



Studying the scriptures of the Restoration together with the Old Testament can give us a powerful witness of the relevance of teachings given by the Lord throughout all dispensations.

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Old Testament Relevancy Reaffirmed by Restoration Scripture

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Many modern readers of the Old Testament find seemingly obsolete religious practices such as strict dietary commands, animal sacrifice, temple worship, and availability of the priesthood difficult to understand. Because these things are so different from current practices in the Church, some readers find the Old Testament not only difficult to understand but also difficult to apply in our day.

However, though methods or procedures change, doctrines remain fixed.¹ Although much has changed since the days of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, additional revelation reaffirms the constancy and relevancy of their ancient teachings. Unfortunately, doctrines and principles common in ancient and modern scripture may be missed when they are studied in isolation from each other. Elder Neal A. Maxwell warns religious educators about this hazard: “Sometimes I fear that we teach the scriptures in isolation from each other, when in fact, if you will make multiple use of them . . . you will not only make the teaching moment more significant but you will also be witnessing to the congruency and relevance of all the scriptures. You will find, as one would expect, a powerful conceptual consistency that flows throughout all the scriptures, sometimes even verbatim language, because they come from the same source.”² Studying the scriptures of the Restoration together with the Old Testament can give us a powerful witness of the relevance of teachings given by the Lord throughout all dispensations.

Concerning these common themes, Elder Russell M. Nelson testifies: “Constancy amid change is assured by heavenly personages, plans, and principles. Our trust can be safely anchored to them. They provide peace, eternal progression, hope, freedom, love, and joy to all who will be guided by them. They are true—now and forever.”³ Additional scripture serves as a second witness to many truths taught in the Old Testament, including God’s nature, His interaction with mankind, and His eternal plan.

God’s Nature and His Interaction with Mankind

Central among these constant “personages, plans, and principles” is the unchanging nature of God. His constancy is apparent early in the Old Testament story. Preparing ancient Israel for entrance into the promised land, Moses reminded his people, “Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deuteronomy 7:9). In other words, God’s keeping covenants for “a thousand generations” means He is unchangeable. As the Lord stated through the prophet Malachi, “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6).

Additional scripture reaffirms the Old Testament declaration about God’s constancy. After watching the fall of his civilization, Mormon testified to his son, Moroni, that God “is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity” (Moroni 8:18). Latter-day revelation found in the Doctrine and Covenants confirms this doctrine. The Lord declared through the Prophet Joseph Smith that “by these things we know that there is a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God” (D&C 20:17).

Moreover, because God is unchangeable, so are His love and efforts to save His children. The Psalmist declared that “the redemption of [a] soul is precious” (Psalm 49:8). Writing during Old Testament times, Alma similarly taught that souls in his day were “as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming” (Alma 39:17). Comparisons should exist, therefore, between the Old Testament and other scripture, paralleling God’s interactions with mankind. Scriptures and teachings by latter-day prophets help us identify these common interactions.

For example, one theme common in the standard works is God’s trying the faith of His people. Mormon parenthetically observed that “the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (Mosiah 23:21; see also Ether 12:6). The principle abounds in Old Testament stories. Being closely pursued by the chari-

ots of Pharaoh, Moses and the children of Israel were commanded to “go forward” faithfully toward the Red Sea *before* the Lord parted the waves (see Exodus 14). Similarly, Joshua instructed the priests of Levi to dip their feet in the overflowing waters of Jordan while bearing the ark of the covenant *before* the Lord opened their way (see Joshua 3:13–17). Hezekiah watched the armies surround Jerusalem *before* the Lord fulfilled His promise of protection for Judah (see 2 Kings 18–19). Naaman, the Syrian captain, was required to dip seven times in the river Jordan *before* his flesh was healed of its leprosy (see 2 Kings 5). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faithfully stood their ground and were cast into the fury of the fiery flames *before* they walked with the Lord unharmed (see Daniel 3). A Book of Mormon scripture summarizes the lesson: “Ye receive no witness until *after* the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6; emphasis added).

Trusting God’s timing. Throughout the Old Testament and today, trusting God involves trusting His timing, omniscience, and power to save. Numerous examples both in the Old Testament and through additional revelation highlight the importance of trusting God’s timing. Abraham, the father of the faithful, spent his lifetime learning about faith in the Lord’s will and timing. Before leaving Haran, Abraham was promised posterity, even “the literal seed, or the seed of the body” (Abraham 2:11). Though already sixty-two years old when this promise was given (see v. 14), Abraham learned to rely on the Lord and His timing. After thirty-eight long years of waiting, Abraham and Sarah finally received Isaac, fulfilling the promise (see Genesis 21:5).

Waiting on the Lord’s timing for posterity is a theme common to Old Testament individuals. Like Abraham and Sarah, Elkanah and Hannah had to wait on the Lord for the gift of a child. Though they faithfully worshiped and sacrificed before the Lord, Hannah remained without child. “Year by year [she diligently] went up to the house of the Lord,” vowing and praying to the Lord for His will to be done (see 1 Samuel 1:7, 10–11). Finally, the Lord blessed Hannah for her righteous desire, and Samuel the prophet was born (see 1 Samuel 1).

Latter-day revelation confirms the Old Testament lesson that faith in the Lord includes faith in His timing. The Lord declared, “Sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his *own time*, and in his *own way*, and according to his *own will*” (D&C 88:68; emphasis added). “The issue for us is trusting God enough to also trust His timing,” observed Elder Neal A. Maxwell. “If we can truly believe He has our welfare at heart, may we not let His

plans unfold as He thinks best?”⁴ Elder Dallin H. Oaks summarizes the lesson: “Faith means trust—trust in God’s will, trust in His way of doing things, and trust in His timetable. We should not try to impose our timetable on His.”⁵

Trusting God’s personal knowledge of His children. Related to faith in the Lord’s timing is faith in His knowledge of us as individuals. The Lord’s unfolding plans sometimes include lessons learned through personalized trial. “I assure you, my brothers and sisters, that our Heavenly Father is aware of us individually and collectively,” declared Elder M. Russell Ballard. “He understands the spiritual, physical, and emotional difficulties we face in the world today. In fact, they are all part of His plan for our eternal growth and development.”⁶

God’s foreknowledge of the plight of His children is also evident throughout the Old Testament. “The Lord was with Joseph” during his service in the house of Potiphar, his imprisonment, and ultimately his rise to power in Pharaoh’s eyes (see Genesis 39:2–3, 21, 23; 41:38). Upon being reunited with his brothers years later, Joseph testified: “*God did send me* before you to preserve life. . . . *And God sent me* before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now *it was not you that sent me hither, but God*” (Genesis 45:5, 7–8; emphasis added). Joseph recognized God’s personal knowledge of him.

Latter-day Saint history and scripture record similar foreknowledge and intervention during periods of trial. When Martin Harris lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript, the Lord revealed His foreknowledge of the incident, having previously prepared the small plates of Nephi as a replacement for that which was lost (see 1 Nephi 9; D&C 10). When including the duplicate record in the book, Mormon testified: “I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore he worketh in me to do according to his will” (Words of Mormon 1:7). Of His intervention, the Lord later revealed, “I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil” (D&C 10:43).

As it did for Joseph in Egypt and Joseph Smith with the lost manuscript, the foreknowledge of God during periods of trial gives Saints, both ancient and modern, faith to move forward. Through His omniscience, the Lord shapes difficult experiences for good. Lessons from both the Old Testament and other scripture verify this principle.

Trusting God's omnipotence. Related to God's omniscience is His power to intervene in life as His will and timing dictate. The Old Testament is replete with examples of the Lord's divine intervention. Many of the examples previously mentioned and countless others highlight God's being "mighty to save" (Isaiah 63:1). Old Testament prophets acting in the name of the "Almighty God" (Genesis 17:1) were given His power to stop the mouths of lions, quench the violence of fire, break mountains, divide seas, dry up waters, put at defiance the armies of nations, and even divide the earth (see Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:26, 30–31). "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" destroyed a Midianite army of over one hundred thousand with just three hundred men and a like number of trumpets, pitchers, and swords (see Judges 7–8). David defeated the giant Goliath, showing "all the earth . . . that there is a God in Israel" (1 Samuel 17:46). Through Elijah, God sent down fire from heaven, licking up wood, stone, and water, and causing the people to exclaim, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God" (1 Kings 18:38–39).

Additional scripture reiterates the reality of these miraculous demonstrations of God's power and the possibility for their repetition today. Elder Oaks observes, "The protection promised to the faithful servants of God is a reality today as it was in Bible times."⁷ Moroni likewise reasoned: "And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles" (Mormon 9:19). Thus, like the Old Testament record, restored scripture describes God's freeing His servants from prison (see Alma 14), saving the righteous from destruction (see 3 Nephi 8–9), and delivering His prophet from affliction (see D&C 24:1). He promises to fight His children's battles (see D&C 98:37), a reality verified throughout Church history.⁸ The divine hand that parted the Red Sea and held back the flooded Jordan declared of modern rivers and attempts to stop His will: "What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints" (D&C 121:33).

God's Plan and Principles from the Old Testament

In addition to identifying characteristics common to God's interactions with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and modern prophets, the Old Testament and latter-day scripture also share common principles of His

plan. For example, scriptures both ancient and modern contain numerous teachings on the eternal importance of families, the mission of the house of Israel, and the centrality of temple covenants. Studying latter-day revelation together with the Old Testament helps us recognize these common lessons and themes.

Eternal importance of families. A theme common to the Old Testament and other scripture is the divine role of families in the plan of salvation. All scripture, in fact, begins in a family context. The Old Testament introduces the Creation as being divinely designed for the placement of Adam and Eve on earth as an eternal family.⁹ The Old Testament regularly speaks of families and their challenges. Examples include Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob.

The New Testament begins the same way, with Joseph and Mary starting their family. Jesus Christ's genealogy is included in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, thus highlighting the importance of extended family ties in God's plan. Similarly, the Book of Mormon begins with Nephi and his "goodly parents" (1 Nephi 1:1). Like the beginning of the Bible, it too tells the story of a family divided by wickedness.

Two books in the Pearl of Great Price likewise begin with family. Abraham tells of his familial relationship, including the desire to have "the blessings of the fathers" (Abraham 1:2), and Joseph Smith initiates his history by summarizing his place in a family.

Finally, the Doctrine and Covenants solidifies the theme, beginning its story, like each of the other standard works, with the doctrine of eternal families. After the preface (D&C 1), the first chronological revelation given to Joseph Smith quotes Malachi's prophecy of the return of Elijah with the power to seal families (see D&C 2).

Truly, eternal families are at the heart of the everlasting gospel message. Not only are they "central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children"¹⁰ but also they seem central in all books of scripture, including the Old Testament.

Covenants, temples, and their centrality in the gospel plan. Related to the theme of the eternal importance of families is the centrality of covenants and temples in God's plan. The Old Testament is really the story of covenant, the word itself sometimes being rendered "testament" (see Bible Dictionary, "covenant," 651). Paraphrasing Moses's earlier declaration (see Deuteronomy 7:9), Solomon summarized the relationship among God, His children, and covenants in his temple dedicatory prayer: "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart" (1 Kings 8:23).

The Old Testament is the story of God establishing His covenant. He made covenants with Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 9:21–25; 14:26–27; Genesis 17; Exodus 2:24). Additional scripture further teaches the importance of covenants, including the fulfillment of ancient promises. The Book of Mormon reveals that one of the foreordained missions of Joseph Smith was to bring the house of Israel to the knowledge of the covenants God made with their fathers (see 2 Nephi 3:7). The Doctrine and Covenants emphasizes that the Lord called Joseph Smith to reestablish His “everlasting covenant” (D&C 1:22). Similarly, Zion is promised to the “remnant of Jacob, and those who are heirs according to the covenant” (D&C 52:2).

The covenant established in the Old Testament, including gathering scattered Israel and restoring it with gospel blessings, is being fulfilled today. Unfortunately, many are ignorant of the Lord’s hand in this process. Elder Nelson observes: “The gathering of those remnants and the fulfilling of that divine covenant are occurring in our day. Yet this big picture is obscure to the eye of many who focus upon bargains at supermarkets and rankings of favorite football teams. Let us examine our place in God’s plan for his children and for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are part of a destiny known by relatively few people upon the earth.”¹¹ That destiny includes the promised gathering of scattered Israel, accomplished by missionaries and members throughout the world. The Old Testament, supported by other scripture and revelation, helps us recognize this covenant and its modern fulfillment.’

Related to the theme of covenants is the importance of temples. “The story of ancient Israel, the chosen people of God,” remarks Elder John A. Widtsoe, “centers upon their temples.”¹² Temples dominate the Old Testament, from the Lord’s detailed instructions about the tabernacle to Solomon’s efforts to erect a permanent structure. Generations of faithful Israelites labored to build, preserve, and worship in these sacred edifices. Later, Old Testament prophets lamented the loss of the temple and recorded its rebuilding (see Lamentations 1–3; Ezra 3–6). Expanding the theme, Elder Widtsoe further observes, “All people of all ages have had temples in one form or another. When the history of human thought shall be written from the point of view of temple worship, it may well be found that temples and the work done in them have been the dominating influence in shaping human thought from the beginning of the race.”¹³

Latter-day Saint beliefs in temple worship, says Elder Nelson, “compose another link between ancient and modern Israel.” These

ties are particularly strong between the modern Church and Solomon's ancient temple. "The best known temple of ancient Israel," continues Elder Nelson, "was Solomon's temple. Its baptismal font and dedicatory prayer provide patterns that are employed for temples today. Old Testament scriptures refer to special clothing and ordinances that are associated with temples."¹⁴ Individuals familiar with current temple worship resonate with the instructions given in the Old Testament regarding earlier temple service.

The Doctrine and Covenants helps us appreciate these ancient and modern connections. The Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer, for example, begins with almost identical wording to the beginning of Solomon's dedicatory prayer: "Thanks be to thy name, O Lord God of Israel, who keepest covenant and showest mercy unto thy servants who walk uprightly before thee, with all their hearts" (D&C 109:1; compare 1 Kings 8:23). Both prayers ask that God's name be upon the house and its occupants and that the Lord will hear and forgive His people who worship therein (see D&C 109; 1 Kings 8). Later revelation about the Nauvoo Temple invited members to bring, as they did for Solomon's temple anciently, gold, silver, precious stones, and trees to build a house worthy of God's presence (see D&C 124:26–27; see also 1 Kings 6:21).

Scripture further notes that God's people "are always commanded to build" these structures to His holy name (D&C 124:39). The Old Testament and modern revelation instruct us that temples and temple worship are central to the plan of salvation, across all ages of time. Joseph Smith summarizes, "All that were ever saved, were saved through the power of this great plan of redemption, as much before the coming of Christ as since."¹⁵ Ordinances necessary for salvation today are the same as in any age of the world. These include temple covenants.

Old Testament Prophets and Events and Latter-day Scripture

In addition to being linked by common principles and themes, modern and ancient scripture are further tied together by frequent reference to Old Testament prophets and events. Old Testament persons and stories are frequently used as models for modern Saints. Furthermore, latter-day scripture expands our understanding of many difficult passages from the ancient record. Studying these texts together helps the reader appreciate their interdependence.

The Doctrine and Covenants refers to Old Testament personalities like Adam, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Uriah, Solomon, Isaiah, and Job. It also refers

to Old Testament stories, including the Fall of Adam and Eve, Enoch's translation, Moses's parting of the Red Sea, and Uzzah's steadying the ark of the covenant. Whatever doubt the world casts on the historicity of the Fall, the Flood, and the Exodus or on the reality of Moses, Isaiah, and Job, latter-day revelation reaffirms biblical veracity.

Not only does latter-day scripture witness to the authenticity of biblical characters and accounts but also it often expands our understanding of them. The lives and events of the early patriarchs, including details of the Creation, Fall, and Flood, are expanded from cursory verses to whole chapters in the latter-day texts of Moses and Abraham. For example, the seven-verse summary of Enoch found in Genesis 5:18–24 is expanded to 119 verses in the Pearl of Great Price (see Moses 6:21–8:2). Likewise, details of the Lord's confounding the languages at the Tower of Babel are expanded in the book of Ether. Furthermore, passages from the Doctrine and Covenants significantly enhance our understanding of Old Testament priesthood and practice (see D&C 84; 132). Finally, as Elder Nelson observes, "Abraham is mentioned in more verses of modern revelation than in all the verses of the Old Testament."¹⁶

Conversely, a working knowledge of the Old Testament helps modern Saints better understand all scripture. Nephi's inspiring charge to "let us be strong like unto Moses" (1 Nephi 4:2) makes more sense if we are familiar with the faith of the Old Testament prophet. Diligent students of Isaiah better understand why both Nephi and the Lord would delight in his words (see 2 Nephi 25:5; 3 Nephi 23:1). The Lord's Liberty Jail reminder that "thou art not yet as Job" (D&C 121:10) and His later command to "go ye, therefore, and do the works of Abraham" (D&C 132:32) mean more to readers if they are familiar with the faithful sacrifice of these Old Testament characters. Elder Maxwell encourages teachers to emphasize these links in their teaching. Doing so helps the reader appreciate the "high integration of concepts in the scriptures . . . [and] the editorial control of the Holy Spirit as various prophets gave utterances in centuries past. It wouldn't hurt at all . . . for your students to see the literal relationships of the scriptures."¹⁷ These relationships show that scriptural records confirm and witness of each other.

Conclusion

The Old Testament is an important foundational canon for Latter-day Saints. Its emphasis on the nature of God, His interactions with mankind, and the unchanging principles of the plan of salvation make

it essential to a full understanding of the gospel. Unfortunately, some of us overlook its importance. Elder Nelson observes: “Connections with the New Testament would be no surprise to any who understand the deep commitment to Jesus Christ held by members of this Church that bears his holy name. . . . But the connection between the Church and the Old Testament is less apparent.”¹⁸ Modern revelation helps us see these ties.

Additional scripture helps us appreciate the importance of the Old Testament and its messages—many of which are as applicable today as when prophets first uttered them millennia ago. The Old Testament has much to say about faith through adversity and about trusting God’s timing, omniscience, and power to save. In an era of eroding values and broken promises, the Old Testament emphasizes the divine importance of families, covenants, and temples. Its heroes provide role models for a society often misguided in whom it applauds. Using all scripture, teachers can help others recognize and apply these essential Old Testament themes. Challenging teachers to bring the Old Testament to life, Elder Maxwell summarizes, “I would hope that the students, as well as members of the Church whom you teach, will be able to discover for themselves that the Old Testament is new—new in the sense that its antiquity is filled with relevancy.”¹⁹ **RE**

Notes

1. Elder Packer observes, “While doctrines remain fixed, the methods or procedures do not” (in Conference Report, September–October 1989, 18; or *Ensign*, November 1989, 15).

2. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Old Testament: Relevancy within Antiquity,” in *A Symposium on the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), 9.

3. Russell M. Nelson, in Conference Report, October 1993, 48; or *Ensign*, November 1993, 35.

4. Neal A. Maxwell, *Even As I Am* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 93.

5. Dallin H. Oaks, “Timing,” *Ensign*, October 2003, 12.

6. M. Russell Ballard, in Conference Report, October 1992, 45; or *Ensign*, November 1992, 33.

7. Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, October 1992, 54; or *Ensign*, November 1992, 39.

8. For example, see the account of Zion’s Camp at the Fishing River in *History of the Church*, 2:103–5. In this instance, Joseph Smith tied their miraculous preservation to divine intervention by the God of the Old Testament: “When Jehovah fights [the enemies] would rather be absent” (104).

9. Elder Nelson observes: “The purposes of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement all converge on the sacred work done in temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The earth was created and the Church was restored to make possible the sealing of wife to husband, children to parents, families to progenitors, worlds without end” (in Conference Report, October 1996, 47; or *Ensign*, November 1996, 35). Similarly, Elder Robert D. Hales teaches: “From the earliest beginnings, God established the family and made it eternal. Adam and Eve were sealed in marriage for time and all eternity” (in Conference Report, October 1996, 86; or *Ensign*, November 1996, 64).

10. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.

11. Russell M. Nelson, “Remnants Gathered, Covenants Fulfilled,” in *Voices of Old Testament Prophets: The 26th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 2.

12. John A. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, April 1921, 53.

13. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” 52.

14. Nelson, “Remnants Gathered,” 15.

15. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 59.

16. Nelson, “Remnants Gathered,” 9.

17. Maxwell, “The Old Testament,” 9.

18. Nelson, “Remnants Gathered,” 2–3.

19. Maxwell, “The Old Testament,” 8.