

## Lesson One & 1/2: Introduction to the Word of God in Scripture :

*And John [the Revelator] saw and bore record of the fulness of my glory,  
and the fulness of John's record is hereafter to be revealed.*

*And he bore record, saying:*

*I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning,  
before the world was;*

*Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word,  
even the messenger of salvation—*

*The light and the Redeemer of the world;  
the Spirit of truth,*

*who came into the world, because the world was made by him,  
and in him was the life of men and the light of men.*

*The worlds were made by him; men were made by him;  
all things were made by him, and through him, and of him.*

*And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory,  
as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father,  
full of grace and truth,*

*even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh,  
and dwelt among us.*

*Doctrine & Covenants 93: 6-11*

When we look at the meaning and importance of the word of God in the pages of scripture itself, we are struck with the great importance put on holding to, studying and learning about the word of God. Psalm 119 in the Old Testament is a pretty impressive testimony to the great importance put on the word of God by the Israelites in ancient days. For most Jews the same reverence and honor is showed toward the word of God today. The Jews do not call the scriptures they use the *Old Testament* because they don't recognize a *New Testament*. To them it is the "Tanakh," which is an acronym standing for Hebrew words meaning "The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings." The word Torah means "the Law," and refers specifically to the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers and Leviticus. Sometimes you will see in the New Testament a reference to "the law and the prophets." This is just a short-hand way of referring to their scriptures.

The Torah is highly revered by all Jews. Young Jewish children go to Hebrew school so that they can learn sufficient Hebrew to read from the Torah. When boys turn 13 they become, Bar Mitzvah, literally a "son of the commandments," and are given the right to read from the Torah scroll before the congregation at Sabbath service. This is a great honor and the Bar Mitzvahs celebrations for Jewish young men have their origin in this right to read from the Torah and become a part of the functioning body of men in the congregation—similar to our quorums<sup>1</sup>. Before the Torah scroll is read at Sabbath, it is carried through the congregation and members reach out and touch its cover with their hands or prayer book or prayer shawl, and then kiss the

<sup>1</sup> In Orthodox congregations only males may read, but in the Reform or Conservative traditions, young women also read from the scriptures at a Sabbath service to celebrate coming of age.

hand or object that touched the Torah. Every Jew is under the obligation to protect the precious Torah scrolls even if it means the loss of his own life.

Psalm 119 was traditionally regarded as a teaching tool written by King David to teach his sons to read Hebrew so that they could read the word of God. Each section in the psalm is called by a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet; and every line in each section began with that letter. The primary purpose of learning to read in that day was to be able to read the word of God. As you can imagine, books or scrolls before the invention of the printing press were very rare and precious. Writing itself was considered very powerful, a gift that had been given to man from God. The word of God was transmitted through hand copying the scrolls. This was serious business. Every letter was considered to have come from God himself. Every scribe took it as his sacred duty to copy the sacred books without a single error. There were many checks and balances to keep the scrolls mistake free. Thus when Nephi testifies about many plain and precious parts of the gospel being taken out of the word of God, he says that this happens *after* “these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God. And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious, and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.” (1 Nephi 13:24-26)

The words and the scrolls themselves were held by the Jews to be holy and regarded with awe. It is against this background that the Savior made his statement to a crowd of Jewish men in Jerusalem, “Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.”

It is not the book which gives life, but the One of whom the book testifies, and whose teachings are within its pages. The very Jehovah who spoke to Moses from the top of Mt. Sinai stood before them and they missed him, while claiming to revere his words. The same kind of thing can be seen among Christians today when they study and study some more the words of the Bible for years until they have an advanced degree in their studies, but as the saying goes, “[they] had the experience, but missed the meaning.”<sup>2</sup> Our reading of the words must bring us to the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose very purpose is to bring life to those who come to him and covenant with him. If they never come, they will not receive that life any other way.

Perhaps words have become too cheap. We are inundated by them. We hear them constantly all day long from radios, TV's and iPods. We read them on paper and on computer screens. We are surrounded by them on signs and we even wear them on our clothes. Words are everywhere. My friend Shanna Parmley lives in South Africa where she and her husband have been on assignment for the Church for the last five years. I asked her to comment on how the African saints regard their scriptures and this is what she shared with me:

“As to the Saints here and their scriptures: Most of the scriptures are the very inexpensive variety. They are paperback and are worn to a frazzle. They just get worn out and at Sacrament Meetings they open quickly to any scripture being referred to. They simply know the scriptures backwards and forwards and they can quote from them and they can find anything without indexes because their scriptures of course don't have them. I had a group of single adults to my home to do some beading again and asked them to come prepared to tell their favorite scripture. They each (not knowing what the other was prepared to do) gave a mini sermon about that favorite scripture. It was like a 2 1/2 minute talk. They don't have TV or the money for books or entertainment. It isn't safe to go out

<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot, from The Four Quartets, “The Dry Salvages”

at night, so they read and read. The older ones are the same. The scriptures are loved. They testify of their truths and they always testify of their love for them.

One woman had taken the Gospel Literacy Course (“Ye Shall have My Word”) and had learned to read the scriptures. She was from Kenya. I asked her how her life had changed. She touched her chest and said “when I joined the church, I KNEW the Gospel was true because I could feel it here, but now I can read to my family and I can teach them what God's blessings are to me and my family.” It was a touching moment.

For all the words we are surrounded with, from our cereal box in the morning to the voice of the newscaster on the ten o'clock news, let us remember that one person, and only one, was called as his very name, The Word. There is a connection between Jesus Christ and the words of scripture that is so real and intimate that the word Word becomes a title for him. We read in the Doctrine & Covenants, “Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation.” (93:8) This section is quoting the words of the apostle John, called “the beloved,” who also wrote about Christ’s second coming, “And he was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood and his name is called The Word (Logos) of God.” (19:13) John started his gospel of John with the very first sentence announcing: “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” (John 1:1)

You can see that this concept was an important one to John. The Greek word he used was “logos.” It is one of two Greek words translated *word* in our English bibles. Why is that important? Because to the Greeks, the idea of *logos* was a concept that meant much more than just a spoken or written word. It also meant the thought and reasoning behind the word. So the meaning of “logos” was actually more like “a written or spoken representation of some thought or reasoning.” It has the same root as our word logic. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus had first used the term Logos to refer to the reasoning or logical force that was behind the visible physical world. Much in the way we speak today of Intelligent Design to mean that the design in the world of nature must point to a Designer behind all of it, the Greek philosophers also held that there must be some great power of logic and order behind the physical order they saw in the world. The apostle John borrowed their concept of the logos, and effectively announced, ‘Let me tell you who the Logos really is!’

Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants is foundational to a Latter-day Saint understanding of Deity. In verse 19 it announces as its very purpose, “I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.” This section begins by quoting sentences from the apostle John’s writings that have been lost from our version of the Bible (though we are told that someday in the future ‘if we are faithful’ we will have John’s complete record v.18). This is the reference quoted above that identifies Jesus Christ as “The Word,” and goes on to say of him, he was “the light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men.

10 The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him.

11 And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us.” (D&C 93:9-11)

It is John’s testimony that Jesus Christ was God before he came to the earth in flesh. He was and is the messenger of salvation, the perfect representation of the Father who sent him. He was the logos, the expression of the power behind the visible world made flesh and come to dwell among us. In other words, we may not be able to see God the Father, but we saw Jesus Christ, for

he came down and “dwelt among us” and was the perfect representation or logos or Word or messenger of the Father.

Perhaps it will make it easier to understand if we use an analogy many of us are familiar with. When someone we love is on a mission we can't see them or have contact with them for two or even three years if they are mission presidents. But we can receive words from them. And how precious those words become! We look forward with great anticipation to the emails we get weekly and jump for joy at the Christmas and Mother's Day calls. Why? Because when we read or hear those words, it is as if the person himself had come to us. We sense their humor, their personality, their nature and thoughts as if they were there with us. Something of their “logos,” their *mind*, comes through to us and seems to be right there in the room with us.

And that is what is supposed to happen to us when we read the scriptures with the same hunger and thirst that Shanna told us the African saints had when they read the frayed pages of their precious scriptures. They were looking for the person of Jesus. They felt as if he were there with him, talking to him.

We will end these notes with some quotes from the scriptures themselves, from modern prophets, and from some wise teachers. Please enjoy these thoughts and draw from them the intended invitation for all of us to “draw near unto me, and I will draw near unto you.” (D&C 88:63) We are the ones that can pick up the phone and make the call, every time we open and study The Book!

“Behold, I say unto you, that you must rely upon my word...” (D& C 17:1)

“Only Jesus Christ is qualified to provide that hope, that confidence and that strength to overcome the world and rise above our human failings...Faith in Him is more than mere acknowledgment that He lives. It is more than professing belief. Faith in Jesus Christ consists of complete reliance on Him.” ((Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, Nov 1983 pp. 6,8)

“I will fight your battles.” (D&C 105:14)

“There are hundreds of promises from the Lord that are so casually stated that unless one is alerted to them they almost go unnoticed. It is in these quiet promises that we can substitute our own name for those given in the revelation. Put your name in front of it and the promise is yours.” (Robert Matthews, Dean of Religious Education at BYU in the *Church News*, Sept 2, 1989)

“...bear with patience thine afflictions, and [insert your name], I will give unto you success.” (Alma 26:27)

“Come now, [insert your name], and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow...” (Isaiah 1:18)

“To unlock...prophecy, readers first need to relate to the scriptures and assume that God is speaking forth personally to them. If readers think that prophecies, warnings, and promises apply only to others, the scriptures remain distant, foreign, and hidden, and their great power is never unlocked. Since all of us in the Church are inheritors of the promises made to the house of Israel, we can particularly identify with the history and messages of the scriptures, and we can read them as if Isaiah, Moses, and other prophets were not only speaking about us, but to us. (Victor Ludlow, *Ensign*, Oct 1990, p. 60)

“Please remember this one thing. If our lives and our faith are centered upon Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. On the other hand, if our lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.” President Howard W. Hunter *Speeches of the Year*, Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1988-89, p. 112)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman...Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except yea abide in me.” John 15:1)