

“Open Thou Mine Eyes”

Blindness and the Blind in the Old Testament

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Participating in this fiftieth anniversary Sperry Symposium is a definite privilege for me. Perhaps I am the only presenter during this jubilee year who actually had the privilege to be a faculty colleague of Dr. Sidney B. Sperry. I first met him when as a youth I attended a series of lectures he gave in Southern California on “Our Book of Mormon.” He impressed me with his organized scholarship, his in-depth but easy-to-understand presentation, and his faith in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Then, when I joined the BYU faculty at age twenty-seven, Brother Sperry became a valued mentor who treated me, a very junior colleague, with genuine interest and kindness. He always seemed to have time to answer my questions and provide direction.

I remember the first Sperry Symposium that took place on a single evening with only three presenters. A few years later, this event moved to Saturday mornings in the old Joseph Smith Building

auditorium. I first presented in 1977 and have been honored to participate numerous times since then. This year's focus on Old Testament teachings about compassion for marginalized and disadvantaged groups has special interest in today's society and to me personally, because I am blind.

An awareness of how our modern society views groups with disabilities can bring the Old Testament's teachings on the subject into sharper focus. While earlier generations were comfortable using terms such as *blind*, today they may seem too blunt or harsh, so softer terms such as *visually impaired* have become more popular. Similarly, *handicapped* has more commonly been replaced with the more euphemistic terms *disabled*, *persons with disability*, or *persons with special needs*. The Old Testament, however, does not employ euphemisms, but rather is direct and even blunt. *Blind* is consistently used to refer to those without physical sight. Meghan Henning, an associate professor at the University of Dayton, points out that "there is no term for disability among the cultures that produced the biblical text." "Rather," she insists, "there were standards of bodily normativity." Persons whose bodies were considered "nonnormative" were regarded not only as different but as deficient and defective, so they "were excluded religiously and socially."¹

In the Old Testament the term *blind* may refer to the literal loss of sight or to a more metaphorical inability or unwillingness to see spiritually. This presentation focuses on the Old Testament's teachings concerning the blind—including the causes of physical or spiritual blindness, the image of those who are blind, how they should be treated, and the hope for overcoming blindness.

Causes of Physical and Spiritual Blindness

Physical blindness was a widespread challenge in the ancient Near East, and the Old Testament suggests some possible causes—natural, human, and divine. Three examples of people with poor eyesight are familiar. Isaac, Jacob or Israel, and Eli readily come to mind. In all

three of these cases, their blindness was described as resulting from natural causes, their sight being "dim" as a consequence of advancing age (see Genesis 27:1; 48:10; and 1 Samuel 3:2; 4:15). Disease was another widespread natural cause of blindness in the ancient world, but it is not specifically reflected in Old Testament teachings. One might ask, though, wasn't the ban on eating pork instituted to eliminate a potential cause of blindness? Writing in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Rabbi Jeffrey Howard Tigay rejected this hypothesis: "There is no evidence that the biblical injunction against eating pork was intended or understood to prevent trichinosis or other diseases which cause blindness."²

There were also examples, fortunately few, of individuals who were blinded by their enemies—a not uncommon practice in the ancient Near East. After Delilah caused Sampson to have his hair cut, which resulted in him losing his power, the Philistines "put out his eyes" and bound him (Judges 16:15–21). After the army of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, had conquered the kingdom of Judah, they "put out the eyes of Zedekiah" (2 Kings 25:7). The law of Moses itself seems to have condoned even the Lord's people inflicting this harsh punishment: "eye for eye" (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). Although this penalty is found in the Torah, Rabbi Tigay questions whether this extreme penalty "was ever carried out literally in Israel."³

Divine power is the most common cause of blindness mentioned in the scriptures. The Old Testament acknowledges God as the creator of all things, including people in widely different circumstances. The Lord taught Moses: "Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" (Exodus 4:11). One can only speculate about why Jehovah would create certain individuals to be blind, for the Old Testament does not give any definitive answers. Two events in the Old Testament underscored God's power over vision. The record in Genesis includes an interesting account of blindness being inflicted by divine power on a specific occasion to achieve a specific end. When an angry mob from

Sodom surrounded Lot's house and demanded that he surrender two "angels" who were inside, these angelic visitors "smote [members of the mob] with blindness" in such a way that "they wearied themselves to find the door" (see Genesis 19:1-11). The record does not state whether this blindness was permanent or was subsequently removed. Much later, at the time of the prophet Elisha, divine power over sight was again demonstrated in an unusual way. When the Syrians had surrounded the city of Dothan, Elisha asked the Lord to spiritually open the eyes of his servant, enabling him to behold supernatural "horses and chariots of fire" and to realize that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Then, at Elisha's request, the Lord blinded and later opened the eyes of the Syrians so that Elisha could lead them away to another place (see 2 Kings 6:8-23).

Two experiences in the New Testament possibly exhibited a similar phenomenon. When a mob seized Jesus and threatened to throw him over a precipice, he was protected, "passing through the midst of them, [and] went his way" (Luke 4:29-30). Here Jesus's safety is described as "miraculous,"⁴ since the mob is apparently unable to see Jesus even though they may have been able to see everything else. Similarly, when Jesus later joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they did not recognize him because their eyes were "holden." Even though they discussed prophecies about the Savior as they walked along with him, they were not able to recognize him until "their eyes were opened" (see Luke 24:13-32). A writer in *The Interpreter's Bible* insists that "Luke intends us to understand that their senses were supernaturally dulled, not that they were blinded by intense preoccupation," and that they later knew him when "the miraculous inhibition that had prevented the disciples from recognizing their traveling companion" was removed.⁵

Passages in the Old Testament frequently link blindness with wickedness. Through Moses, the Lord enumerated blessings that would follow righteousness and warned of cursings that would be the consequence of disobedience. Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 contain such a list. Blindness was among the negative outcomes of

wickedness: "The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness" (Deuteronomy 28:28–29). Although the wording seems quite graphic, the threatened blindness perhaps referred more to spiritual darkness rather than to literal blindness. As a teaching meant to instill the consequences of obedience or disobedience, the Lord directed Moses and the children of Israel to set up large stones on which the law would be written and to have representatives of specified tribes shout out promised blessings from Mount Gerizim and representatives of the other tribes shout out the curses resulting from disobedience—including blindness—from Mount Ebal, two prominent hills in the center of the promised land (see Deuteronomy 11:26–29; 27:1–4). The array of cursings could have been presented more briefly, one commentator noted, "yet the purpose of the repetition is not primarily intellectual analysis. It is rather the homiletical aim of building up the total impression by picture after picture, each viewed repeatedly from different angles, so that the reader or hearer may see it all, feel it deeply, and never forget it."⁶

While the notion of large groups becoming spiritually blind as a result of wickedness is readily acknowledged, the idea of certain individuals becoming physically blind as a consequence of personal sin is not as obviously recognized. One possible example might be the verse in Proverbs that warns that birds of prey would pluck out the eye of one who is disrespectful of his or her parents (see Proverbs 30:17). Also, there is evidence that in biblical times physical blindness might be linked with sin. This is illustrated by a New Testament incident that may have reflected attitudes carried over from Old Testament times. John describes the occasion when Jesus met an individual who was congenitally sightless. The Lord's disciples inquired, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" The Savior did not refute the concept that sin might cause literal blindness, but rather he suggested another purpose: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be

made manifest in him” (John 9:1–3). Even though we may not always fully understand how an individual’s blindness, for example, fits into God’s grand scheme of things, it nevertheless is comforting to know that he is aware of our condition and will bless us according to our needs and for our ultimate good.

Description and Status of the Blind

The Old Testament typically describes individuals who are physically blind as helpless, such as groping at noonday in darkness (see Deuteronomy 28:29). The prophet Zephaniah likened the spiritual fate of the wicked to the physical condition of people who are blind: “I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord” (Zephaniah 1:17).

Isaac with his diminished eyesight is portrayed as not being fully in charge. This was in marked contrast to the usual pattern in this highly patriarchal era. One commentator described the family as a “little kingdom that was ruled by the father,” who specifically “ruled over the wife, children,” and “everyone in the household.”⁷ In this instance, Rebekah (rather than Isaac) received divine guidance concerning which of their sons should be given the birthright. Isaac’s dimmed vision enabled her to disguise Jacob to feel and smell like Esau (see Genesis 27:1–29). Rebecca’s and Jacob’s behavior may seem inappropriate, especially in light of Isaac’s disability. But, as Dr. Sidney B. Sperry pointed out, the Hebrews came out of “an Oriental culture . . . whose language, manners, and customs were much different from our own.”⁸

Similarly, the biblical record suggests that Jacob or Israel’s diminished eyesight was a factor when he blessed Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (see Genesis 48:10–19). Joseph positioned the two boys in such a way that Jacob’s right hand would rest on the head of Manasseh, the older brother, assuming that he would receive the birthright blessing. The scriptural record does not state whether or not Israel could see which son was being placed under his right

hand, but "as he embraced the boys, a discerning impulse moved him, and he followed this inward moving as against what Joseph had supposed he would do."⁹ He therefore crossed his arms so his right hand would rest on the head of Ephraim, the younger brother.

Then, centuries later, it is clear that King Jeroboam's wife planned to take advantage of the prophet Ahijah's visual impairment in order to get a blessing; the Lord, however, revealed the plot to the elderly prophet (see 1 Kings 14:4–6). Thus these Old Testament examples point out that the Lord's inspiration and power were available to overcome disabilities such as visual impairment and ensure the right outcome.

Still, offerings to the Lord were to be perfect in every detail. The law of Moses prohibited a man with "blemishes" from officiating at the altar or approaching the veil lest he "profane" the sanctuary; among the several specifically mentioned disqualifying blemishes were blindness and "a blemish in his eye" (see Leviticus 21:17–23). Sacrificial animals likewise needed to be free from any blemishes; here again, blindness was specifically mentioned as a disqualifier (Leviticus 22:22; Deuteronomy 15:21). Therefore, the prophet Malachi later queried rhetorically: "If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? (Malachi 1:8). These provisions undoubtedly contributed to the generally unfavorable image of those who were blind.

Blindness as a Metaphor

The rather discouraging image of those who are blind made blindness a fit metaphor for unfavorable spiritual attributes and conditions. This usage is prevalent in the Old Testament. Blindness is sometimes used to represent a lack of intellectual capacity or understanding. Even in today's English, the absence of blindness is reflected in such positive terms as *insight* or *enlightenment*. Blindness being used as a metaphor "for ignorance or lack of comprehension," insisted Professor Henning, "reflects ancient cultural attitudes towards disabilities."

She further noted, “The reason that these metaphors worked in their ancient context and still play well in the contemporary world is because of the negative value that is placed upon bodies that are in some way different from what is considered the norm.”¹⁰

Sometimes blindness was not so much the inability to see, but the unwillingness to see. Jeremiah, who ministered at a time of crisis in faith when the kingdom of Judah faced great perils,¹¹ demanded: “Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes [and presumably the capacity to see], and see not [apparently because they chose not to]; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 5:21–22). In similar language Ezekiel, who ministered after the people had been taken into captivity,¹² warned: “Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 12:2). Notice how the Psalmist described useless human-made idols in almost identical discouraging terms: “They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not” (Psalms 115:5, 135:16). Isaiah also used blindness to describe negligence of duty: “His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber” (Isaiah 56:10).

More seriously, blindness described the loss of moral direction. For example, judges were warned that bribes or gifts may “blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deuteronomy 16:19; compare Exodus 23:8). Again, in conjunction with his instructions for the ceremony at Mount Ebal, Jehovah lamented that blindness would be the condition of those who would not “hearken unto the voice of the Lord [their] God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes” and that “these curses shall come upon [them] and overtake [them]” (see Deuteronomy 28:15–29). Speaking of the wicked people of his day, Isaiah declared: “We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead

men" (Isaiah 59:9–10). Jeremiah likewise lamented that the wicked people in Jerusalem had "wandered as blind men in the streets, they have polluted themselves with blood, so that men could not touch their garments" (Lamentations 4:14). In sum, it appears that these prophets were condemning the refusal to see rather than the inability to see. The writer of Proverbs cautioned, "Where there is no vision [particularly spiritual], the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

Treatment of People Who Are Blind

The people of Israel were expected to help those in need, including those who were blind. The prophet Isaiah admonished, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees" (Isaiah 35:3). Job apparently fulfilled this responsibility. As he recounted his benevolent acts, he specifically affirmed that he had aided those who were sightless: "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor" (Job 29:15–16).

Through Moses, the Lord reviewed a series of commandments related to loving one's neighbor and treating others justly and graciously. He enjoined: "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:14). Then, in like spirit, as Moses listed behaviors to shout from Mount Ebal and which should be condemned, he declared: "Cursed be he who maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deuteronomy 27:18). This suggests that there was widespread agreement with the concept of being helpful to people who were blind or had other disabilities.

Overcoming Blindness

Although the Old Testament presents a rather dismal image of physical and spiritual blindness, it also affirms that there is hope to overcome them. The Psalmist petitioned, "Open thou mine eyes" (Psalm 119:18). Several passages in the Old Testament specifically affirm that

God has the power to restore sight to the blind. “The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous” (Psalm 146:8). The prophet Isaiah perhaps more than anyone else spoke of blindness being overcome: “I the Lord have called thee in righteousness . . . to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (Isaiah 42:6–7). “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight” (Isaiah 42:16).

The divine power to restore sight was highlighted especially as Isaiah looked forward to the conditions that would prevail when the Lord would come to earth. Notice how these familiar and oft-quoted prophecies are linked with the promise that blindness would be overcome: “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and [there shall be] streams in the desert” (Isaiah 35:1, 5–6). Concerning the eyes of those who are blind being opened, Donald W. Parry’s commentary on Isaiah explains: “This statement has a literal, physical application, but it also refers to those who are spiritually blind, deaf, and dumb, who will be made whole through their conversion to the restored gospel.”¹³

Isaiah specifically prophesied that in the latter days the Lord would “proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder” (Isaiah 29:14). Latter-day Saints frequently cite this passage as a prophecy of the Restoration of the gospel and of the publication of the Book of Mormon.¹⁴ “And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust” (Isaiah 29:4). Professor Parry insists that “this chapter provides many details about the book of scripture that is the keystone of our religion.”¹⁵ Then Isaiah added, “And in that day

shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness” (Isaiah 29:18).

Even though the context of these prophecies suggests that they referred primarily to overcoming spiritual blindness, they could well refer to restoring physical sight as well. In many instances, they could well apply to both. Certainly God has the power to restore physical sight as well as to end spiritual blindness. Still, the Old Testament presents few, if any, examples of healing physical blindness. On the other hand, these would be a frequent part of the Lord’s earthly ministry.

The New Testament Picture

The New Testament continues both the Old Testament’s description of people who are physically blind as not being able to find their way and the metaphoric use of blindness to represent the lack of a moral compass. On one occasion, for example, the Savior condemned the Pharisees as “blind leaders of the blind,” observing that “if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14).

The New Testament also presents a theme absent from the Old Testament. The Gospels contain numerous accounts of the Lord healing those who are blind, both physically and spiritually. While the New Testament echoes the image of blind people being helpless, it also emphasizes an additional and positive facet in their character. Many of them had a deep and yearning faith in the Savior. Bartimaeus, a man who was blind, was sitting at the side of the road near Jericho as Jesus passed by and cried out: “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” Many tried to quiet him, “but he cried the more a great deal,” and Jesus called for him to come and asked: “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” The blind man then said unto him, “Lord, that I might receive my sight.” Jesus answered, “Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole,” after which the blind man “immediately . . . received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way” (Mark 10:46–52; compare Matthew 20:30–34). Others full of faith brought a man who

was blind to the Lord and asked him to touch the man. The Lord took him by the hand, placed saliva in his eyes, “put his hands upon him,” and asked him what he saw. His sight was still distorted, so the Lord placed his hands upon him again, and this time the man saw clearly (see Mark 8:22–26). Perhaps the piecemeal nature of this miracle heightened its impact. John gave some interesting details as he related the Master’s healing of the man who was born blind. The Lord declared: “I am the light of the world.” Then Jesus “spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the man who was blind with the clay, and said unto him, Go wash in the pool of Siloam.” He did so “and came seeing” (John 9:1–7). Notice how Jesus involved more senses than one and allowed the blind recipients to participate in their healing. Later, the latter blind man was challenged, “Give God the praise: we know that this man [who healed you] is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see” (John 9:24–25). Thus the faith of these blind individuals certainly was rewarded. Other accounts of Jesus healing the blind include, for example, Matthew 11:5, Luke 7:22, and Matthew 12:22. When multitudes of people saw Jesus healing the blind, “they glorified the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:31).

Blindness in the Latter Days

Physical blindness continues to exist in the modern world, but because of advances in medical science, there are fewer blind people. The perception of blindness is also more enlightened than in Old Testament times. The image of people who are blind has also improved, exemplified by popular admiration for the accomplishments of individuals such as Helen Keller.

Latter-day scriptures decry spiritual blindness as did the Old Testament. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob warned, “Wo unto the blind that *will* not see (2 Nephi 9:32; emphasis added). In the days of wicked King Noah, “the eyes of the people were blinded; therefore

they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi" (Mosiah 11:29). A well-known latter-day revelation describes heirs of the terrestrial kingdom as "honorable" people "who were blinded by the craftiness of men" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:75).

Modern revelation reaffirms the Old Testament's assurance that blindness can be healed. The faithful will "cause the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk" (Doctrine and Covenants 35:9). Various "signs shall follow them that believe," including this promise: "In [Jesus's] name they shall open the eyes of the blind, and unstop the ears of the deaf" (84:65, 69). These promises seem to include the restoration of physical sight as well as overcoming spiritual blindness.

Still, the promised restoration of physical sight may not come immediately. Therefore individuals are left to cope with attendant challenges. Teachings of Latter-day prophets can provide helpful perspectives. After Joseph Smith had languished in Liberty Jail for over three months, he pleaded with the Lord for understanding. In response, the Master gave this assurance: "Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8). Later, the Lord reviewed many of the trials Joseph and his family had experienced and then affirmed, "Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (122:7). "There is a divine purpose in the adversities we encounter every day," testified Elder James E. Faust. "They prepare, they purge, they purify, and thus they bless."¹⁶

Of course, how we deal with these challenges can affect their influence on our lives. As Ella Wheeler Wilcox expressed it, "One ship sails East, / And another West, / By the self-same winds that blow, / 'Tis the set of the sails / And not the gales, / That tells the way we go."¹⁷ The Lord counseled, "Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good" (Doctrine and Covenants 90:24).

An oft-quoted passage from the Book of Mormon provides perspective concerning the importance of how we respond to disabilities, including blindness. Through Moroni, the Lord declared: "I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:27). The Savior has assured, "Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers" (Doctrine and Covenants 112:10). Humbling oneself is not an acknowledgment of inferiority, but rather it is a recognition of one's true relationship to others. In this case it is an acknowledgment of our dependence on the Savior. In his Atonement, Jesus suffered for more than just the sins of humankind. Decades before the Savior's mortal ministry, Alma, another Book of Mormon prophet, taught: "He will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12, see Doctrine and Covenants 62:1). Hence, as we face our disabilities (such as blindness), we can certainly rejoice in the assurance expressed by the angel Gabriel to Mary, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Echoing the injunction given through Isaiah, a latter-day revelation also admonishes reaching out to help others: "Succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees" (Doctrine and Covenants 81:5; compare Isaiah 35:3; Job 4:4). Heeding this counsel, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an organization has been active in assisting groups with disabilities. The Church's website affirms: "All of God's children are on earth to be given the opportunity to learn and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. Members of the Church with differences or disabilities that affect their activities or interactions also [should] have meaningful opportunities to minister, teach, serve, and lead. Every person's

contribution is needed in the Lord's kingdom. . . . Our Father in Heaven knows and loves all of His children, and He is aware of the challenges we face."¹⁸

Thus Church programs not only avoid placing "stumbling blocks before the blind" as the Old Testament admonishes, but the Church actually seeks to remove them. One of the greatest needs of Latter-day Saints who are blind is having direct access to the scriptures and other literature. For over a century, the Church has sought to bridge this gap. In 1904 Church President Joseph F. Smith directed the organization of the Society for the Aid of the Sightless with the stated mission to publish literature for the blind, aid in their education, improve their condition, and cooperate with others to work for these ends through education and legislation. The society's work was carried out primarily by Albert M. Talmage (the blind brother of Elder James E. Talmage) and his wife, Sara. Beginning in 1912 they published a monthly braille magazine, *The Messenger to the Sightless*, that included materials of religious and general interest.¹⁹ This put the Church in the vanguard of religious organizations disseminating literature to the blind throughout the world. Publishing the Book of Mormon piecemeal in braille on their hand-operated press was an important and challenging project for the Talmages. Since those beginnings, all of the standard works and a few other Church books appear in braille. In 1958 audio recordings began to be used. Now the Church's magazines, the *Come Follow Me* study outlines, and other materials are distributed in digital form. An advisory committee, composed of approximately ten blind members (including the present author), meets regularly to assure that the Church's programs and materials are removing "stumbling blocks before the blind" as effectively as possible.

Summary and Conclusion

Although the Old Testament described people who are blind as helpless and used this affliction as a metaphor for the lack of spiritual

understanding and direction, it nevertheless affirmed that with God's help such blindness can be overcome. Healing those who were physically blind was a repeated event in the Savior's mortal ministry, and surely his gospel provides the means to overcome spiritual blindness. The teachings of modern prophets shed light on the role of challenges (such as blindness) in our personal growth. The restored Church has sought to follow the Old Testament's encouraging, benevolent treatment of those who are blind. It has made the scriptures and other materials available in formats accessible to blind people; it also promotes other programs enabling those who are blind to participate fully in gospel activities and, as the Old Testament promised, to be able to overcome the limitations of their disability. Truly The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is helping those who are blind to realize the fulfillment of the Psalmist's petition to "open thou mine eyes" (Psalm 119:18).

Notes

1. Meghan Henning, "Disabilities in the Bible," *Biblical Odyssey* (SBL Online forum), June 2020.
2. Rabbi Jeffrey Howard Tigay, "Blindness," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1982), 3:753.
3. Tigay, "Blindness," 753.
4. George Arthur Buttrick, et al, eds., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1982), 8:95.
5. Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 8:421, 427.
6. Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 2:497–98.
7. Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 57.
8. Sidney B. Sperry, *The Spirit of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 6, 30.
9. Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 1:815
10. Henning, "Disabilities in the Bible."

11. F. Kent Brown, "History and Jeremiah's Crisis of Faith," in *Isaiah and the Prophets*, ed. Monte S. Nyman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 105–18.
12. Gerald N. Lund, "Ezekiel: Prophet of Judgment, Prophet of Promise," in Nyman, *Isaiah and the Prophets*, 75–88.
13. Donald W. Parry, et al., *Understanding Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 318.
14. See, for example, LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 67; and Mark E. Petersen, *Isaiah for Today* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 77.
15. Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, 259.
16. James E. Faust, "The Refiner's Fire," *Ensign*, May 1979, 53.
17. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "'Tis the Set of the Sail," thoughtco.com
18. "Disabilities," Gospel Topics, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/disability>.
19. Society for the Aid of the Sightless minutes, manuscript, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.