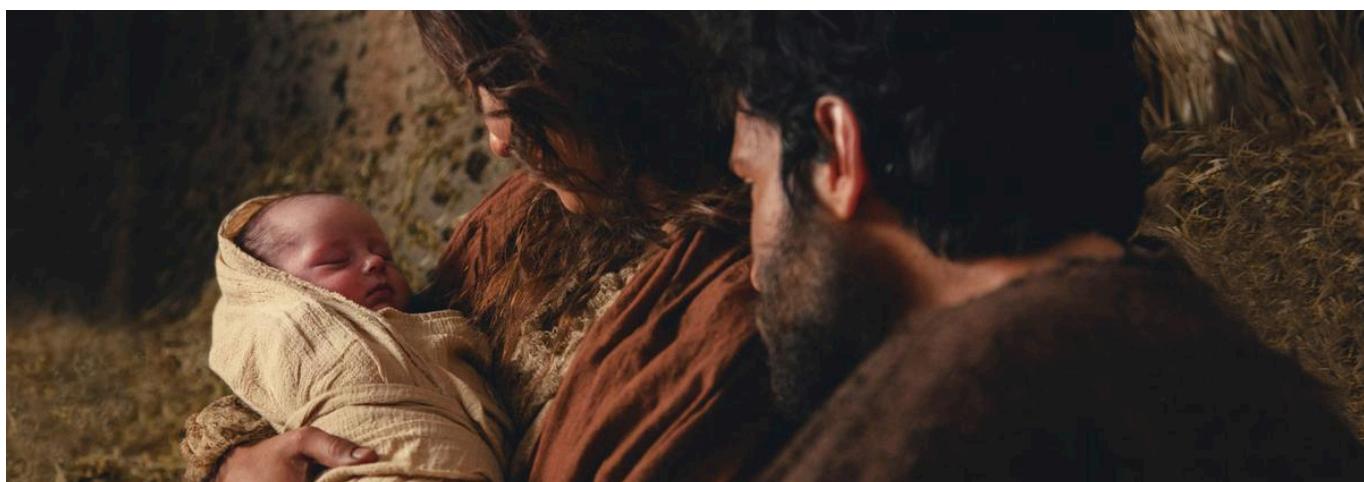
Week 49 : Nov 30-Dec 5

“Without the blessings that come from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, we can never do enough or be enough by ourselves. The good news, though, is that because of and through Jesus Christ we can become enough. All people will be saved from physical death by the grace of God, through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

-By Dale G. Renlund

“Do Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with God”

October 2020





“HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY”

Week 49 : Nov 30-Dec 5

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 ("the just shall live by his faith") extensively. What does this teach us about the value of works and grace in the Old Testament and now?

Habakkuk is not making a declaration of intellectual belief over righteous actions or works in this verse. Verses 4-8 of Habakkuk 2 show that correct practice and righteousness is exactly what is in view here, criticizing the proud, the wealthy, and the unrighteous rulers in these verses. Habakkuk is making an argument in favor of the righteous who will trust in God's covenantal promises, even amidst the wicked people around them. Nothing is stated about merely acknowledging the existence of God in an intellectual sense—both God and the prophet demand obedience, or else people will suffer the woes of the wicked (Habakkuk 2:6-19).

Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 in both Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 to emphasize Christ and the new covenant. In both passages, he argues against dependence on the Mosaic Law, while in Romans 1:17 specifically, he points to Jesus Christ as the object of faith. Like Habakkuk before him, Paul isn't calling for mere intellectual belief in God, but for trust/faith in His promises. Paul's distinctive interpretation invites people to trust that Christ has made keeping the Mosaic Law unnecessary, the main thrust of both his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians.

Does Micah 5:2's prophecy of Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace conflict with the prevailing scholarly understanding that Jesus was actually born in Nazareth?

Biblical scholars propose based on the oft-used name "Jesus of Nazareth" and the indifference of the gospel of John towards Jesus's birthplace in John 7:40-43 that Jesus may have been born in Nazareth. Among the apostles, it seems that there were varying degrees of importance given to where Jesus came from. Matthew and Luke clearly have a desire to teach how Jesus Christ really did fulfill messianic expectations, and so use this prophecy of a new ruler from Bethlehem in their gospels. Matthew states rather matter-of-factly that Jesus was simply born in Bethlehem with his family that already lived there (Matthew 2:1), but then he escaped to Egypt and later moved to Nazareth to be raised. Luke, on the other hand, adds a narrative about a census causing Mary and Joseph to temporarily move to Bethlehem where Jesus is born, and then they move back to Nazareth.

John, Mark, and Paul are seemingly uninterested in these details, and so Jesus is simply from Nazareth (whether born in or just from Nazareth is unclear). This brings up an interesting question: how important the Bethlehem birth was to the earliest followers of Jesus? One could survey the differences and determine that the apostles knew that Jesus fulfilled prophecy, and because of that, they interpreted the Old Testament consistent with that revelation even though he was born in Nazareth (much like early Jewish pesher interpretation, and portions of the Joseph Smith Translation). Alternatively, it's certainly likely that Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem and the gospel writers (Matthew and Luke) just had two different ways of expressing that historical detail. History writing was much less exact in these times, so sending a certain message usually triumphed over detailing precise historical facts. Ultimately, what the authors wanted to convey, no matter what, was that Jesus is the promised savior and messiah.



“HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY”

Week 49 : Nov 30-Dec 5

Why does the Book of Mormon say that Jesus would be born “at Jerusalem” when Old Testament prophecy and New Testament authors claim Jesus was born in Bethlehem?

When looking at this text in the Book of Mormon, it's important to remember that (1) it is not claiming to be inerrant, and (2) it's unclear how much old world geography Alma and his audience knew. This drastically changes the weight of this apparent error, to the point that age-old critique is mostly inconsequential for all Latter-day Saints. Regardless, there are a couple key points that give us clarification about what Alma is saying.

For one, Alma specifically states that Jesus would be born “at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers” (Alma 7:10). The emphasis of the verse is that Jesus would be born in the old world in the land of Lehi and his family (which may have included areas outside of Jerusalem), not strictly Jerusalem to the exclusion of places round about. The description given by Alma is a little more broad. Bethlehem was only a couple miles away from Jerusalem, and could certainly be considered to be in the “land of our forefathers/at Jerusalem” that Alma is referring to.

Assuming the critics' arguments about this verse (and also a naturalistic explanation of the Book of Mormon) would also create a strange scenario where Joseph Smith seemingly doesn't know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which would be absurd for how common-knowledge the Bethlehem birth was in the 19th century. There's clearly much more going on in the text than critics boil it down to, and writing it off as Joseph's mistake in order to discredit the Book of Mormon doesn't work very well.



CFM Reading Guide

“HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD”

DEC 7

Haggai 1:1-15, 2:1-23

God's encouragement to rebuild the temple and His promises of future glory

DEC 8

Zechariah 1:1-21

God's call to repentance and visions of judgment and restoration

DEC 9

Zechariah 2:1-13

God's protection over Jerusalem and the promise of its future glory

DEC 10

Zechariah 3:1-10

Joshua the high priest cleansed and the vision of the Branch

DEC 11

Zechariah 4:1-14

The vision of the golden lampstand and the two olive trees

DEC 12

Zechariah 10:1-12, 11:1-17

God's promise and Judgement to Israel

DEC 13

Zechariah 12:1-14, 11:1-9, 14:1-21

The future restoration of Israel and the coming of the Messiah

Week 50 : Dec 7-13

“These things matter because they engage us in God's work and are the means by which we collaborate with Him in our own transformation from natural man to saint. What our Heavenly Father offers us is Himself and His Son, a close and enduring relationship with Them through the grace and mediation of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.”

-By D. Todd Christofferson
“Our Relationship with God”
April 2022





“HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD”

Week 50 : Dec 7-13

How should the prophecy in Haggai 2:23 be understood regarding Zerubbabel as God's "signet ring" when he disappears from the historical record?

As with any prophecy, whether oral or scriptural, there's a level of contingency based on the free-will actions of human beings. Latter-day Saint scripture declares that “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven [that] when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” (D&C 130:20-21). Latter-day Saint commentators and modern authorities have noted that this is something that applies to either this life or the hereafter, ensuring that we are treated fairly according to our intent in obeying God's commands or prophecies regardless of what earthly constraints might limit our abilities to carry them out.

This prophecy/blessing of leadership about Zerubbabel is a good example of such an occurrence, since it seems that he may have died, been replaced as governor, or met some other fate that kept him from fulfilling expectations. It's not clear from the historical record exactly what happened to him. This prophecy might also foresee his role in Jesus Christ's genealogy, making him almost a kind of spiritual ruler in the bloodline that would produce the messiah (see Matthew 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27). This passage in Haggai encourages us to think carefully about prophecy and what it means for a prophecy to be made or fulfilled, since sometimes the blessings promised don't appear as might be expected.

What lessons about covenant keeping and obedience in Haggai can apply to modern temple covenants?

Haggai asks in chapter 1 verse 4, “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?” The focus of this passage in Haggai 1 is the peoples' dedication to the temple before other matters. The exiles were beginning to come back from Babylon, and most people seem to have been focused on their personal comfort far over and above the temple. Because the temple was so important to their religion, it was necessary that it be rebuilt as soon as possible. Though this may have been a difficult burden in the face of drought and famine (Haggai 1:10-11), the people in this age would have understood and accepted the responsibility and priority to build the temple as commanded by God through the prophet. And this is exactly what they did (Haggai 1:14).

Like Haggai and the people of Judah (and even Joseph Smith in the Kirtland and Nauvoo periods), when we put spiritual things first, then we open ourselves up to receiving blessings and comfort (Haggai 2:16-19). In the temple, we covenant to consecrate our time and talents to God, and so temple building (both ancient and modern) is a great lesson about what that consecration has looked like in harder circumstances, and what kind of dedication God may require of us in the future.



“HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD”

Week 50 : Dec 7-13

How do we interpret Zechariah 13:2-6's seeming condemnation of prophecy in light of continued prophetic ministry?

This passage is a good example of the importance in understanding context when studying the scriptures. Isolating this passage could make it seem as though God intended to cease speaking through prophets in the future, which would be problematic for the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament as much as for Latter-day Saints. In this chapter of Zechariah, the focus is on a cleansing of Israel and particularly Jerusalem from wickedness and idolatry (Also see Zechariah 12:6-9). Verses 2-6 associate the prophets in question with idolatry, meaning that the author foresaw or warned against prophets of other gods, not prophets in general. Deuteronomy specifically identifies prophets that shouldn't be followed as those who are from other gods (Deuteronomy 18:20). So, a future society that would need no prophets/authorities was not in view, except perhaps for one in which God ruled personally among the people in a millenarian sense. The coming cleansing of Jerusalem and Judah will put the false prophets to shame and open the way for a millenarian future.



CFM Reading Guide

“I HAVE LOVED YOU, SAITH THE LORD”

DEC 14

Malachi 1:1-5

God's covenant love and chosen people

DEC 15

Malachi 1:6-14

Honoring the Lord in worship and obedience

DEC 16

Malachi 2:1-9

Faithful leadership and reverence for God's name

DEC 17

Malachi 2:10-17

Covenant faithfulness in relationships and justice

DEC 18

Malachi 3:1-6

The coming messenger and God's refining work

DEC 19

Malachi 3:7-18

Returning to the Lord with faithful hearts

DEC 20

Malachi 4:1-6

The coming day of the Lord and future hope

Week 51 : Dec 14-20

“I bear testimony that Elijah did come. The hearts of the children—of you and me—have turned to our fathers, our ancestors. The affection you feel for your ancestors is part of the fulfillment of that prophecy. It is deeply seated in your sense of who you are. The work of gathering Heavenly Father's family is not just for young people, and it is not just for grandparents. It is for everyone.”

—By Henry B. Eyring
“Gathering the Family of God”

April 2017





“I HAVE LOVED YOU, SAITH THE LORD”

Week 51 : Dec 14-20

Why are there different versions of Malachi 4 that Joseph Smith produced in scripture and in his sermons? Does this hurt Joseph Smith's credibility as a prophet and translator?

The short answer to the second question is no. Explicit changes to Malachi 4:5-6 include D&C 2:1-3 and a discourse he gave on 13 August 1843. As a prophet, Joseph Smith has the same interpretive authority and liberty as the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles in recontextualizing scripture and giving it renewed binding authority in his day. As Joseph Smith grew to understand the temple, sealing, and covenants more, newer ways of rendering Malachi 4:5-6 came to his mind, which he used to teach just as much as the KJV translation (which is labeled in the JST “correct”). It seems that he was satisfied with how the KJV was rendered, but occasionally tweaked the verses to teach a clearer lesson.

For one instance, as sealings and covenants grew to become strong points in Joseph’s theology, his interpretation of Malachi 4:5-6 shifted to emphasize those connections. Wilford Woodruff cited Joseph as saying on March 10, 1844:

“Elijah should first come & turn the hearts of the Fathers to the Children &c, now comes the point, what is this office & work of Elijah, it is one of the greatest & most important subjects that God has revealed, He should send Elijah to seal the children to the fathers & fathers to the children...”

This interpretation/expansion clarifies the fuller meaning of Malachi 4 the same way that his 13 August 1843 sermon did. Joseph in this last alteration of Malachi 4:5-6 emphasizes covenants and sealing between fathers and children, while the KJV is focused on remembering and turning—both terms thematically associated with covenants. Joseph as prophet/translator is using his authority to apply the scriptures to the lives of his audience, but also to clarify the meaning.

Why is God so strict with his offerings in Malachi 1:6-14? Isn't this a huge burden upon the post-exilic population of Judahites?

One of the central problems of Malachi is the offering of animals that are comparatively lesser than what the people have. It’s indicative of lower commitment to the temple cult and hesitancy when it comes to personal sacrifice. Because it was expected of the ancient Israelites to sacrifice their best (see Leviticus 22:18-25), the offering of blind, lame, or sick animals was an affront. This could be viewed as inconvenient at least, and probably taxing on impoverished Judahites living in post-exile Judah, but the importance of the offering to be without blemish was to be a sacrifice great enough to keep people’s hearts and minds pointed towards God.

The prophets of the Old Testament constantly emphasized the importance of correct practice, and so following this law of sacrifice was essential for the Israelites to grow in holiness through closeness to God. It encouraged reliance upon God in all things—not too different from modern expectations regarding tithing, consecration of time and talents, and serving in sometimes very difficult callings in the Church. While it is a burden, it is also an opportunity for growth and getting closer to God. God promises blessings for obeying principles of sacrifice such as these (see Malachi 3:8-12).



"I HAVE LOVED YOU, SAITH THE LORD"

Week 51 : Dec 14-20

How can the Book of Mormon quote Malachi 4:1 even though Nephi was writing around a hundred years prior?

1 Nephi 22:15 contains phraseology very similar to Malachi, but with a couple important differences in theme, language, and context. Important differences are bolded in the two texts.

- 1 Nephi 22:15 - ...for the day soon cometh that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned.
- Malachi 4:1 - For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up...

Malachi is focused upon a corporate burning and cataclysmic event, applying to both the people and to some future "day." Nephi is in the middle of an apocalyptic run-through of events during the last days, focusing on the states of the wicked and the righteous. In Malachi, the righteous will fight against the wicked, but in Nephi, the righteous will simply endure the wicked and the wickedness of the world. While there are basic similarities between 1 Nephi 22:15 and Malachi 4:1, their purposes are different, and their language reflects that. Additionally, it should be remembered that the Book of Mormon translation language mirrors KJV language because the very language of the KJV had a "scriptural" ring to it. It's to be expected that some verses are more similar to KJV passages than others, since it was an important part of Joseph's world.



CFM Reading Guide

“WE HAVE WAITED FOR HIM,
AND HE WILL SAVE US”

DEC 21 Genesis 3:14-15

The first promise of a coming Savior

DEC 22 Isaiah 7:10-14

The sign of Immanuel, God with us

DEC 23 Micah 5:2-5

The promised ruler born in Bethlehem

DEC 24 Isaiah 9:2-7

The light, the child, and the everlasting kingdom

DEC 25 Isaiah 11:1-10

The righteous Branch and the peace He brings

DEC 26 Jeremiah 23:5-6

The coming righteous King from David's line

DEC 27 Zechariah 9:9-10

The humble King who brings salvation and peace

Week 52 : Dec 21-27

“Even in worldly terms, the mortal life of Jesus of Nazareth has had a greater impact on this world and its history than any life ever lived. He has been the principal subject of prophets and poets for thousands of years. The greatest art and music of the western world have been devoted to celebrating the birth and life and mission of Jesus Christ.”

-By Dallin H. Oaks
“Good Tidings of Great Joy”
December 2022





“WE HAVE WAITED FOR HIM,
AND HE WILL SAVE US”

Week 52 : Dec 21-27

In the famous Christmas story, Luke 2:7 talks about Mary and Joseph not having room in the “inn.” What did the author specifically mean by this?

In modern video depictions of the Christmas story, it's very common to see a scene of Mary and Joseph going from hotel to hotel looking for a place to sleep. This is incredibly unlikely, and misses the precise language of “inn.” The Greek *kataluma* (κατάλυμα) wasn't an inn or a hotel as we think of it today. Houses in Roman Palestine were multi-roomed and storied, and there were places in the house designated for guests. If Luke is noting that “there was no room for them in the inn,” then that signifies that the house that Mary and Joseph were travelling to was already full of guests, and there weren't any rooms for lodging available. The only place available for Mary and Joseph was the portion of the house designated for the animals (probably the first floor, in a tighter space). Regardless, the overall message of the detail is still about the same—Mary bore Jesus in humble circumstances, not the ease and comfort expected of a king—and Jesus would continue to defy contemporary messianic expectations.

Why do some translations of Isaiah 7:14 say “a young woman is with child” when others specify that she's a virgin (like the KJV)?

This controversy arrives because of the difference in semantic range between the Greek Septuagint and the Hebrew traditions. Matthew, who identifies Isaiah 7:14 as a prophecy of Jesus (Matthew 1:23), is using the Septuagint, so the word in use is *parthenos*/παρθένος. *Parthenos* refers specifically to a virgin. It's a little more specific than the Hebrew ‘almah/הָלֶמֶד, which can mean virgin, but more generally applies to young women of marriageable age.

Because of this slight discrepancy, critiques have been levied at this fulfillment of prophecy for how inexact it is, and also from a contextual angle by looking at the meaning of Isaiah 7 as a whole. On the linguistic level, it's probable (if not preferable) that Isaiah has in mind an actual virgin, since the other usages of ‘almah in the Old Testament do not refer to any women who have had sexual relations. Contextually, this is probably another example of a dual fulfillment of prophecy or at least an authorized reinterpretation/recontextualization by a servant of God (apostle, prophet, etc.). Isaiah definitely has an ‘almah in his immediate context in mind (though who is very debated), but he may also have an eschatological ‘almah in mind: the mother of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Latter-day Saint scripture and teaching is consistent that Mary was a virgin and conceived Jesus Christ without having had sexual relations, fulfilling the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 7 and 1 Nephi 11:13-18.



“WE HAVE WAITED FOR HIM,
AND HE WILL SAVE US”

Week 52 : Dec 21-27

Was Jesus Christ really born on April 6th in year zero CE?

This has been a traditional understanding of many Latter-day Saints ever since James E. Talmage wrote Jesus the Christ, but it has never been an official teaching of the Church. There is no way we would be able to know the exact day that Jesus was born except through revelation, and so people often point to D&C 20:1 as scriptural/revelatory support for the idea. There are a couple of historical problems and interpretive considerations with this verse.

As far as D&C 20:1 goes, the wording required for the April 6th, 0 CE birth interpretation isn't there. The focus of the scripture is on the restoration of the church in the last days, the traditional dating of Jesus's coming of 0 or 1 CE, and the date of the reorganization of the church on April 6th. Nowhere is there an explicit reference or explanation in the verse that Jesus's actual birth date is the same as the date of the reorganization of the church, April 6th. The ending line "on the sixth day of the month which is called April" modifies "it" which is "the Church of Christ in these last days".

Additionally, if one both accepts the dating of April 6th, 0 CE and accepts the historicity of the Christmas narratives about Herod found in Matthew and Luke, then some historical conflicts arise. Herod probably died sometime between 4-1 BCE, making him unavailable for any of the narratives described in the gospels if Jesus was born in year zero. Any dating of Jesus's birth to allow for these stories to be true (in a historical sense) must fall between about 6-3 BCE.

General Authorities have also held all sides of this issue, from J. Reuben Clark and Bruce R. McConkie settling on the 5th of December, to many people today who accept James Talmage's dating. It's important to remember that Christ's exact date of birth has not been established based on history or revelation, and that ambiguity will probably remain "unless indeed the past is opened to [inspired writers] by revelation." (Elder John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, (1960): 127)