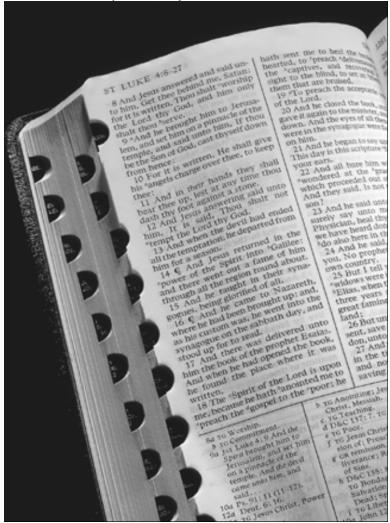


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We have the scriptures and are therefore under obligation to search them
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“He That Hath the Scriptures, Let Him Search Them”¹

Gaye Strathearn

Gaye Strathearn was Instructor of Ancient Scripture at BYU when this was published.

A quarter of a century after the fact, I vividly remember when the scriptures became an important focus in my life. I had a friend named John. His family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when I was seven, and we became close friends. Everything that John did, I wanted to do. When he started collecting movie ticket stubs, I did also. When he began writing the words to some favorite hymns in a little pocket-sized address book, I had to get one exactly the same and do likewise.

Can you imagine what I was thinking when I saw that John’s parents gave him a missionary triple combination for his birthday? You guessed it. I wanted one exactly the same. The problem, however, was how I would achieve that desire. Initially, I wasn’t too worried. Surely my mother would see this as a very righteous desire and would, therefore, be ecstatic about my sudden interest in the scriptures. My confidence, however, was soon shattered. She told

me we already had plenty of sets of scriptures. I could use any one of those. Of course, my mother's response just underscored the fact that she didn't understand what was at stake here. I tried to explain that I didn't want just any set of scriptures. I needed a black missionary set with thumb tabs because that was what John had. My mother was like the Rock of Gibraltar in her responses. I was devastated. I had not even entertained the idea that she would say no. I repeatedly pleaded my case—all to no avail.

So I decided I needed to modify my plan of attack. Maybe if I saved up the money myself, Mum would acquiesce. And she actually agreed when I put my new proposal on the table. Looking back, I have no memory of how I earned the money. All I remember is how excited I was when she took me to the LDS bookstore where I bought my first triple combination. I couldn't wait to get home so I could gently, reverently unstuck the pages one by one. Hindsight has helped me realize that perhaps that day wouldn't have been so sweet if Mum had simply bought it for me. But this is just half of the story.

Soon after that day, I was at my sister's place where I picked up my brother-in-law's set of missionary scriptures. As I thumbed through them, I saw he had color coded them, each color representing a different gospel topic. I figured that because I had missionary scriptures, I should mark them like a missionary does. As I sat down and very carefully began the process, something wonderful happened. I really enjoyed what I was doing—not just that I was coloring but that I genuinely enjoyed what I read and learned. I think my mother was sufficiently impressed with my new interest because she gave me a missionary Bible for Christmas, and I immediately began another wonderful adventure with it. It was these experiences that first introduced me to the importance of the statement in 3 Nephi 10:14: "He that hath the scriptures, let him search them."

Today, I realize we have many different ways of searching the scriptures. We could talk with more depth about color coding, or we could talk about archaeological, historical, or cultural backgrounds of the scriptures—and so on. Each of these approaches can be very helpful aids to searching the scriptures. But as I have pondered and prayed about what I could share with you, three things have continually popped into my mind and have guided my preparation. They all have to do with another dimension of searching the scriptures. The first idea relates to something that Sister Camilla Kimball used to say whenever she was asked, “What is it like to be married to an Apostle?” Invariably, her reply was, “Well, you know, I was married to him twenty-five years before he was one.”² Hang on to that thought.

The second event that keeps popping into my head was an experience I had while I participated as a student at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies program. As one of my electives, I took a class on Isaiah from Sister Anne Madsen. Sister Madsen required that we write three papers during the course. For one of those papers, she asked us to write about the man Isaiah, but she did not want us to go to commentaries and synthesize a paper from what others have said about him. She wanted us to write the paper based on what the book of Isaiah tells us about Isaiah. That single assignment had a profound influence on how I study the scriptures.

As I prepared to write that paper, some wonderful things happened to me. Isaiah was transformed from simply a name on a page to a living, breathing individual who had a family, who had hopes and dreams, and who also experienced trials, afflictions, and frustrations. As I read and pondered, I came to feel an inkling of the cost he was asked to pay to be the Lord’s prophet. I had never read Isaiah through that lens before. As I did so, I came to feel Isaiah’s deep and abiding love and respect for God. As I came to these realizations and wrote the paper, I also

came to appreciate and understand Isaiah's teaching because I understood him as a real person—a person I could relate to and a person I could look to in my own struggles. In a very real sense, the book of Isaiah came alive for me as a result of this assignment.

The third and final thought that has influenced my preparations is a comment one of my students made during student evaluations. This student, complaining about the tests, said, "Who cares who introduced Peter to the Savior?" That comment saddened me—not because of the criticism but because I had failed as a teacher. The comment indicated that, for this student, Peter and Andrew were still just names on a page. This student had not made the transition during the semester to the point where these people became real.

Although I realize there are numerous approaches to studying the scriptures, here I would like to focus on one aspect: reading the scriptures so the people become real and meaningful to us and so they become more than just names on a page. You've heard the old adage that you can't know people until you've walked a mile in their moccasins—a very important element that comes into our scripture reading as we make conscious efforts to walk spiritually in the moccasins of the people we read about. The power of the scriptures, after all, comes not from reading about these people but from learning the lessons they learned.

All the prophets in the scriptures, to be sure, were foreordained to their callings, but none of them were born as prophets. Remember Sister Kimball's comment. All of them had to develop their relationship with deity, and that pursuit required doing the same kinds of things I have to do. Can I suggest that as we struggle to see these individuals as real people, we not only draw closer to them but also come to better appreciate their teachings.

I will now test these ideas with two scriptural personalities. One is a well-known and well-loved scriptural personality: Nephi. The other, Anna, occupies only three verses in Luke. I think both have important things to teach us as we reach out to them as real people.

Nephi the Son of Lehi

As I ponder about Nephi, Sister Kimball's statement, in particular, rings loudly. Although Nephi was an extraordinary man who eventually became the Lord's prophet among the Nephites, he was not always a prophet. As much as 1 and 2 Nephi describe the physical journey Nephi and his family made as they left Jerusalem and traveled to the promised land, I think the most important journey we should look for in these passages is Nephi's spiritual journey that prepared and enabled him to become the Lord's prophet. It is that spiritual journey that helps me best to relate to Nephi in my own spiritual quest. I don't have space to discuss his whole life, so I have chosen to discuss three major events: (1) his declaration in 1 Nephi 3:7; (2) his experience with Laban; and (3) his vision of the tree of life.

Recall with me the famous passage in 1 Nephi 3:7. I think this passage was the first scripture I memorized when I was a child: "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing he commandeth them."

This is a superb statement of faith. The children sing about it in Primary, and I am willing to suggest that it is one of the most-often-quoted passages in scripture. We use magnificent statements like this to formulate our images of Nephi.

As I read this passage, though, I want to ask some questions. First, how old was Nephi when he made this declaration? In 1 Nephi 2, Nephi tells us he was "exceedingly young" when his family left Jerusalem. Another question that surfaces is how can someone who is

“exceedingly young” make such a bold declaration of faith, especially when his older brothers, Laman and Lemuel, could not do so? Certainly we know of other individuals who exhibit spiritual sensitivities at a young age; but, with Nephi, we find some very explicit signs of how he developed that type of spiritual sensitivity. Turn with me to 1 Nephi 2. It is here, while the family is camped in the valley of Lemuel, that we first learn of Laman’s and Lemuel’s displeasure over leaving Jerusalem (2:11–13)—a displeasure that was magnified over time and was the source of many confrontations both with their father and with Nephi.

The verse I find interesting is 1 Nephi 2:16: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.”

Notice that Nephi had “great desires to know the mysteries of God.” Leaving Jerusalem and all of their wealth and property at a moment’s notice must have been something of a mystery to Lehi’s family—Nephi not excluded. It certainly was to Laman and Lemuel. You’ll notice, however, that Nephi’s reactions to this mystery were very different from those of Laman and Lemuel. While his brothers murmured against their father, Nephi “cried unto the Lord.” As we will note in other situations, this reaction is an important theme in Nephi’s spiritual development. When faced with a situation he didn’t understand, Nephi always turned to the Lord. And what did Nephi say happened in response to his prayer? He said that the Lord “did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father” (1 Nephi 2:16).

What does this incident tell us about Nephi's feelings toward leaving Jerusalem? It seems to me that he was also a little bewildered and had a propensity for rebelling against his father as well. Otherwise, why did the Lord need to soften his heart so he would not rebel? For me, the critical point between Nephi and his brothers is not their feelings about leaving home but their responses to those feelings. Does this incident reflect a lesson for me? I think so. There are plenty of times in my life where I bump up against things that don't make sense to me. In these situations, I have two choices: I can complain about it, or I can turn to the Lord. We might try to make it more complicated than that, but that's really what it boils down to. Nephi also had to struggle with his father's decision to leave Jerusalem, but Nephi chose a path that differed from his brothers' path, and that made all the difference.

Now let's read 1 Nephi 2:19: "And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart." Then note what the Lord went on to say: "And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands. . . . And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren" (2:20, 22). Here is the promise, mentioned twice: Keep the commandments, and you will be blessed. Notice that Nephi received this promise before he boldly declared that he would "go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded." I don't think the sequence here is happenstance. I think there is a direct relationship between God's promise and Nephi's declaration.

Let us now turn to the brass-plates confrontation between Nephi and Laban that occurred in 1 Nephi 4. I'm not interested here in the legal or social ramifications of Nephi's killing of Laban; others have done excellent work in that area.³ I'm more interested in the inner struggle

that Nephi experienced. You'll recall that the whole purpose of Nephi's declaration back in 1 Nephi 3 is that the Lord told Lehi to return to Jerusalem to get the plates. It is that command, in particular, to which Nephi assented. Relying on chance and their own wisdom, the brothers made two unsuccessful attempts to get the plates.⁴ After each one, Laman and Lemuel were ready to give up and leave, but Nephi was committed to "go and do"—not just to "go and try."

I have often thought about Nephi's commitment in this situation. It is all well and good to make declarations of faith when you are in a position of relative safety, as Nephi was with Lehi, but it is another thing to maintain that commitment when you try something and it fails. And then you try something different and it fails; and, as a result of the second failure, you are beaten up. When the angel came, he spoke to Laman and Lemuel. He commanded them to "go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands" (1 Nephi 3:29), but we all know it was Nephi, alone, who obeyed.

As Nephi entered the city, he said he was "led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do" (1 Nephi 4:6). Is it possible that Nephi was willing to be led by the Spirit because of his experiences in 1 Nephi 2 and 3? I think so. He possessed confidence in the Lord because he had turned to Him in the past and received help. Surely Nephi had every right to expect that the Lord would help him again. But this time the Lord's response was not simply a softening of his heart and a quiet assurance that his father was indeed a prophet. This time the Spirit told him to kill a man. Do you notice that, in this instance in the narrative, there is no immediate declaration that Nephi would "go and do the things that the Lord had commanded"? This time Nephi hesitated. "Never at any time have I shed the blood of a man," he said; and, as a result, he "shrunk and would that [he] might not slay him" (4:10).

May I be so bold as to suggest I'm glad Nephi hesitated. How many people have been murdered throughout history while the culprits have claimed that "God told me to do it"? Nephi knew how important it was to get the plates from Laban, he knew the Lord commanded his father to do so, and he knew an angel reiterated the commandment to him. Nephi had no doubt the Lord would prepare a way to accomplish the thing that had been commanded. But when the way was finally prepared, Nephi took a minute to weigh the consequences of what he was being asked to do. This was a commandment for which Nephi needed to make sure he was interpreting the still, small voice accurately. For Nephi to carry out this commandment, he had to have his own personal witness that what he was doing was indeed the will of God. Relying on his father's prophetic mantle in this instance would not have been sufficient for what Nephi had to do. And so he listened more intently to the Spirit until he was satisfied that this act was indeed the will of the Lord, and then—and only then—he obeyed.

It seems to me that there is an important lesson here for us. There are times in our spiritual development that we rely on the testimonies and spiritual insights of others. The Prophet Joseph learned through revelation that with the gifts of the Spirit, "to some it is given to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world," and "to others it is given to believe on their words" (D&C 46:13–14). To believe on the words of others is an important stepping stone in our spiritual development, but it should never be the final destination.

President Heber C. Kimball is reported to have said the following: "The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. If you do not have it, how can you stand?"⁵ Ultimately, we need to have our own personal testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ, the prophetic calling of the

Prophet Joseph, the inspired nature of the Book of Mormon, and the reality that Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord's anointed on the earth today. Ultimately, the testimonies of our parents, spouses, children, friends, or priesthood leaders will not bring us salvation until we make those testimonies our own. Do you recall Elder McConkie's wonderful final testimony at general conference? Testifying of the Atonement, he said:

In speaking of these wondrous things I shall use my own words, though you may think they are the words of scripture, words spoken by other Apostles and prophets.

True it is they were first proclaimed by others, but they are now mine, for the Holy Spirit of God has borne witness to me that they are true; and it is now as though the Lord had revealed them to me in the first instance. I have thereby heard His voice and know His word.⁶ [p.64]

If Nephi hadn't realized the importance of his own personal testimony before, he certainly came to that conclusion here with Laban.

The impact of this lesson for Nephi becomes even more clear just a few chapters later. You will recall that when the brothers returned to their parents with the plates, Lehi was ecstatic and immediately began studying them (1 Nephi 5:9–16). Perhaps it was this searching of the plates that acted as a catalyst for Lehi's great vision of the tree of life. Note that upon hearing his father's account of the vision and reacting to Lehi's subsequent teachings, Nephi was not satisfied to sit back and rely on his father's testimony. Rather, Nephi wrote that he was "desirous also that [he] might see, and hear, and know of these things by the power of the Holy Ghost," which is given to "all those who diligently seek him" (10:17).

So Nephi chose to pay the price. In 1 Nephi 11:1, we read the following: "For it came to pass after I desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in my heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord." Notice Nephi's formula here: first, he had a desire to know; second, he believed the

Lord would open his understanding (a principle he had learned back in 1 Nephi 2); and third, he put forth every effort through pondering in his heart what he had heard his father teach. As a result of this process, the heavens were opened, and he was privy to one of the greatest visions ever recorded.

May I suggest to you that the result might not have been the same if the vision had been received by Lehi in Jerusalem or shortly after embarking into the wilderness? Nephi had developed his spiritual sensitivity because of the way he responded to earlier spiritual experiences, as I have noted. Many years later, Nephi taught his people, “For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more” (2 Nephi 28:30). Nephi could teach that principle because that is exactly the way he developed his own spirituality.

In contrast, do you remember how Laman and Lemuel responded to their father’s vision and teachings? When Nephi returned from his visionary experience, he found his brothers “disputing one with another” (1 Nephi 15:2). So Nephi “spake unto [them]” and asked the “cause of their disputations” (15:6). Note how they responded: “Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken” (15:6). In return, Nephi asked if they had “inquired of the Lord?” (Note that, for Nephi, this was a natural reaction to a failure to understand and that he had been applying this reaction since the second chapter.) But that was not the case for his brothers: “We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us” (15:9). Why didn’t the Lord do for Laman and Lemuel what He did for Nephi? The simple answer is because they never asked. Five hundred years later, Alma the Younger taught the same principle to Zeezrom: “It is given to

many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him” (Alma 12:9; emphasis added).

Nephi’s response to his brothers tells us the Lord did want Laman and Lemuel to understand their father’s vision, but they did not give the heed and diligence that would qualify them for it, as Nephi had.

I believe that experiences such as these molded Nephi into the great prophet he eventually became. It was those same types of experiences that enabled him, toward the end of his life, to penetratingly ask us if we “are in the strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” and to encourage us to “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope and a love of God and of all men” (2 Nephi 31:18, 20). Nephi can ask us such questions precisely because he had spent his life living those principles. But the important element for our discussion is that Nephi had to make the same spiritual journey God requires of us.

I love Nephi—not just because the Book of Mormon portrays him as a righteous individual who seems to always choose the right, even when his father had a momentary lapse. I also love him because I see in 1 and 2 Nephi the metamorphosis of a young man who, foreordained to great things, still had to learn to find his way spiritually. It is this side of Nephi that I can turn to and relate to as I face my own spiritual growing pains. As I have read 1 and 2 Nephi from this perspective, I have caught something of a vision of what is possible for me because I see Nephi struggling with the same type of spiritual yearnings I struggle with. And I see him initiate the same spiritual steps I know I must implement in my life. Nephi has become one of my great heroes.⁷

Anna of the New Testament

I will now shift gears a little and turn to a lesser-known scriptural personality from the New Testament. Forty days after the Savior's birth—and long before the wise men ever showed up—Joseph and Mary went to the temple to offer the purification sacrifice for the new mother.⁸ Like our temples today, the temple then was a busy place. In the eyes of most of the people, Mary and Joseph's sacrifice was apparently just another sacrifice, but at least two people had the spiritual insight to appreciate the significance of the child who accompanied this couple. One of those is a woman named Anna.

Luke records just three verses about this amazing woman. As a result of such brief mention, she, like so many women, is often overlooked in our scriptural study and discussions. The paucity of information about her, however, should not blind us to her spiritual abundance. As I have read and pondered about Anna, she has also become one of my great heroes. Read with me what Luke has to say about her:

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36–38).

Even with such a short description, Anna has been the source of some significant reflection for me.

My initial question when I first read about Anna was the following: Why was she privy to such an important event when so many others just went about their business at the temple?⁹ I think it is significant that these events took place at the temple. President Hinckley taught us that the temple and its ordinances are “the crowning blessings the Church has to offer.”¹⁰ In the

ancient world, as in the modern, the fundamental purpose for attending the temple was and is to enter the presence of God. Thus, Elder Bruce R. McConkie describes the temple as “a holy sanctuary, set apart from the world, wherein the saints of God prepare to meet their Lord; where the pure in heart shall see God, according to the promises.”¹¹ Yet, on this day, Anna was one of only two people, as Luke recorded, who recognized the presence of God. The others, it seems, were too busy doing other things to recognize the magnitude of this moment. Anna, on the other hand, did not allow herself to get so caught up in the ritual that she lost sight of the purpose behind the ritual; and, in so doing, she had spiritual eyes to see what was truly going on.

The first descriptive clue Luke gives us about this amazing woman is that she is a prophetess. The scriptures designate only five other women with that title.¹² In Anna’s case, the exact meaning is unclear. We have no information about her past to help us understand it; and, unlike Simeon, she makes no prophetic declaration about the Christ child (Luke 2:32). However, as a result of this experience, she certainly fulfilled Revelation’s definition of prophecy as “the testimony of Jesus” (19:10). Thus, one way of understanding Anna’s designation of “prophetess” is “in preparation for her inspired identification of” Christ.¹³ Luke also tells us that she “gave thanks . . . unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (2:38). The word translated with the phrase, “gave thanks,” is *anthomologeomai*. It means to “confess freely and openly.”¹⁴ Additionally, the imperfect tense of the verb “to speak” suggests that this confession was something she did repeatedly. Unlike Mary who “kept all these sayings in her heart” (2:51), Anna “spread abroad the word about the child.”¹⁵ She could not keep her testimony contained; she wanted everyone to know that all the prophecies had been fulfilled and that the Messiah had, in reality, come. The Lord, I think, will not have to admonish Anna as He

did some of the early missionaries when He said that “with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths” (D&C 60:2).

The second characteristic of Anna that stands out to me is she had been serving in the temple with “fastings and prayers night and day” for a very long time. Some ambiguity exists in the Greek textual tradition over exactly how long Anna had served in the temple. Some texts, which the King James translators followed, indicate she had served there for eighty-four years since she became a widow. If this is the case, Anna would have been over a hundred years old when Mary and Joseph came to the temple with Jesus. Other texts, however, indicate that she was eighty-four years old at the time of these events.¹⁶ Regardless of these differences, both textual groups emphasize that Anna had been a constant temple patron for over sixty years. Unlike Simeon, who “came by the Spirit into the temple” (Luke 2:27), Anna needed no such guidance because she was always there.

I have often wondered, as I have read these verses, what the motivation was behind Anna’s constant and prolonged dedication to the temple. It surely couldn’t have been simply a job or an assignment. If that were the case, she would have retired or would have been released long before—but still she came. At her age, it couldn’t have been physically easy for her to get to the temple or to spend so much time there—but still she came. Perhaps she, unlike many of her contemporaries, saw beyond the outward manifestations of the temple ritual. Perhaps she understood the true purpose behind temple worship; and, for one day, that purpose became a reality as she came into the presence of God’s Only Begotten Son. Is it any wonder that this wonderful woman recognized Him immediately?

Are there lessons for me to learn from Anna? I think so. I would like to touch on just two. First, her story teaches me I cannot allow myself to be complacent in my worship. In the 1907

October general conference, Elder David O. McKay declared, “The peril of this century is spiritual apathy.”¹⁷ We may have moved on to a new century, but I’m not sure we have put Elder McKay’s indictment behind us. Do you remember Nephi’s prophecy that in the last days, Satan will pacify people “and lull them away into carnal security, [so] that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth”? (2 Nephi 28:21). Of this Nephi warns: “Wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion” (28:24). Can we regularly attend our church meetings and the temple and still be included in Nephi’s prophecy? Can we be lulled into a false sense of security and think that all is well in our personal Zions because we mechanically attend to our worship? Elder John A. Widstoe taught that “the endowment which was given by revelation can best be understood by revelation.” But then note how he continues when he says that “to those who seek most vigorously, with pure hearts, will the revelation be greatest.”¹⁸ Remember that many people were probably at the temple the same day Anna was there, and yet they were not prepared to receive the greatest revelation of all—that they were in the presence of Christ.

Second, and clearly related to the first lesson, the story of Anna teaches me that the temple is where I really come to know that Jesus is the Christ and also to understand the significance of that statement. The temple helps us to understand the plan of salvation and Christ’s central role therein. Perhaps that is why President Howard W. Hunter issued the following challenge to members of the Church:

I . . . invite the members of the Church to establish the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of their membership and the supernal setting for their most sacred covenants. It would be the deepest desire of my heart to have every member of the Church be temple worthy. I would hope that every adult member would be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend, even if proximity to a temple does not allow immediate or frequent use of it.

Let us be a temple-attending and a temple-loving people. Let us hasten to the temple as frequently as time and means and personal circumstances allow. Let us go not only for our kindred dead, but let us also go for the personal blessing of

temple worship, for the sanctity and safety which is provided within those hallowed and consecrated walls. The temple is a place of beauty, it is a place of revelation, it is a place of peace. It is the house of the Lord. It is holy unto the Lord. It should be holy unto us.¹⁹

Even in three short verses in Luke, we can see the temple was holy to Anna. She loved the temple, and so her constant and unwavering attendance at the temple enabled her to have the greatest revelation possible—to know that Jesus is the Christ. Aren't all revelations really ancillary to that revelation?

Conclusion

"He that hath the scriptures, let him search them" (3 Nephi 10:14). This injunction was given to those who survived the great destruction in the New World to show them the fulfillment of the words of the prophets. The same plea to search the scriptures has been proclaimed by all of God's prophets. In this dispensation of the fullness of times, we have been blessed with not only the Bible but also the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. We can hearken to the prophets in many different ways. In this paper, I have discussed just one of these. Nephi and Anna are just two examples of real people mentioned in the scriptures. Their lives and experiences happened in real time. I believe that if we take the time to come to know them, then we will begin to identify with them—with their struggles and with their joys. Then, we can see the gospel and its doctrines not just as theology but also as practical guides that really work in the lives of people just like us. Listen to what President Kimball taught:

To know the patriarchs and prophets of ages past and their faithfulness under stress and temptation and persecution strengthens [our resolve]. To come to know Job well and intimately is to learn to keep faith through the greatest of adversities. To know well the strength of Joseph in the luxury of ancient Egypt when he was tempted by a voluptuous woman, and to see this clean young man resist all the powers of darkness embodied in this one seductive person, certainly should fortify the intimate reader against such sin. To see the forbearance and fortitude of Paul when he was giving his life to his ministry is to give courage to those who feel

they have been injured and tried. . . . While starving, choking, freezing, poorly clothed, Paul was yet consistent in his service. He never wavered once after the testimony came to him following his supernatural experience. To see the growth of Peter with the gospel as the catalyst moving him from a lowly fisherman—uncultured, unlearned, and ignorant, as they rated him—blossoming out into a great organizer, prophet, leader, theologian, teacher. Thus [we can] take courage and know that nothing can stop [our] progress but [ourselves] and [our] weaknesses.²⁰

I know that to be true. As I have sought to identify with individuals in the scriptures, I have grown to love them. I am so grateful for their lives and examples. As I read about them, I take heart in knowing it is possible for even you and me to reach great spiritual heights if we follow the paths they did. We have the scriptures and therefore are under obligation to search them.

Notes

¹ This paper is based on an earlier, shorter version presented at a BYU Women’s Conference. That version was published as “Walking in Their Shoes,” *Arise and Shine Forth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 47–53.

² Caroline Eyring Miner and Edward L. Kimball, *Camilla: A Biography of Camilla Eyring Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 172.

³ For an excellent discussion on the legal ramifications of this passage, see John W. Welch, “Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (fall 1992): 119–41.

⁴ L. Tom Perry, “Give Heed to the Word of the Lord,” *Ensign* 30, no. 6 (June 2000): 24, 26.

⁵ Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball: An Apostle, The Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 450.

⁶ Bruce R. McConkie, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” *Ensign* 15, no. 5 (May 1985): 9.

⁷ See H. David Burton, “Heroes,” *Ensign* 23, no. 5 (May 1993): 46–47.

⁸ See Leviticus 12 for the Mosaic Law requirements.

⁹ Simeon seems to be the only exception (Luke 2:25–32).

¹⁰ Gordon B. Hinckley, “New Temples to Provide ‘Crowning Blessings’ of the Gospel,” *Ensign* 28, no. 5 (May 1998): 88.

¹¹ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 1:98.

¹² Miriam (Exodus 15:20); Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22); Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14); and Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3), although Luke records that the daughters of Philip “did prophesy” (Acts 21:9). In Revelation 2:20, we read that Jezebel “calleth herself a prophetess,” but the author clearly does not approve of the self-designation.

¹³ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1–9:20*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 35A:122.

¹⁴ *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), s.v. *ttt a’nqomologe’omai*, 71.

¹⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 28:431.

¹⁶ For an overview of issues involved, see *ibid.*, 431.

¹⁷ David O. McKay, Conference Report, October 1907, 62.

¹⁸ John A. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 12 (April 1921): 63.

¹⁹ Cited in Jay M. Todd, “President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church,” *Ensign* 24, no. 7 (July 1994): 5.

²⁰ *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 131–32.