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# The Scriptures and the Restoration

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**2 November 2003**  
**Brigham Young University**

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I find myself continuing to feel the inspiration of the last general conference. I felt the power of the messages, especially the doctrinal presentations on the Restoration of the gospel.

Fortunately we can continue to study these messages. Sessions are replayed on television and over the Internet, and the printed text is available in the Church magazines in a remarkably short period of time. Just one month after the final session we have the conference edition of the *Ensign* and the *Liahona* ready for distribution. That's a marvelous accomplishment. It is now possible to study these messages by topic for use in our personal study and family home evening and as source material for our gospel teaching assignments to emphasize the words of the prophets.

As I have reviewed the sermons, I have been impressed with the doctrinal foundation taught. How the Lord has blessed us with additional truths reinforced by the holy scriptures in our lives!

## The Scriptures in Previous Dispensations

From the beginning of time the Lord has instructed His servants to make a record of His dealings with them. For example, in the days of Adam:

“A book of remembrance was kept, in the which was recorded, in the language of Adam, for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration” (Moses 6:5).

Abraham reported that:

“The records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands; therefore a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers, have I kept even unto this day, and I shall endeavor to write some of these things upon this record, for the benefit of my posterity that shall come after me” (Abraham 1:31).

And Moses, in his great vision concerning the Lord's work, was commanded:

“And now, Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest; and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak” (Moses 1:40).

Throughout almost all periods of time there has been a longing of the people to know the scriptures. In about 458 B.C., after bringing the people of Judah back to the land of Judea from their seventy-five years of captivity in Babylon, Ezra the scribe gathered the people together so he could read the scriptures to them:

“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.

“And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

“And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (Nehemiah 8:1–3).

During the time of the New Testament, too, missionaries such as Paul and Silas found people who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11).

## The Great Apostasy

Even so, the Savior's Church had not been organized for very long before apostasy began to enter in among the organized body of the Church. It compelled Paul to write to the early Saints:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

“Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6–8).

The early Christians suffered much persecution. By the first quarter of the fourth century, however, there was a great change in the general attitude toward Christianity. It was marked by the conversion of Constantine the Great, under whose patronage the Christian profession grew in favor and, in fact, became a state religion.

But instead of humbly following the Savior, who established the Church, people began seeking Church offices for the social honor and wealth that accompanied them. Soon pomp and ceremony became a great part of the Church. The ordinance of baptism was perverted. The sacrament was altered. Public worship became an exhibition of art. Men without authority exercised the prerogatives of the Church in leading the people.

An age of darkness was upon the earth, and for a period the Great Apostasy reigned over men. They were in a condition similar to the Sadducees who sought to entrap the Savior concerning a marriage issue. The Savior told them, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). I guess all of us find ourselves in that position at times when we try to answer the perplexities of life without having a foundation and a knowledge of the truth to lead us in the right direction.

### **The Coming Forth of the Bible**

It seems that there was a longing in some of the people to have the words of the Lord to guide them in their lives. As we move through the period commonly called the Dark Ages, we see an awakening of the desire of mankind to have the holy scriptures.

In A.D. 385 the pope recognized a need for making the scriptures available for the priests to use. He commissioned Jerome to work on a revised version that would be used by Catholic priests. Jerome worked for twenty-three years to create the Vulgate Latin Translation of the Bible. Almost a thousand years later John Wycliffe translated the Latin Bible into English.

But very few men had the opportunity to have their own copy of the Bible because it was handwritten only. It took a copyist about ten months to make a copy. Some people would borrow the scriptures for a day, or even for an hour, because they could not afford to buy

them. It was said that a load of hay was the going price to use the Bible for an hour. Because the scriptures were not readily accessible to most people, they were at the mercy of the teachers of religion for knowledge of their contents. Before the Restoration of the gospel could occur, the scriptures needed to be made available in a form that could be used by the common man.

Between 1450 and 1455 Johannes Gutenberg of Germany took an important step in that direction when he published the Latin Vulgate Bible, the first book ever printed in a movable press.

Early in the 1500s William Tyndale saw the need to make an English translation of the Bible directly from the Hebrew and Greek text rather than from the Latin Vulgate. As a scholar trained in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, Tyndale was able to identify many errors in the Latin translation and would often turn to the Hebrew and Greek texts in his teaching. But his work of translation was interrupted by church leaders who were opposed to the people having a knowledge of the scriptures. Tyndale was pursued and eventually imprisoned. He suffered mental and physical torment for eighteen months, until 6 October 1536, when he was taken from his cell and tied to a stake. There he uttered a loud prayer: “Lord! open the king of England’s eyes.”<sup>1</sup> Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake for heresy.

Since then Tyndale has become known as the father of our present English Bible. About 92 percent of Tyndale’s translation survived in the English King James Version. It was prepared by a committee of scholars, printed in 1611, and widely used. The King James Version of the Bible is recognized worldwide for its beauty of expression and general accuracy, given the limitations of the manuscripts from which it was translated.

Now the scriptures were generally available to men, but there arose a great conflict among religionists about which of the doctrines were to be followed and which were correct. Revelations received by the Prophet Joseph Smith have made it clear that the King James Version, as great as it was, did not contain all of the ancient manuscripts. Many plain and precious parts had been lost (see 1 Nephi 13:26). There needed to be a clarification of the language of the scriptures—not made by scholars but by a prophet of God.

## The Restoration

I am intrigued with the Lord's timing to bring forth His gospel again. It shows that He understands His children. The simplicity of life in the early 1800s was a good seedbed for the Restoration. Technology had been asleep for centuries. Communication almost had to be face-to-face. If you wanted to travel, you had to rely on the winds or the strength of men to move vessels over rivers, lakes, or seas, and by land you traveled on beasts of burden or just by plain walking. A half century later may have been too late to find the humble, hard-working, rugged pioneers necessary to establish His Church.

At the time of the Prophet Joseph Smith's birth, the world's population was about one billion. Since that time we have seen a population explosion. Technology has similarly advanced, with the invention of steam power, electrical power, the telegraph, the telephone, the radio, the internal combustible engine, air flights, television, the computer, and so on as we expand and grow into new technologies. It seems as if the Lord has been opening the minds of men to prepare them for an age when the gospel would be preached in its fulness. This Restoration has come in a time when a large number of God's children can have ready access to His word as revealed through His chosen prophets.

The Lord needed someone who was teachable to be an instrument through which He would restore the gospel. He needed someone He could mold into a leader. Out of the weak things of the earth the Lord raised up a prophet with power and strength. The one foreordained for this great assignment was the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Few prophets have come from more humble beginnings than had the Prophet Joseph. He had little opportunity for education. He was not quite fifteen years of age when the Lord touched him and brought forth a marvelous vision through which mankind would again know the true nature of God, His relationship to His Son, and Their relationship to the Holy Ghost.

It is interesting that the Lord chose to reveal Himself to such a young man. I think there were probably two reasons:

1. Joseph had not been educated in the ways of the world and therefore could more easily be taught the pure doctrine by visitations and establish his understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. Joseph would teach what he had learned to others in simplified words that could be understood by all mankind. Through Joseph the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored to the earth.

An essential part of the Restoration was the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon clears up the misconceptions about the gospel as presented in the Bible. It stands as tangible evidence of the reality of the First Vision and of Joseph Smith's divine calling. It teaches about faith in God. It strongly urges obedience to His will and testifies of the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth—that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. It declares the truth of the divine origin of the Bible and corroborates its truths. It teaches of purity of thought, word, and deed and sets heaven as the highest goal of life. As in previous dispensations, the doctrinal base provided in the scriptures—in this case the Bible and the Book of Mormon—made possible the establishment of the Savior's Church again on the earth.

## The Story of William Pilkington

My special interest in the words of the prophets came at a very impressionable age in my life. My father was the bishop of our ward. Each year he would plan a trip that would help impress on our minds the significance of the events that happened near our home in Logan, Utah.

When I was twelve years of age, he planned a trip to Clarkston, Utah, for the Aaronic Priesthood holders of our ward. Arriving in Clarkston, we were driven to the town cemetery, where we were asked to gather around a tall granite marker. The marker was engraved with the name of Martin Harris, one of the Three Witnesses to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Not only were we to see Martin Harris's grave, but we would also hear Martin Harris's testimony by one who knew him. I would like you to relive that event with me tonight. I have invited William Pilkington—alias Lael Woodbury—to tell his story. William, please come forth and give that witness.

“We had been in our new home a few days. One dark night a knock came on the door. Our family was gathered at home and we were all singing the songs of Zion. We stopped singing and Father opened the door. A strange man walked in. He was given a chair and he sat down.

“He said, ‘What is your name, sir?’

“Father promptly told him our name was Pilkington.

“He said, ‘Are you immigrants?’

“He was told that we had just immigrated from England. He said he wanted to hire a boy to go and live with him for one year.

“My brother Richard and I were sitting together on the right of the stranger. He looked at us and said, ‘I think this one will do.’ That one was Willie—me.

“He then asked if I would like to go and live with him for a year. He said he had just sold his property in Smithfield and was going to a place across the valley called Clarkston. Father asked him how much I would get if I went for a year. He thought a little while and then said, ‘I will give Willie a two-year-old heifer and his board and clothes if he will work for me.’

“I asked Father what he thought about the proposition. He said it was all right—I could go and work for him a year, and for me to be a good boy.

“I put on my coat and hat, kissed Mother, Father, and all the rest of the family, and went with him. It was a very dark night, and the country being strange to me, he took hold of my hand. We walked for about 10 minutes and entered a log house—the first log house I was ever in.

“The rest of the family had all retired to bed. Or at least I thought so. I thought it very strange the man did not tell me what his name was. He gave me a chair and sat me down close by a little round table. He then asked me if I had had my supper.

“I said, ‘Yes,’ and he said, ‘Maybe you can eat a little more.’ So he got a pan of milk, some bread, a bowl and spoon and told me to eat all I wanted. He told me the folks had all gone to bed and said, ‘Now I will go to bed, but before going I will show you where you will sleep on the floor,’ and then he went to bed.

“I was enjoying the bread and milk when my attention was attracted to an object over in the northwest corner of the room. As the oil lamp gives very little light, I was puzzled as to what it could be, so I ate a little faster so I could go to bed.

“I was obliged to go between the table and this object, and in going round the table I discovered the form of a man. He made a motion with his hand as if he wanted me.

“Rather timidly I went over to him, and he told me to pull up a chair and sit down close to him. I still felt a

rather crawly sensation creeping over me, but I pulled up the chair alongside the chair he was sitting on and sat down.

“He asked me what my name was, and I promptly told him my name was William Pilkington.

“He asked me if we were immigrants.

“I told him our family immigrated from England.

“He then asked me if I was going to live with them.

“I told him I thought I would live with them for about a year.

“Up to this time neither one of them had told me what their name was, and it rather puzzled me. Then he asked me if I was a Mormon.

“I told him our whole family were Mormons.

“He told me he was going to call me Willie. I told him that Mother called me Willie too.

“Then he said, ‘Willie, tomorrow night after the chores are done and we have had supper and all the folks have gone to bed, I want you to sit down in this chair, close to mine, for I have lots to tell you.’

“I told him I would do that, and then I retired to bed on the floor. Between the floor being hard and what the old man had told me, I did not sleep very much and arose very early the next morning not feeling very much refreshed, as that was the first time I had ever slept on the floor, and that with only one quilt under and one over me.

“When I arose the next morning, I looked for the man who talked to me last night. I knew that I could recognize him, as in the darkness of the room he resembled a picture I had once seen of Rip Van Winkle. When I found him, however, I found a very old man, and he walked with a cane. He greeted me with ‘Good morning, Willie’ and shook my hand and told me not to forget tonight.

“I told him I wouldn’t forget. I was wondering all day long what that old man wanted me for—an old decrepit man who wanted to talk to a boy he had found out was a Mormon boy.

“At last night came. Supper was over, and after having family prayer they all retired to bed. The old gentleman then sat down in his armchair, put his elbow on the arm of the chair, and crooked his finger as he did scores of times afterward, and that was a signal for me to bring my chair alongside his.

“He again asked me what my name was.

“I told him.

“ ‘Oh, yes, I am to call you Willie.’ He then said, ‘Willie, did you ever go to Sunday School?’

“I promptly told him, ‘Yes, sir.’

“ ‘What class were you in?’

“I promptly told him the Book of Mormon class.

“His eyes sparkled and his whole body seemed to vibrate. He seemed like a changed being. He was very excited, trembling as I gazed into his eyes.

“He said, ‘Did you ever read the Book of Mormon?’

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ was the reply.

“ ‘Well, if you have read the Book of Mormon, what is the first reading that we find in the preface of the book?’

“After a little thinking, I said, ‘The first reading in the Book of Mormon is the testimony of the three men testifying to the whole world that they saw an angel come down from heaven, that they saw the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and the angel told them that the translation was correct, and they bear record that Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God and that their names will go forever before the world testifying that the Book of Mormon is true.’

“He then said, ‘I know now, Willie, that you have read that glorious book. Willie, I am going to ask you one more question. What were those three men’s names?’

“I told him they were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris.

“This little old man, then 92 years of age, of whom in my mind I had likened to Rip Van Winkle, whose whole being at this time was wonderful to behold, all lit up with the Spirit of God, whose eyes now were sparkling, whose whole being was transformed, stood up before me on that memorable occasion and, putting his walking cane in his left hand, he straightened up and striking his breast with his right hand exclaimed, ‘I am Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon—a man who had the privilege of standing before angels, a man whose eyes beheld the golden plates, a man whose ears heard the voice of God declare that the book was translated correctly and then command him to testify to all the world that it was correct.’

“From that time on until his death, he never tired of telling me of the beauties of the gospel, and especially

about the early rise of the Church and the tribulations that beset the Prophet Joseph Smith and himself.”

Thank you, William Pilkington, for that witness and testimony.<sup>2</sup>

This experience electrified me. I realized that there stood a man who had actually heard the testimony of one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Now I was having the privilege of hearing his witness on that hillside in Clarkston, Utah.

## The Scriptures Are Fundamental

There is real power in the scriptures. I am amazed at how much is given to us in them that is sound and beneficial in every age and time. As I study, review, and comprehend the scriptures, I find a fundamental, basic plan that is of value to each generation from the very beginning of time.

The greatest fear I have in this information age is that we will have so much clutter descending upon us that we will find it difficult to keep our lives in balance. I believe the scriptures provide insight into patterns that will help us prepare for the future.

President Theodore Roosevelt stated:

“Every thinking man, when he thinks, realizes . . . that the teachings of the Bible are so interwoven and entwined with our whole civic and social life that it would be literally . . . impossible for us to figure [for] ourselves what that life would be if these teachings were removed. We would lose almost all the standards by which we now judge both public and private morals; all the standards toward which we . . . strive to raise ourselves.”<sup>3</sup>

Through the scriptures the gospel of Jesus Christ is revealed to us. It is the ultimate good news. There is no news that even approaches the good news of the gospel in beauty, insight, fulness, and depth.

Our love of the scriptures should be a paramount part of our faith firmly anchored to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We should not look upon reading and studying the scriptures as an inconvenience or something we must endure. In the word of God there is power and nourishment and life. It is interesting to me how many promises the Lord extends to those who read His words. The word can heal the wounded soul (see Jacob 2:8). The words of Christ will tell us all things we should do (see 2 Nephi 32:3). There are other promises for those who turn to the word of God and trust in it fully. Let us examine a few.

## Promises to Those Who Study the Scriptures

Joshua was told, “Meditate [upon the words of the law] day and night . . . : for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

The Psalmist said:

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105).

This is one of the most reassuring promises of the Lord—that in the gospel light we shall be able to find our way in darkness and be able to see the path that we are to follow.

In the New Testament there is additional insight into the power of the scriptures. In Luke we read about the Savior appearing to two of His disciples following His Resurrection. After He departed from them, they said, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). There’s a wonderful promise for you. I encourage you to find the real meaning of that promise and have your “heart burn within” you as you study the words of the Lord.

What will such a study do for us? It will strengthen our testimony of the Savior, for the scriptures testify of Him. Jesus said:

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

And Paul made this statement:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Nephi saw that the rod of iron in his father’s dream represented the word of God. And then he made this promise about the word of God:

“Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them” (1 Nephi 15:24).

Can you imagine a more wonderful promise than that? Through our study of the word of God we will find the power to resist temptation.

Listen to this promise extended to those who diligently study the scriptures and obey the word of God. Perhaps it is the most marvelous of them all. The prophet Mormon wrote:

“Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—

“And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven” (Helaman 3:29–30).

In light of these great promises, my encouragement to you this evening is that you do not leave the study of the scriptures to chance. Do not trust in the things of the world that will prevent you from finding the things of eternal value. Turn to the scriptures. In them is the plan of happiness. Through them we can grow in knowledge and understanding of what the Lord has revealed to His prophets through all ages. Do not become so busy that you reduce the power that comes from reading the scriptures because you are overly involved in the things of the world. Have faith and confidence in the Lord’s dealings with His children here on earth. Build your faith strong by trusting what the Lord has given to us through His holy scriptures. Surely here is the foundation we need to gain the fundamental witness of the saving grace of our Lord and Savior.

We also have the opportunity of reviewing the messages of general conference. Please focus on applying the lessons we have been taught so that they will have an effect on our individual lives. The Doctrine and Covenants tells us:

“Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

“For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:4–5).

President Gordon B. Hinckley has been so strong in his desire to separate us from worldly involvement, which is penetrating even the sanctity of our own homes. He announced that we are going to raise the standard for full-time missionary service:

“The time has come when we must raise the standards of those who are called to serve as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . I remind you that missionary work is not a rite of passage in the Church. It is a call extended by the President of the Church to those who are worthy and able to accomplish it. . . .

“I am confident that raising the bar on eligibility will cause our young people, particularly our young men, to practice self-discipline, to live above the low standards of the world, to avoid transgression and take the high road in all their activities.”<sup>4</sup>

That message not only applies to those preparing for missionary service—it has a rippling effect that extends to every member of the Church and to those who must qualify themselves to join the Church. To raise the standards of missionaries requires raising the standard of devotion in our own homes. The Church organizations that support the family—Primary, Aaronic Priesthood quorums, Young Women, Melchizedek Priesthood quorums, Relief Society, Sunday School, and so forth—must also have higher standards of performance.

The charge has been given to us. Now, to obtain the promised blessings, we must respond by increasing our understanding of the doctrine and religiously applying the doctrine in our lives.

In closing, I remind you of the promise the Lord gave when He said:

“Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for

behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

May the Lord bless each of us with the desire to study and know and grow in a knowledge of the scriptures. May you find them to be a guide and a source of power. May they direct you to the eternal good that we are all seeking here in mortality and in the worlds to come.

I promise you that the scriptures will lead you to life eternal. God lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. We have an opportunity of being part of His great kingdom. Let us do it with all of the enthusiasm and with all of the power our souls can muster, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. In William Byron Forbush, ed., *Fox's Book of Martyrs: A History of the Lives, Sufferings and Triumphant Deaths of the Early Christian and the Protestant Martyrs* (1926), 184.
2. Author's note: The story of William Pilkington is from my memory and also some information shared with me from Jeannie Davis Dorhofer, a great-granddaughter of William Pilkington.
3. “The Influence of the Bible,” 1901 address to the Long Island Bible Society, in Christian F. Reisner, *Roosevelt's Religion* (1922), 306.
4. “Missionary Service,” in *First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, 11 Jan. 2003, 17.