

404: Perspective and Potential (Old Testament Lesson 1; January 2)

Moses 1; Abraham 3

January 2: Moses 1; Abraham 3	Perspective and potential
January 9: Genesis 1-2; Moses 2-3; Abraham 4-5	Creation
January 16: Genesis 3-4; Moses 4-5	Fall and Freedom
January 23: Genesis 5; Moses 6	Enoch
January 30: Moses 7	God who Weeps

Sunday School class readings

	Date	Readings	Readings covered between classes
1	Jan 2	Moses 1; Abraham 3	
3	Jan 16	Gen 3-4; Moses 4-5	Gen 1-2; Mos 2-3; Abr 4-5
6	Feb 6	Gen 6-11; Moses 8	Gen 5; Mos 6-7
8	Feb 20	Gen. 18-23	Gen 12-17; Abr 1-2
10	Mar 6	Gen. 28-33	Gen 24-27
12	Mar 20	Gen 42-50	Gen 37-41
16	Apr 17	Easter	Ex 1-17
18	May 1	Ex 24; 31-34	Ex 18-20
20	May 15	Num 11-14; 20-24	Ex 35-40; Lev 1; 16; 19
23	June 5	Jdgs 2-4; 6-8; 13-16	Deut 6-8; 15; 18; 29-30; 34; Josh 1-8; 23-24
25	June 19	1 Sam 8-10; 13; 15-18	Ruth; 1 Sam 1-3
27	Jul 3	1 Kgs 17-19	2 Sam 5-7; 11-12; 1 Kgs 3; 8; 11
29	Jul 17	2 Kgs 17-25	2 Kgs 2-7
32	Aug 7	Job 1-3; 12-14; 19; 21-24; 38-40; 42	Ezra 1; 3-7; Neh 2; 4-6; 8; Esther
34	Aug 21	Ps 49-51; 61-66; 69-72; 77- 78; 85-86	Ps 1-2; 8; 19-33; 40; 46
36	Sept 4	Prov 1-4; 15-16; 22; 31; Eccl 1-3; 11-12	Ps 102-103; 110; 116-119; 127-128; 135-139; 146-150

38	Sept 18	Is 13-14; 24-30; 35	Is 1-12
42	Oct 16	Jer 1-3; 7; 16-18; 20	Is 40-66
45	Nov 6	Dan 1-6	Jer 30-33; 36; Lam 1; 3; Ezek 1-3; 33-34; 36-37; 47
47	Nov 20	Amos; Obadiah	Hos 1-6; 10-14; Joel
49	Dec 4	Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah	Jonah; Micah
51	Dec 18	Malachi	Haggai; Zech 1-3; 7-14
52	Dec 25	Christmas	

Remember: Embrace the specificity of relationship, whatever you are using this podcast for. If you are reading the scriptures, embrace the particularity of you reading these particular scriptures at this particular time. If you are using this to teach, you were called to be you, teaching the scriptures. Embrace the particular relationship you have with your class and with the scriptures and with teaching. Name what is, then use it to do good.

Outline:

As usual, I like to take the first discussion of the year to give background and perspective to give discussions their best chance of being productive.

1. What is scripture?
2. Why do we study it?
3. What is the Old Testament?
4. What is the Pearl of Great Price?
5. How would we like to read and discuss the Old Testament together?
6. Reading review
7. Discussion (sorry, not like that, still too much work)

Brief review and framing:

Why do we study the scriptures? What's the point?

Read about the relationship and interpretation of God and the gospel so that we can establish our own relationship and become better disciples and people. Love God, love ourselves, love each other.

What's at stake? The LDS scriptures are lined up like dominoes. If the historicity of the Bible falls, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price tip and wobble as well.

Book of Mormon, D&C, PoGP all "keyed" to the KJV OT

But this is good news theologically, because we know for sure that the spiritual reality and historical sources were certainly *not* the 1611 English King James Version. If we take that seriously, that gives us more theological room to work on constructive approaches and interpretation.

So we are pushed into the question, what is the relationship between LDS scripture as we have it and the sources of that scripture? (This is my PhD training, as applied to the Bible)
What is the relationship between scripture as we have it, the sources of that scripture, and spiritual reality? THIS is a fun question, but not my favorite question.

My favorite question is.... What is the relationship between scripture and living well/our well-being?

I therefore recommend this order of operations

- 1) Figure out how scripture study helps you be a better person/live well (I would submit this is the primary goal of Sunday School and religion in general)
- 2) Figure out the approach to scripture that works best for you
- 3) Figure out what you think about the nature of scripture

What is scripture?

I'm not supportive of people pretending that scripture is something other than what it is (an overly literal or historical approach to scripture is an issue of the history of scriptural interpretation), but we do need to keep in mind what scripture is for, which is why I started with that point.

Sidebar: The physiology of existential crisis:

Why does being wrong hurt? Blame your brain. Our brains are 2% of our weight, but use 20% of our calories. Our amazing brains are what make us human and even divine, but they are very expensive. Our brains take constant shortcuts to help us survive without thinking too much. I'm not kidding. We make assumptions about how life works and how we should live it. So when these assumptions and frameworks are challenged, we literally feel pain. Our survival feels like it is at stake, because in a way, it is. If we have to think too long about the nature of reality, reality might eat us.

So how do we soothe this hurt and fear? We create safe environments and opportunities to update beliefs in a way that feels safe. That has been a primary goal of this podcast since the beginning.

Goals: make it safe to engage honestly and constructively with the scriptures.

Review of Terms:

Past: The time period before now, and what happened then. It is mostly irretrievable, even in our own lives!

History: History does not equal the past. It is a *story* told or written about the past. It is a reconstruction. In a strict sense, there is nothing but historical fiction. There can be no history without interpretation, and we all have our own biases and cultural contexts that influence how we understand the past.

Accurate: Free from error “Historically accurate” is more precise than “true” (Precise just means specific, not accurate)

Fact: Descriptions of how things are, the state of things. There are less of them than you probably think.

Critical: Critical does not mean negative. Critical means careful, reasoned, and effortful analysis. When we engage in critical thinking we put aside what we think we know and seek to understand what we should believe and do based on all available evidence and best ways we know to approach a given issue.

Theology: Theology seeks to understand spiritual reality and the ways of God. God’s character, the meaning of life, and questions of meaning are all theological questions. Theology is a creative exercise that constructs or extrapolates a consistent, satisfying explanation of reality and life from a spiritual perspective.

Myth: Myth does not necessarily imply “not true”. Myths are stories that reflect spiritual and internal realities and often grant meaning to our lives. They are narratives that help us understand life and reality. Usually they are legends that do not have a historical basis, but the word means more than that.

Inspired: Influenced by a higher, usually divine source

Revelation: a message that comes from God

True: Corresponds to reality, but this is more complicated than “historically accurate”, because there are multiple levels of reality. Usually theories of truth are broken up into Correspondence (A statement is true if it corresponds to reality as we understand it), Pragmatic (something is

true if it works or is beneficial), and Coherence (something is true if it corresponds to other known truths). One of my favorite examples to evaluate truth is a composite narrative put together by a therapist to illustrate a key principle of relationships. The story is not exactly true, though it is made up of true stories, and the principle it teaches is true in a way more important than the fact that specific narrative never happened.

Putting these together: Facts are descriptions of what is. For example, we have certain manuscripts with certain words, or a given statue was found in a particular location, or a coin was found in a particular layer of soil. Think of it like a detective story (CSI: The Scriptures). There is a dead body on the ground. But these facts don't tell us whether a work is authentic or a forgery, what date a text was written, or whether a death comes of natural or suspicious causes. We combine facts (which we count as evidence) to build arguments and come to conclusions. This is our interpretation.

Approaches:

What a literary critic does: A literary critic seeks to understand what the text means (or what meaning can be drawn from the text which is slightly different) by noticing details such as genre, emphasis, repetition, imagery, characterization, etc. To use a food analogy, the literary critic would notice how the food is presented and the impact that presentation has on the one eating the food. They would note whether the dish is an appetizer, main course, or dessert, how the flavors go together, what cultural influences are present, and so forth.

What a historian does: A historian uses textual (and material evidence when available) evidence and critical methodology to determine insofar as possible what happened in the past. For example, one historical tool is called the "criterion of dissimilarity", which means if a story goes against the interests or agendas of the one telling it, it is more likely to be true. In our food analogy the historian would deconstruct the meal to determine its ingredients.

What a theologian does: A theologian seeks to understand what the text teaches about God, life, and spiritual realities, usually taking all evidence to put together a coherent system of belief. In our food analogy, the theologian is concerned with how the food tastes and nourishes.

Summary: How we can approach a text (literary, historical, theological, ethical, critical, but the elements are all mixed together)

My own process:

- 1) Reflect on the topic
- 2) Read, attentive to inspiration and guidance
- 3) Think about the themes of the reading
- 4) Consider other sources that inspire me relating to the theme
- 5) Think through issues relating to the passages and topic
- 6) Discern how to apply insights into my own life

In sum: Reading as relationship.

What is the OT?

I think beginning the Old Testament is an excellent opportunity to name the fact that the Old Testament is foreign, strange, weird, and even horrific at times. We have to name it. It is worth naming that the King James Version is hard to understand, given that it is translated from Hebrew (and a bit of Aramaic) and Greek into English 500 years old.

Very first insight when I began graduate studies in the Bible was that scripture and religion is very different than what I was taught growing up. This is particularly intense with the OT, since the way we commonly interpret it is so different than the most responsible scholarly reconstruction and interpretation.

The Old Testament (or Jewish Scriptures) is a library or anthology of ancient texts written thousands of years ago in ancient languages from ancient cultures influenced by other ancient cultures. It is reflections on the nature of God and God's relationship with the world and its humans, especially Israel.

How do we study it?

The first time I went through the Old Testament I was so overwhelmed and daunted that I broke every episode into three sections: Sunday School, Scripture Study, and Study Notes. I'm proud of that design, but the reason I felt I had to do it was because the academic approach to the Old Testament is so at tension with the current LDS interpretation of the Old Testament. I care primarily about well being, including spiritual well being, so I have designed the podcast in a way that each listener can get what they want without necessarily needing to digest things they don't want to.

By the way, I STRONGLY recommend that everyone buy a Study Bible in a more recent translation. Think of it as commentary if you'd like.

What is the Pearl of Great Price?

My basic framework for the Pearl of Great Price allows for multiple interpretations while remaining true to what we can know academically. The Pearl of Great Price is the result of Joseph's inspired reflection on the KJV Genesis narratives. The Book of Moses was written before his study of Hebrew, and the Book of Abraham was produced after. The Book of Abraham was informed by his study of Hebrew, catalyzed by his meditation on (and fascination with) the Egyptian papyri he acquired.

What is the relationship between our English text of the Pearl of Great Price and the King James Version of the Bible? That is a literary question. What is its relationship with history? That is a historical question. What is its relationship with spiritual reality? That is a theological question. What is its relationship with our lives? That's a devotional question.

What is the Old Testament?

Keep perspective

Stay curious

Stay constructive

In sum, let the scriptures be surprising as well as inspiring

Thus our motto: challenge and be challenged by the scriptures

Let's get into the reading! Future lessons will dig into the reading more and sooner, but I think that background and framing pays off.

Moses 1:

1 The words of God, which he spake unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain,

2 And he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence.

What places are conducive for our own revelations? Where are our sacred spaces?

What do we need to do in our lives so we are prepared for truth and growth beyond what we can currently endure?

I cherish the insight that God is bigger than us. God is greater than anything we can understand (this is one of the several reasons I playfully call myself a devout agnostic). This motivates me to keep growing and learning so that the fictions I believe come just a little closer to reality.

10: "humans are nothing". My favorite summary of human nature is that we are limited. I think most of the terrible things we humans do come from being overwhelmed because of these limitations. We are small, selfish, and social. We are easily overwhelmed and can access reality only through our own flawed perceptions. This is why our social nature holds the keys to our redemption, accessing perspectives greater than our own. The sacrament of conversation. Need for service. Loving our neighbor is worshipping God and redeeming ourselves.

18: Use our past experiences, our awareness of our worth and values, to resist temptation.

27: The power of perspective. Seek and record moments when we see the big picture. One practice I've been encouraging for staff wellness is at the beginning of a workday or a task, name one of your values and explain to yourself how the task of the moment connects to your big picture values. It will change the way you experience your work at a profound level. The way we think about things is a matter of life and death, because it impacts the way we feel and process stress and challenge.

Literally today my son and I were discussing life on other planets. This multi-planetary creation perspective is very cool. I'm glad it's in our scripture.

39: God is redeemed with creation. Powerful implications.

Abraham 3:

1-10: Fun to speculate on God's address, but doesn't seem most important to me. Many terms in Abraham come from Hebrew. Star is "Kokhav" for example. We should all take a moment to lie down and look at the stars and reflect on our place in the universe. Moses and Abraham do that in our reading, and we should too.

12 And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I will show you all these. And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof. (Intimate relationship with God, relationship, connection, and again, perspective)

13: Kokob does mean star in Hebrew (kokhav, plural kokhavim, not cocoa beans) and Shinehah likely comes from Shekhinah, which means the presence of God, the cloud that went before the Hebrews in the Exodus narrative (also has come to mean God's wife in some traditions which I find very cool)

18: gnolaum is the way Joshua Seixas, Joseph's Hebrew teacher, pronounced Olam

19: Intelligence, excellence and hierarchies. (I like thinking of intelligence as agency made matter, and spirits as organized intelligence/agency) The Plan of Salvation turns matter into love. (by way of consciousness)

23: Foreordination/potential

25 And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them (the way we think about this REALLY matters, either checklist perfectionism, or loving relationship and relaxing and stretching into our divine potential)

26: "And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever." virtuous cycles, building on what we have, growth as practice and training (one of the biggest areas of growth/shift in perspective in my life)

War in heaven: We will talk about this during week 3's lesson.

Discussion

OT Lesson 1 perspective and potential

Divine perspective

Putting humans in perspective

To realize our divine potential, we need to take human nature seriously

Awe wonder curiosity humility

Yarah (יָרָא) "fear and trembling"

We are small.

Part of something big.

This isn't who I am/I'm better than this

Kellen Petersen's helpful schedule table:

Month	Sunday	
1	1/2/2022	Moses 1; Abraham 3
	1/9/2022	Genesis 1–2; Moses 2–3; Abraham 4–5
	1/16/2022	Genesis 3–4; Moses 4–5
	1/23/2022	Genesis 5; Moses 6
	1/30/2022	Moses 7
2	2/6/2022	Genesis 6–11; Moses 8
	2/13/2022	Genesis 12–17; Abraham 1–2
	2/20/2022	Genesis 18–23
	2/27/2022	Genesis 24–27
3	3/6/2022	Genesis 28–33
	3/13/2022	Genesis 37–41
	3/20/2022	Genesis 42–50
	3/27/2022	Exodus 1–6
4	4/3/2022	Exodus 7–13
	4/10/2022	Exodus 14–17
	4/17/2022	Easter
	4/24/2022	Exodus 18–20
5	5/1/2022	Exodus 24; 31–34
	5/8/2022	Exodus 35–40; Leviticus 1; 16; 19
	5/15/2022	Numbers 11–14; 20–24
	5/22/2022	Deuteronomy 6–8; 15; 18; 29–30; 34
	5/29/2022	Joshua 1–8; 23–24
6	6/5/2022	Judges 2–4; 6–8; 13–16
	6/12/2022	Ruth; 1 Samuel 1–3
	6/19/2022	1 Samuel 8–10; 13; 15–18
	6/26/2022	2 Samuel 5–7; 11–12; 1 Kings 3; 8; 11
7	7/3/2022	1 Kings 17–19
	7/10/2022	2 Kings 2–7
	7/17/2022	2 Kings 17–25
	7/24/2022	Ezra 1; 3–7; Nehemiah 2; 4–6; 8
	7/31/2022	Esther
8	8/7/2022	Job 1–3; 12–14; 19; 21–24; 38–40; 42
	8/14/2022	Psalms 1–2; 8; 19–33; 40; 46
	8/21/2022	Psalms 49–51; 61–66; 69–72; 77–78; 85–86
	8/28/2022	Psalms 102–103; 110; 116–119; 127–128; 135–139; 146–150
9	9/4/2022	Proverbs 1–4; 15–16; 22; 31; Ecclesiastes 1–3; 11–12
	9/11/2022	Isaiah 1–12
	9/18/2022	Isaiah 13–14; 24–30; 35
	9/25/2022	Isaiah 40–49
10	10/2/2022	Isaiah 50–57
	10/9/2022	Isaiah 58–66
	10/16/2022	Jeremiah 1–3; 7; 16–18; 20
	10/23/2022	Jeremiah 30–33; 36; Lamentations 1; 3
10/30/2022	Ezekiel 1–3; 33–34; 36–37; 47	
11	11/6/2022	Daniel 1–6
	11/13/2022	Hosea 1–6; 10–14; Joel
	11/20/2022	Amos; Obadiah
	11/27/2022	Jonah; Micah
12	12/4/2022	Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah
	12/11/2022	Haggai; Zechariah 1–3; 7–14
	12/18/2022	Malachi
	12/25/2022	Christmas