

Study: How to Understand the Scriptures Deeply

1. Joseph Smith taught that Church members should not rely on leaders as spiritual crutches, but that each person should seek to know and understand the scriptures for themselves. In one of his best-known sayings, he stated: "I teach correct principles, and they govern themselves" (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011. p. 281-291). This teaching shows that the prophet valued personal responsibility in study and spiritual growth. Each Latter-day Saint should strive to understand revealed principles, rather than relying solely on the guidance of others, no matter how inspired they may be. Thus, studying the scriptures becomes an individual task of faith, strengthening one's testimony and bringing each person closer to God.

Question 1: Why did Joseph Smith teach that each person should study and understand the scriptures for themselves?

2. Studying the scriptures cannot be limited to superficial reading. Each sacred book was written in a specific historical time, marked by customs, religious traditions, social contexts, and even political pressures. The prophets of the Old Testament, for example, spoke to an agricultural people, subject to strict purity laws and alliances between neighboring kingdoms. Their metaphors, such as the vineyard or the shepherd, can only be fully understood when we remember this context. In the New Testament, Christ's words about "kingdom" and "deliverance" gain new force when we know that the Jews lived under Roman rule, yearning for national redemption. By dedicating ourselves to understanding the cultural and historical context of each scripture, we open space for the text to come to life and acquire a meaning closer to what the Lord originally intended to teach.

Question 2: How does knowing the historical and cultural context of the time illuminate our understanding of the scriptures?

3. Another essential aspect is understanding the scriptures in their original languages. Many texts were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, languages rich in meaning that are sometimes lost in translation. Hebrew, for example, uses the word *ruach* to designate "wind," "breath," and also "spirit," revealing the intimate connection between physical and spiritual life in Jewish thought. Greek, on the other hand, uses different terms to express "love": *eros* (human love), *philia* (friendship), and *agape* (unconditional, divine love). When we read the New Testament in Portuguese and see only the word "love," we may not grasp these distinctions. Understanding these linguistic nuances helps us perceive the depth of revelation and God's care in transmitting His word with precision and purpose.

Question 3: What can we learn by considering the original meanings of words in the scriptures?

4. In addition to historical and linguistic analysis, it is possible to enrich our learning by studying the scriptures thematically. This method consists of gathering different passages on the same subject, observing how it is presented throughout the revelation. Take the priesthood as an example: in the Old Testament, it is linked to the lineage of Levi and service in the temple; In the New Testament, Christ is revealed as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek; in the Book of Mormon, the priesthood is described as power from God granted to minister among men; in the Doctrine and Covenants, we have clear teachings about keys, orders, and restored authority; and the Sealed Book of Mormon, translated from the plates of Mormon by Mauricio Artur Berger, recovers the original understanding of the time of Moses, showing that priesthood power comes from good feelings and can only be exercised in righteousness. This type of study shows that revelation is progressive, expanding over time, and reinforces the unity of the scriptures as a coherent testimony of God's will.

Question 4: How does thematic study, bringing together passages from different books, broaden our understanding of the scriptures?

5. Within this thematic study, it is essential to note that the scriptures use various names and titles to refer to the same subject, revealing different aspects of the same truth. The Savior, for example, is called "*Messiah*," "*Lamb of God*," "*Son of Man*," "*Redeemer*," and "*Word*." Each title reveals a dimension of His mission: as Lamb, it highlights His atoning sacrifice; as Son of Man, it highlights His incarnation and mortality; as the Word, shows that He is the perfect manifestation of the Father's will. The same is true of the priesthood, which can be described as "*authority*," "*ministry*," or "*eternal covenant*." When we identify these different titles, we realize that they do not point to distinct things, but to a single spiritual truth presented from different perspectives.

Question 5: How does the variety of names and titles in the scriptures enrich our understanding of the same principle?

6. Beyond human analysis, it is essential to seek to understand the principles of scripture through God's lens. Our reading is often filtered by modern values, which can lead us to partial or distorted interpretations. The priesthood, for example, could be seen merely as an administrative function of the Church. But in God's view, it is an eternal power, instituted since creation, to bless families, perform ordinances, connect earth to heaven, and lead His children back to His presence. This difference in perspective invites us to ask not only "what is written?" but also "why did the Lord reveal this?" and "what is the eternal purpose behind this principle?" Looking through God's lens is what transforms an ordinary study into spiritual revelation.

Question 6: Why is seeking God's lens essential to understanding the true nature of scriptural principles?

7. Finally, understanding the scriptures in depth is the fruit of constant practice and dedication. It is not something achieved in a single reading or isolated study. As Latter-day Saints read daily, compare passages, revisit original meanings, and organize themes, they begin to connect dots that previously seemed scattered. Texts that seemed distant begin to dialogue with one another, revealing the unity and coherence of God's word throughout the dispensations. This ongoing practice not only strengthens knowledge but transforms the heart, leading to action and living out the principles learned. Scripture study, therefore, is not merely an intellectual act, but a path of discipleship that molds us according to the Lord's will.

Question 7: What does the consistent practice of study teach us about the unity and coherence of scripture throughout the dispensations?