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**Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses
2020 Interpreter Foundation Conference
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**Adam, Eve, the Book of Moses, and the Temple:
The Story of Receiving Christ's Atonement
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I. Historicity and Plausibility

Today's conference description states, "Because we believe that the Book of Moses includes authentic history, the possibility of evidence for that belief interests us as scholars." In other words, the papers we'll hear this weekend have been prepared by scholars who believe in the general historicity of the Book of Moses, and their research has found evidence that supports that belief. I'd like to begin by offering some context and support for their approach.

I see clear parallels between our current interest in the historicity of the Book of Moses and what happened some years ago with research about the Book of Mormon. During the unfortunate Mark Hoffman era of the mid-1980s, the Church encountered an unusual barrage of criticism about Joseph Smith and the historicity of the Book of Mormon—that is, whether the history described there actually happened. Elder Neal A. Maxwell, then on BYU's Board of Trustees, described this criticism as "a new generation of fiery salvos, including a few duds and re-used old darts."¹

These issues prompted Elder Maxwell to galvanize the skilled and faithful scholars he knew at BYU to "protect our flanks" rather than just "wave our arms."² And instead of focusing primarily on such external evidence as archeology, he favored an approach that studied "parallels between the ancient world and the Book of Mormon" especially as "drawn from texts and historical facts" discovered since 1829.³ This approach simply made sense to Elder Maxwell,

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who believed that there was so much internal evidence supporting the Book of Mormon that “the notion that it was concocted in the nineteenth century [is] just plain unscientific as a conclusion.”⁴

He encouraged a research approach that began with “gospel premises,” and “with the mind [and scholarly research tools] still involved,” rather than importing the “secular vocabulary and viewpoint [of non-Latter-day Saint biblical scholars] into a Church setting.”⁵ This model looked for “historical contextualizing,” such as grounding “the Book of Mormon in ancient history.”⁶

Elder Maxwell believed that science would never be able conclusively to “prove or disprove holy writ.” So he saw these scholars’ work as a source of defense, not offense, because their research could verify the *plausibility* of religious propositions—meaning not that the proposition necessarily *did* happen, but that it *could have* happened—enough to offset attacks that claimed to be based on physical or logical evidence. Neutralizing those attacks—what C. S. Lewis called using good philosophy to answer bad philosophy—doesn’t claim to prove the gospel’s truth; rather, it has the more modest but crucial purpose of nourishing a climate where voluntary belief is free to take root and grow. Only when belief is not compelled, by external evidence or otherwise, can it produce the growth that is the promised fruit of faith. In Elder Maxwell’s terms, faithful scholars could gather “enough plausible evidence . . . to prevent scoffers from having a field day,” or letting them have “slam dunks”—but do so without removing “the requirement of faith.”⁷

That approach to defending the Book of Mormon’s historicity is an apt model for defending the historicity of the Book of Moses, as this conference demonstrates. I’m grateful to

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our program participants, because their impressive credentials, attitudes, and skills show that it's possible to gain the tools of a fine graduate level education and use those tools to research and analyze ancient texts, scriptures, and other resources just as Elder Maxwell had hoped—through the lens of sacred premises rather than primarily through secular premises.

Evidence from ancient history will almost always be ambiguous, partly because specific, reliable ancient data are nearly impossible to find and identify with absolute certainty. Amid such uncertainty, a scholar's premises can significantly influence his or her findings and conclusions. But where to look for research premises? A sacred map of reality can look at all knowledge through the gospel's lens, allowing us to integrate the secular map of reality into the bigger, broader sacred map—and still include what the secular map shows. But the smaller secular map, with its more limited tools and framework, typically excludes religious insights. In Richard Bushman's phrase, "Modernism and skepticism discredit the idea of visions and revelations."⁸ For example, I still remember reading years ago what the brilliant but by then secularized University of Utah professor Sterling McMurrin said when an interviewer asked what he thought of the Book of Mormon: "You don't get books from angels."⁹ And his premise largely determined his conclusion of disbelief.

Drawing on my own discipline of law, the varying standards of proof used in criminal and civil cases offer useful comparative tools when we want to understand how much evidence, and what kind, should be enough to "prove" (or disprove) an historical or other claim. In addition to the standard options of "true" and "false," what does a jury (or we) do when, even after much effort, the real answer is—"we can't tell for sure?" That's when the legal standard (like a research premise) about which side should receive "the benefit of the doubt" will decide a case. Lawsuits deal constantly with that problem.¹⁰

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In nearly all universities today, the default position—where we place the benefit of the doubt—is with secular premises. If we don't have adequate “empirically verifiable evidence,” we assume the secular default position—such as, “You don't get books from angels.”

Another example. The current *Wikipedia* entry on “Abraham” tells us that until the 1970s, the leading biblical scholars and archaeologists believed that the Abrahamic patriarchs “were either real individuals or believable composites of people who lived in the ‘patriarchal age.’” Then other scholars challenged these views based on the relative lack of archaeological evidence and their own reading of ancient texts. So, “by the beginning of the 21st century, archaeologists had given up hope of recovering any context that would make Abraham, Isaac or Jacob credible historical figures.” Thus an inadequate degree of verifiable empirical evidence can be taken to mean “no historicity”; when what it really means is that there is insufficient empirical evidence to *prove* historicity within the premises of the secular map.

People who seek graduate training today in such fields as ancient languages and biblical studies typically study at the feet of experts whose disciplines teach them to reason from secular premises and to bracket their personal faith in their scholarly discourse—partly as a matter of professional courtesy. It is natural for these graduate students to learn to teach and write with an implicit personal detachment that can leave their students and those who read their work quite uncertain about their personal beliefs—an assumption that can serve important purposes in professional gatherings. However, when BYU faculty and students teach or otherwise share their work with other Church members, as Elder Holland said recently, the approach of bracketing one's faith will “cost scholars credibility with [these] readers [or students] because . . . no one knows . . . where [they] are coming from ideologically.”¹¹ Or, as Elder Maxwell put it, “Some [Latter-day Saint scholars] hold back by not appearing overly committed to the Kingdom, lest

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they incur the disapproval of [professional] peers [like those from their graduate school departments] who might disdain such consecration.”¹²

The institutional academic freedom protected by BYU’s explicit, written religious mission consciously removes the brackets around one’s faith, like taking the mute out of a trumpet. And that unmuting allows the talented trumpets of BYU faculty and students to give an especially certain sound while integrating their faith with their academic disciplines—a liberating quality for the BYU community and for Latter-day Saints generally.

The larger sacred map tells us that Abraham did exist—indeed, modern scriptures tell us that he has already entered into his exaltation. (Alma 7:25; Doctrine and Covenants 132:7) ¹³And did Moses really exist? In 1836, Joseph and Oliver testified that Moses personally appeared to them in the Kirtland Temple and committed to them the keys for the gathering of Israel. (Doctrine and Covenants 110:11)—a principal step in authorizing the Restoration. For the historical Moses to have conferred such authority on Joseph Smith makes his revelatory visit a matter “of great consequence to [our] faith.” ¹⁴

The papers we’ll hear at this conference will share plausible findings that support the historicity of the Book of Moses—and scoffers won’t have slam dunks or a field day. Such findings do help make the historicity of the Book of Moses more believable, rendering it at least reasonable to give the benefit of the doubt to sacred premises—even if, ultimately, the choice of premises is just that, a choice. The Lord deliberately leaves us free to make such choices. He doesn’t create circumstances that compel our belief, even as He also invites us to “be believing.” For “as many as *received* him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that [choose to] believe on his name.” (John 1:5, 11-12) Why? Because something happens to

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people who [choose to] receive Him. They learn. They grow. Following his will changes them. Our uncoerced choices set in motion the process of becoming like Him.

One blessing of the Restoration is that Joseph received so much of his evidence and his authority firsthand—from those like John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John. That’s why the Lord could say of the Book of Mormon that it is “a record of a fallen people that contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which was given to [Joseph] by inspiration, and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels, and is declared ... by them—*proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men, and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old.*” (Doctrine and Covenants 20:10-11).

Those who say that the Book of Mormon is a valuable allegorical text while also denying its divine and historical origins as the Lord described them here are missing the crucial point that through the visits of Moroni, Moses, and the others, God himself gave Joseph the authority and power to accomplish the “holy work” of the Restoration.

Let us move now from the historicity of the Restoration and its founding scripture to a discussion of Adam, Eve, the Book of Moses, and the Temple.

II/ Adam, Eve, the Book of Moses, and the Temple: *Receiving Christ’s Atonement*

It is very fitting that we should begin this conference on the Book of Moses by talking about the temple—because the Book of Moses is an ancient temple text¹⁵ as well as the ideal scriptural context for a modern temple preparation course. In answering the question

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“why do we care about the Book of Moses,” John Welch said, “To me, it’s all about the temple,” even though the Lord revealed this temple text to Joseph “well before [Joseph] had any idea about building a temple, let alone what was to be done in the temple.” And yet, “much of the blueprint for the endowment is here and only here.”¹⁶

I have for years encouraged people preparing to receive their temple endowment to study the Book of Moses. The book gives them unique and rich doctrinal perspective for understanding the endowment--the concept of heavenly ascent, the creation, fall, Atonement, the purposes of mortality and its trials, ritual prayer, sacrifice, obedience, consecration, priesthood, revelation, building Zion, and preparing to meet God.¹⁷ And as Welch points out, the Book of Moses also teaches the difference between secular, self-centered marriage and “God-sanctioned, interdependent, child-rearing marriage.”

In what follows, we will explore several of these concepts as taught by the Book of Moses and by the temple through the great archetypal story of Adam and Eve, with a central focus on their relationship to the Atonement of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

In recent years, we Latter-day Saints have been talking, teaching, and writing much more about Christ’s Atonement, in testimonies, articles, books, and conversations. This is a most welcome and much-needed development. At times, however, some of our conversations seem to lack doctrinal clarity.

For example, Jan Shipps, a non-Latter-day Saint scholar who is among the most astute and sympathetic observers of the Church, believes that what she calls our increasing “LDS atonement discourse” has failed “to specify how [Christ’s] atoning act is connected to the

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‘fulness of the gospel.’” Our discourse, she says, especially “fails to link the atonement to that part of the ‘plan of salvation’ that includes progression toward godhood.”¹⁹ And just weeks ago a very thoughtful Church member asked me, “Is there more to ‘drawing on the power of the atonement’ than faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism?”

Christ’s Atonement indeed offers us great blessings *in addition to forgiveness* and the resurrection—and those blessings are key elements in the fulness of the gospel, the plan of salvation, and our progression toward the divine nature. But Marie and I have felt a need to identify some kind of existing doctrinal structure that would help us explain the source and meaning of those additional blessings. As we’ve searched for such structure, we’ve been led especially to the temple and to the Book of Moses. [SLIDE 1 BLANK]

Here’s a picture of the St. George Temple. [SLIDE 2 SGT] I grew up about four blocks from this temple, my sense of “home” in multiple ways. In returning there in 2010 to serve for three years, the two of us came to feel that the doctrines and ordinances of the temple provide much of the doctrinal framework we had been looking for.

Years ago, a friend said to me, “Christ is at the center of the temple. And Christ is at the center of the gospel. So why doesn't the temple endowment teach the story of the life of Christ? What's all this about Adam and Eve?” At that time, neither of us could answer his question.

But Marie and I now feel settled with this answer: The story of the life of Christ is the story of *giving* the Atonement. And the story of Adam and Eve is the story of *receiving* the Atonement. Their story is our story too. We can look at them and say, that's the story of my life. And when we're in the temple, we can naturally think of ourselves as if we were Adam and Eve. [SLIDE 3 ASCENDING PATH TITLE]

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With this picture of the temple as a background, let's put some headings on the screen as a framework for what will follow—priesthood [SLIDE 4], principles [SLIDE 5], ordinances [SLIDE 6], Adam and Eve Receive the Atonement [SLIDE 7], and the Blessings of the Atonement. [SLIDE 8]

St. George was the first temple dedicated after the Nauvoo Temple, and it is actually the same size and shape as the Nauvoo Temple. Indeed, architectural historian Elwin Robinson told us that St. George is Joseph's temple—even though Brigham Young planned and dedicated it.²⁰ The deliberate design of this temple, like the first few that followed it, represents what we might call the original intent of the founders—that is, it's what the Lord gave Joseph for us. Baptism is the first saving ordinance, and the baptistry is always on the temple's lowest floor, symbolizing a new life—the beginning of ascending discipleship.

In the early temples of this dispensation, as a patron moved from the baptistry to each succeeding ordinance, he or she stepped up, literally, to a higher level. Think of the Salt Lake Temple, which has retained that design. With each move—from the Creation Room to the Garden Room to the Telestial Room and eventually to the Celestial Room—we climb upward. So it is in all the temples where it's physically possible, even if only slightly. That upward climb symbolizes the pattern of ascending back to God's presence.

President David O. McKay called the temple endowment “the step-by-step ascent into the Eternal Presence.”²¹ As Joseph Smith said, “when you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom and ascend step by step. [You] begin with the first [principles] and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation.”²²

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This upward pattern could plausibly derive from the Book of Moses, given to Joseph twelve years before he administered the first endowments in Nauvoo. In a clear prologue to the Adam and Eve story, chapter one begins with Moses in God's presence, learning that he is God's son and that God has a work for him to do. Knowing his identity and purpose, he then falls back to the earth, where he must overcome Satan's power before beginning his upward journey of return, calling on God, hearing His voice, seeing His heavenly vision, and regaining His presence.

The same cosmic pattern repeats in Adam and Eve's story of creation, fall, overcoming opposition, redemption, and growing into a return to God. Then Enoch, their descendant, experiences and extends the pattern, moving on to lead his entire city back to God's presence. Thus "the temple themes in the Book of Moses extend beyond the ... story of Adam and Eve" to their culmination in the story of Enoch.²³

Moreover, Jeff Bradshaw and his colleagues have shown that the narrative and details of Moses 1 "place it squarely in the genre of ancient heavenly ascent literature" that Joseph Smith couldn't have known about in 1830.²⁴ And where is Christ in these Book of Moses stories? Right in the middle of them, in every sense, as we'll see—because, as Richard Bushman wrote, "Christ enters the [Book of Moses] discourse almost at once and remains present [because] Joseph Smith's Moses is a Christian ... even in pre-Christian times."²⁵

Terryl Givens describes the stunning implications of this insight: "Positing Adamic foundations to the [Christian] gospel meant the collapse of all those polarities on which traditional Christian understanding was based," such as works and grace, "catastrophic fall and reparative redemption" – that is now all "integrated into a seamless vision of a premortally

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conceived plan delivered in the Garden [of Eden] and made new again in [Joseph] Smith's day."²⁶

Consider now how the Book of Moses gives us the detailed story of Adam and Eve—the story of “receiving” Christ’s Atonement. We begin with baptism, the first temple ordinance in doing work for the dead. [SLIDE 9] Some time after leaving the Garden, Adam asks God in Moses 6:53, “Why is it that men must be baptized?” God replies, “Behold, I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden. The son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are *whole* from the foundation of the world.”

Those simple sentences introduce a doctrinally unique foundation for our understanding of why we need the Atonement of Jesus Christ. With some variations among denominations, the entire Christian world had taught for centuries that, because of Adam and Eve’s fall, children are born with an evil nature. And that natural depravity is why mortals sin, so we need the grace of Christ mostly to overcome our inherited fallen nature. But here the Lord says, no, the Savior has already cleansed your children from that original sin. As Joseph Smith would later write, “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression.”²⁷ An echo in Doctrine and Covenants 93:38 tells us that because Christ redeemed all infants from Adam’s fall, they are born “innocent.” Hence no need for infant baptism.

The Lord then tells Adam in Moses 6:55-6 why his children would still need Christ’s Atonement—language that revealed in 1830 a totally new understanding, after centuries of misunderstanding both the Fall and the Atonement. “Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin” --that is, born into in a fallen world that is subject to death, sin, and temptation--“when they

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begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts and *they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good*. And it is given unto them to know good from evil.”

So the bitterness we taste in life is not because there's something wrong with us, or with God, or with life. Rather, we taste the bitter that we may know to prize the good. We came to earth to learn from experience, some of it bitter enough to require very demanding repentance. But Christ's Atonement is not just for the purpose of erasing black marks. It is a *developmental* doctrine about our personal growth and learning. The Atonement and repentance make that process possible by protecting us while we learn from our wise and unwise choices what love really is or why wickedness cannot produce happiness. Because of the Atonement, we can learn from our experience without being condemned by it.

Moreover, after the Lord's angel had taught Adam and Eve the purpose of their animal sacrifices, they taught their children the wondrous news of the Redemption. Immediately, however, Moses 5 tells us in a remarkable passage that “Satan came among them” and he “commanded” their children not to believe what their parents had taught, “and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began *from that time forth* to be carnal, sensual, and devilish.” (5:13) Those free choices by some of Adam and Eve's children then, not their parents' choice in the Garden, created the first examples of what King Benjamin called “the natural man” who is “an enemy to God.” (Mosiah 3:19)

Thus, writes Terryl Givens, the Book of Moses is “an audacious critique [of the Bible] with no Christian parallels.” Adam and Eve's choice was “designed, not tragic.” It did “not bring fallenness on their race, but opportunity and progress,” with “mortality conceived as an educative ascent from premortality.” These astounding doctrinal ideas were “decisively outside

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any recognizably Christian cosmology or etiology, at least of the nineteenth century.”²⁸ Imagine the irony, then, of arguing that Joseph Smith found these new ideas somewhere in his nineteenth century environment.

Returning to the story of Adam and Eve, once they are forgiven, shouldn't they just go back to Eden? No—as we see in the progressive sequence of the temple endowment, they don't return to the garden. Rather, they continue their journey of ascent from the fallen telestial world toward their ultimate exaltation. That's what the terrestrial and celestial rooms are all about.

The next ordinance is receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost—or confirmation. [SLIDE 10] Again, that part of Adam's story is described only in the Book of Moses, chapter 6: "Thus was he baptized and ... born of the spirit and ... quickened in the inner man." Adam, "Thou art baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost," And then these interesting words: "Thou art after the order of" the son of God. (6:65-66) This tells me that Adam next received the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood. (See D&C 107:3)

With these ordinances, Adam and Eve climbed the path of discipleship to receive forgiveness and the Atonement's other blessings. What happens on that path? After King Benjamin's people accepted the Atonement by baptism, the King told them, "This day he hath spiritually begotten you." You have entered into a covenant to become "the children of Christ." (5:7) So they took His name upon themselves, entering into the relationship of becoming disciples of Jesus.

Thus they did as we do, embracing the two-way covenants that are reaffirmed in the sacrament prayers. By accepting the bread and water, we pledge our willingness to take upon ourselves His name, to always remember Him, and to keep His commandments. And he

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covenants that His Spirit may always be with us—to what end? As we keep climbing, learning, and growing, He bestows upon us three broad categories of blessings: (1) redeeming blessings, (2) strengthening blessings, and (3) perfecting blessings. These three kinds of blessings are all made possible by the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah speaks of the redeeming blessings in terms that connect our repentance and baptism to our *relationship* with Christ—the two-way relationship made possible by His Atonement. The Lord says, "*I have redeemed thee, thou art mine.*" (Isaiah 43:1) Second, again through Isaiah, the Savior describes what will follow from this mine-thine relationship: "*I will strengthen thee, I will help thee.*" (41:10) What is He saying? We've become the children of Christ. Now we are following Him along a strait, narrow path—the steep ascent, sometimes the rocky ridges. Every step of that way, He is “the way,” He will be “with us” to strengthen us. Then third, Moroni exhorts us to keep moving until we qualify to receive His perfecting blessings: “*Come unto Christ and be perfected in him.*” For if we “deny yourselves of all ungodliness” and “love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that ... ye may be *perfect* in Christ.” (Moroni 10:32-33)

The next time you sing all the verses of “How Firm a Foundation,”²⁹ think about the Lord’s promise to His followers about the Atonement’s strengthening and perfecting blessings: “When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply. The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.”

Our covenant *relationship* with Christ, being born again as His covenant children, is the source of these redeeming, strengthening, and perfecting blessings of the Atonement. Apart from this relationship, as President Russell M. Nelson has said, “There is no amorphous entity called

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the atonement upon which we may call for succor, healing, forgiveness, or power. Jesus Christ is the source.”³⁰

Succor, healing, and power are indeed among the blessings made possible by Christ’s Atonement, in addition to forgiveness. But “Jesus Christ”—not some amorphous entity—“is the source” of these blessings.”³¹ And His Atonement is what qualifies Him to enter into the relationship with us that produces these blessings. We grow toward maturity as His spirit children on the bedrock of this covenant relationship. How firm a foundation.

As his people climb this covenant path, King Benjamin urges them to “Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works.” And if they faithfully do that, they will eventually receive this supernal blessing: “That Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, *may seal you his ... that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life.*” (Mosiah 5:15)

Beginning as the baptized children of Christ, Adam and Eve walked the mortal path with its sweat, thorns, and occasional bitterness. And He called to them, “I will help thee, I will strengthen thee, thou art mine.” With His help, they overcame Satan and all mortal opposition until one day He “sealed” them His. That’s a temple word. Then they were truly “at one” with Him, the perfected, full grown men and women of Christ.

Amulek shows us the inverse mirror image of this sacred idea. Moses chapter 5 told us that when many of Adam and Eve’s children chose to love Satan more than God, they became carnal, sensual, and devilish. What is the destiny of this natural man if he continues on that carnal path? Amulek said they become “subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth *seal you his.*” (Alma 34:35)

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So those who are sealed to Christ become Saints through his Atonement (Mosiah 3:19), and they will know a life of eternal joy. Those sealed to Satan become devilish by nature, and they will know a life of eternal misery. So what do the Book of Moses and other modern scriptures teach is the nature of man? At birth we are neither good nor evil, but whole or innocent. Then we're free to choose whom, and whose plan, we will follow—until we eventually acquire either a saintly or a devilish nature.

Now let us apply this doctrinal context to the framework of the temple's ordinances and covenants. On the screen, we'll list the ordinances in ascending order—from baptism and confirmation to the temple ordinances of initiatory [SLIDE 11], endowment [SLIDE 12] and sealing [SLIDE 13]. We won't take time here to discuss each ordinance, except to note again that the temple teaches the story of Adam and Eve to show us how to receive the full blessings of Christ's Atonement.

As we look at that upward sequence, we see Aaronic Priesthood [SLIDE 14] then Melchizedek Priesthood [SLIDE 15] ordinances. For both men and women, the temple endowment makes clear the sequential progression from the Aaronic Priesthood level to the Melchizedek Priesthood level. Why does that matter? Because in the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood—meaning primarily the temple ordinances—“the power of Godliness is manifest.” And without those temple ordinances, “the power of Godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this [power], no man [or woman] can see the face of God ... and live.” (D&C 84:19-22)

So Aaronic to Melchizedek, from the lesser to the higher priesthood. You can see on the screen that at the lower, or Aaronic, level the principles of [SLIDE 16] faith and [SLIDE 17]

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repentance are on the same level as baptism, an Aaronic Priesthood ordinance. And faith, repentance and baptism are the first three principles and ordinances of the gospel, followed by confirmation and the Gift of the Holy Ghost.

If these four are the *first* principles and ordinances, there must be more. Consider, for example, sacrifice [SLIDE 18] and consecration [SLIDE 19], gospel principles that *illustrate* the higher or Melchizedek-level principles embedded in temple covenants. The screen shows these higher principles and covenants on the same level as the higher ordinances of the temple—the initiatory ordinance, the endowment, and the sealing. Perhaps we could say that *the principles of sacrifice and consecration are to the Melchizedek Priesthood ordinances what the principles of faith and repentance are to the Aaronic priesthood ordinances*. The higher, *perfecting* principles ascend alongside the higher ordinances and covenants.

As we ascend upward from the first principles, we will always stand on the permanent foundation of faith, repentance, and baptism. Faith will always be the first and foundational principle, constantly needed and never outgrown. Repentance is similarly essential as a crucial, ongoing process. That said, we do learn in Doctrine and Covenants Sections 84 and 107 about the differences between the two priesthoods. Among other things, the “lesser” or Aaronic Priesthood holds the keys of “the preparatory gospel.” And the “greater” or Melchizedek Priesthood holds the keys of “all the spiritual blessings.” So priesthood, principles, and ordinances are all connected in ways that reflect the temple’s progressive ascent—suggested by the ascent of Moses in Moses chapter one and in the ancient heavenly ascent literature. In summary, “while baptism [focuses] on the *cleansing* of the soul, the temple [focuses] on the *development* of the soul.”³²

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As we've seen, Moses chapter six makes clear the Atonement's developmental dimension. Thus after repentance, baptism, and initial forgiveness, Adam and Eve continue climbing and learning from experience until they enter what President McKay called "the eternal presence," the presence of God. Would being in God's presence then be different from when they were in his presence in the Garden of Eden?

In T. S. Eliot's memorable line: "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."³³ For Adam and Eve, "the place where we started" was in God's presence in the innocence of Eden. Yet they were so inexperienced then that they didn't know what it meant to be there. But finally, after tasting enough of the bitter that they could prize—that is they could *comprehend*--the sweet, they returned to Him. And they were probably overwhelmed to discover what it *meant* to be "with Him." Now they *knew* the place—His presence--fully for the first time.

MARIE: Let's look again at how Eve and Adam show us the temple's ascending development—in particular, what it means to *receive* Christ's Atonement. This interactive *receiving* assists Eve and Adam step-by-step in becoming enough like Christ that they can stay *with* Him. [SLIDE 20 GARDEN] That same *receiving* of His Atonement blesses us in the same way.

Near the end of his life Lehi chose--of all possible topics--to teach his children about Adam and Eve *receiving* the blessings of the Savior's Atonement in their mortal lives. If our first parents had "remained in the garden of Eden," Lehi said, they "would have had no children." Instead, they would have "remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery." (2 Nephi 2:23)

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Oh, I get it: No children—no misery! But the verse goes on, “doing no good, for they knew no sin.” And then the famous lines, “Adam fell that men might be.” And here we need to fill in a blank, right? That men might be “mortal.” And men are “mortal,” why? “That they might have joy.” (2 Nephi 2:25)

Lehi illustrates here what the Lord had told Adam about his and Eve's children—“they [will] taste the bitter that they may know to prize the good.” Lehi calls his version of this concept “opposition in all things.” Without misery and opposition we have no comparison, no contrast. We would have no way to *understand* the difference between good and evil—and therefore, no way to *choose* between good and evil, between the bitter and the sweet, no way to choose to learn and grow from our experience.

As we've noted earlier-- in all of Christianity, the Restoration's *developmental* perspective is an entirely unique way of looking at sin, experience, and Christ's Atonement. Our development in this sense helps us to change, become sanctified--prepared to comprehend being again in His presence. The Book of Moses tells us this story--what Eve and Adam are thinking and feeling--how they are developing-- in ways we simply would not know otherwise.

To illustrate this developmental perspective, I want to share a poem-story about Eve by Arta Romney Ballif, President Marion G. Romney's sister. She is trying to imagine what it was like for Eve after she and Adam had been driven out of Eden. They were alone in a fallen world. [SLIDE 21] [SLIDE 22 ADAM'S BAPTISM] No way to call her mother to ask, “What do I do with these boys? They're driving me crazy. They're on their cell phones all the time!” What WAS it like for her? Arta Ballif shows us what she imagines Eve thought and felt in the midst of one of her most wrenching experiences.

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Her poem has levels of symbolic meaning. Listen for the symbols: Eve trades the “*fruit*” of the garden for the “fruit” of her body. The “*storm.*” Storms in Eve’s life. Storms in our lives. “*Seed.*” “Seed” of plants. “Seed” of animals. Our “seed.” As you listen for the symbols, listen for Eve's feelings. How do we know Eve's attitude at the end of the poem when she asks “Why”? Arta Ballif calls her poem “Lamentation.” [SLIDE 23]

And God said, “BE FRUITFUL, AND MULTIPLY — “

Multiply, multiply — echoes multiply

God said, “*I WILL GREATLY MULTIPLY THY SORROW —“*

Thy sorrow, sorrow, sorrow —

I have gotten a man from the Lord

I have traded the fruit of the garden for fruit of my body

For a laughing bundle of humanity.

And now another one who looks like Adam

We shall call this one, “Abel.”

It is a lovely name “Abel.”

Cain, Abel, the world is yours.

God set the sun in the heaven to light your days

To warm the flocks, to kernel the grain

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He illuminated your nights with stars

He made the trees and the fruit thereof yielding seed

He made every living thing, the wheat, the sheep, the cattle

For your enjoyment

And, behold, it is very good.

Adam? Adam

Where art thou?

Where are the boys?

The sky darkens with clouds.

Adam, is that you?

Where is Abel?

He is long caring for his flocks.

The sky is black and the rain hammers.

Are the ewes lambing

In this storm?

Why your troubled face, Adam?

Are you ill?

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Why so pale, so agitated?

The wind will pass

The lambs will birth

With Abel's help.

Dead?

What is--dead?

Merciful God!

Hurry, bring warm water

I'll bathe his wounds

Bring clean clothes

Bring herbs.

I'll heal him.

I am trying to understand.

You said, "Abel is dead."

But I am skilled with herbs

Remember when he was seven

The fever? Remember how—

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Herbs will not heal?

Dead?

And Cain? Where is Cain?

Listen to that thunder.

Cain cursed?

What has happened to him?

God said, "A fugitive and a vagabond?"

But how can God do that.

They are my sons, too.

I gave them birth

In the valley of pain.

Adam, try to understand

In the valley of pain

I bore them

Fugitive?

Vagabond?

This is his home

DRAFT

This the soil he loved

Where he toiled for golden wheat

For tasseled corn.

To the hill country?

There are rocks in the hill country

Cain can't work in the hill country

The nights are cold

Cold and lonely, and the wind gales.

Quick, we must find him

A basket of bread and his coat

I worry, thinking of him wandering

With no place to lay his head.

Cain cursed?

A wanderer, a roamer?

Who will bake his bread and mend his coat?

Abel, my son dead?

And Cain, my son, a fugitive

DRAFT

Two sons

Adam, we had two sons

Both – Oh, Adam –

Multiply

Sorrow

Dear God, Why?

Tell me again about the fruit

Why?

Please, tell me again

Why?

I'm looking forward to meeting Eve one day. I want to thank her.

Did you notice how Eve asked her questions at the end of the poem? And with what attitude? Did she demand, "Heavenly Father! Tell me! After ALL we've sacrificed--Why you are doing this to me?" I don't think so. Not why did she feel such anguish and agony about Cain and Abel but rather, with more trust: "Heavenly Father, why DO we have all the terrible difficulties to work through in this world? And where could working through those difficulties lead us? What IS--after ALL--the 'fruit' of this life?"

As I think about the developmental ascent we're all struggling in, I'm grateful for Elder Maxwell's honest insight, asked ironically: "How can you and I really expect to glide naively

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through life as if to say, ‘Lord, give me experience, but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal, and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made Thee what Thou art. Then let me come and dwell with Thee and fully share Thy joy.’”³⁴

So . . . what does Christ’s Atonement have to do with what Eve describes in the poem? Again, the best answer --a ringing doctrinal answer--is in the Book of Moses, in an angel’s visit to an altar. [SLIDE 24 ANGEL’S VISIT] “Why,” the angel asks, “dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?” “I know not,” Adam replies, “save the Lord commanded me.” (Moses 5:6)

This is Walter Rane’s painting showing the angel teaching Adam and Eve,. [SLIDE 25 ANGEL PAINTING] Again the Book of Moses paints a clearer picture. “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father. . . . Wherefore, . . . thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.” (Moses 5:8-9)

Look at the angel’s face. Attitude? Is he scolding them? No. He wants them to understand. He wants them to want to do the hard things they will HAVE to do to ascend. He wants them to ascend, to get their feet out of the mud and themselves into the firey light of heaven. He loves them.

Look at Adam’s and Eve’s faces. It’s not fear you see. They’re leaning forward, desiring to understand. Look at the diagonal division in the painting. Lower right: The reality, the mud of mortality. The glory of God can only be reached by stretching up and out and through the difficulties created by that symbolic mud. And notice Eve’s hand on Adam’s shoulder. As if she’s saying, “We’re going to do this together.”

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The angel teaches them not only about Christ's sacrifice, but also the great plan of redemption and salvation. (Moses 5:9) Eve's reaction to the angel's teachings? Eve and Adam were not novices, not greenies in Eden. They'd been on the earth for some time. They'd had children and many hard experiences. And Eve is no Pollyanna; YET Moses 5:11 tells us that she "heard all these things and was *glad* saying, were it not for our transgression we never should have had SEED ["seed" again] and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption." She's saying, "If we hadn't chosen and known the bitter, we wouldn't, . . . we couldn't, prize the good."

Eve is getting it. Remember—no experience, no children, no misery, no sin—and therefore no joy. So she says that without the anguish they wouldn't know, "the joy of our redemption and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient." I love how she doesn't say "unto all the perfect," but "unto all the obedient"--those who are striving. In this story, the Book of Moses again makes clear the unique doctrine that Christ and his atoning mission were central to Adam and Eve from their earliest days, and that mortal afflictions are designed not to punish us, but to teach us. A catalyst to growth. [SLIDE 26 ANGEL'S VISIT, repeat of slide 24]

Now we can add more words to the screen. Adam and Eve are stepping up, as in the temple's pattern, [SLIDE 27] to the Terrestrial world and moving toward the Celestial [SLIDE 28]. And as part of that stepping up, we can also see the additional blessings of the Atonement. The Savior is so ready to give us what is good for us when we become ready and when we're willing to reach up.

As we think of the *redeeming blessings* [SLIDE 29], the *strengthening blessings* [SLIDE 30], and the *perfecting blessings* [SLIDE 31], notice how the perfecting blessings relate to the endowment and to the higher priesthood with sacrifice, with consecration. The angel's visit strengthened Adam and Eve. And

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I believe the Savior is strengthening us *while* we're being redeemed and *while* we're trying to become perfected.

If Eve, and Adam, could grow through their extreme difficulties, maybe I could. The Book of Moses teaches this doctrine--I can climb up and out of any anguish, IF I stick with Him. I believe *if my faith is based on trust in God, and not on blessings, I can grow through any trial. It is a doctrine of hope.*

BRUCE: Let me add two brief thoughts about Adam and Eve's marriage—and the doctrines of sealing and sacrifice, which culminate the story of receiving the Atonement. We noted earlier that the Book of Moses shows the contrast between other-centered and self-centered marriage; more on that shortly. We have also seen that Eve and then Adam chose wisely in the garden because only the natural, mortal consequences of eating the fruit could provide the experience—including the children—needed to fulfill God's plan for them, and for us.

In contrast, traditional Christianity teaches that Eve's choice was a terrible mistake, bringing down the wrath of God on all mankind. Some Christian churches still teach that because women are the daughters of foolish Eve, wives should be *dependent* on their husbands. Reacting strongly against this idea, most people today would say that a wife should be *independent* of her husband. And, in fairness, they would add, a husband should also be independent of his wife. But when both spouses are independent of each other, they usually accept today's "nonbinding commitments," which makes them *both* more likely to leave their marriage when the fun stops—or when the trouble starts.

Which is correct in a marriage: *dependence* or *independence*? Neither one. Resting on the doctrinal foundation provided by the Book of Moses, the restored gospel—unlike the rest of

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Christianity—teaches that Eve and Adam’s choice in the garden wasn’t a mistake or an accident; rather, their action was a deliberate, even glorious, part of the plan of salvation. Thus the Restoration sees Eve—and all women—as noble beings who are the complete equals of men. So Eve is not dependent on Adam, nor is she independent from him. Rather, Eve and Adam are *interdependent* with each other. As the Church’s *Proclamation on the Family* states, they are “equal partners” who “help one another” in everything they do.³⁵ That concept was also not likely to have been present in Joseph Smith’s 1830 New England culture.

The Adam and Eve story also teaches us about sacrifice—both in general and as a sanctifying dimension of marriage. During our time in the St. George Temple, I was asked to perform a sealing in the same sealing room where Marie and I had been married about half a century earlier. As I invited the young couple to come to the altar, suddenly I realized something I hadn't caught before. I would be asking them to kneel—like Adam and Eve— at the sacred altar of prayer, the altar of covenant, the altar of sacrifice. And what would they be doing there?

I found myself telling them that when the Savior spoke to the Nephites after He had completed His atoning mission, He said that He no longer wanted animal sacrifices. He wanted instead the new sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. (See 3 Nephi 9:20)

Animal sacrifice was symbolic of the Father offering His son. But having a broken heart and a contrite spirit is a symbol of the Savior offering *Himself* as a sacrifice for us. James E. Talmage taught that Jesus literally died of a broken heart. When we make that kind of sacrifice, offering ourselves, we seek to emulate Him. So that couple were meekly offering themselves on the altar--to God and to each other, holding nothing back—like Adam and Eve.

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And what will happen to them as they try to live for each other and for their family in a way that emulates Christ? This thing is in similitude of the Only Begotten. As they try individually to live as He did, they offer themselves to God vertically and they offer themselves to each other horizontally. As “Adam said: this . . . is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” And he “shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” And “Eve, his wife, did labor with him.” (Moses 3:23-24; 5:1)

Think of a triangle, with the bride and groom in the two bottom corners and the Lord at the apex above them. As they individually ascend toward Him on either side of the triangle, the closer they come to the Lord, the closer they will come to each other. And eventually, when they come to the point of being “at one” with Him, they will also be at one with each other. As their sealing is sanctified in this way, they are personally sanctified—as the Savior’s perfecting grace blesses their lifetime of placing their hearts on the altar of selfless love.

This covenantal, sacrifice-based understanding of marriage differs starkly and powerfully from the prevailing cultural view of marriage today. In His parable of the good shepherd, Jesus described a hireling—someone who is paid to care for the sheep. When the wolf comes, He said, the hireling “leaveth the sheep, and fleeth.” Why does the hireling run away? Because his “own the sheep are not.” By contrast, Jesus said of Himself, “I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:11–15). In today’s culture, many marriage partners view themselves like hirelings—who too often flee when the wolf of trouble comes. They are like Adam and Eve’s misguided descendants who “hearkened not” to the words of Noah, and “[E]very man was lifted up in the imagination . . . of his [own] heart.” (Moses 8:21-22) But *we*, in similitude, try to give our lives for the sheep of our marriage covenant, an hour, a day at a time.

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I know that the Good Shepherd lives, and that our personal relationship with Him leads to a joining of His sacrifice and ours. Within and through that relationship, He redeems us, He strengthens us, and he perfects us.

Finally, when I was assigned to meet in the St. George Temple with people ready to receive their own endowment, I would tell them that they were about to have an experience similar to what Moses did, as described in Moses chapter 1. And I would say that what the Lord said to Moses, He would be saying to *them* during the endowment: Moses (now imagine the Lord saying your name), “*thou art my son*” or *my daughter*, and “*I have a work for thee*” to do. (Moses 1:3, 6) I’m so thankful for the Book of Moses, because through the temple it teaches us the divine *vision* of who we really are, and it teaches us the *work* that will return us to His presence.

Endnotes

1 Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 508.

2 *Ibid.* 509.

3 Noel B. Reynolds, *Ibid.* 510.

4 Truman G. Madsen, quoted in *Ibid.* 510.

5. Elder Maxwell encouraged this research model, which John W. Welch describes in *Ibid.* 511.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Neal A. Maxwell, *Plain and Precious Things* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 4.

⁸ Richard L. Bushman, Introduction to “Joseph Smith and Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 59:2 (2020 online edition)

⁹ Blake Ostler interview in 1981 with Sterling McMurrin, https://dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V17N01_20.pdf

¹⁰ On the role of evidence in nurturing faith, see John W. Welch

<https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/power-evidence-nurturing-faith>

11 Holland, Jeffrey R. 2018. The Maxwell legacy in the 21st century (2018 Neal A. Maxwell Lecture. Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, JSB Auditorium, Brigham Young University, 10 November 2018). In Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2018 Annual Report, pp. 9-21.

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¹² Maxwell, Neal A. "Discipleship and scholarship." *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992): 5-9.

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¹³ For a new website with relevant perspectives on the Book of Abraham, see <https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/#>. The site includes forty historical validations of Abraham.

¹⁴ Conference introduction.

¹⁵ "I define a 'temple text' as one that contains the most sacred teachings of the plan of salvation that are not to be shared indiscriminately, and that ordains or otherwise conveys divine powers through ceremonial or symbolic means, together with commandments receive by sacred oaths that allow the recipient to stand ritually in the presence of God." John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 300-301.

¹⁶ John W. Welch email to Bruce C. Hafen, Sept. 9, 2020.

¹⁷ Jack Welch suggested several of these terms in our recent exchange of emails on this subject. See *Ibid*.

¹⁸ We first explored many of the themes described in this paper in Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: How The Atonement Applies to our Experiences*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 1989, expanded edition 2008 and *The Contrite Spirit: How the Temple Helps Us Apply Christ's Atonement*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 2015. The doctrinal foundations for both books rely heavily on scriptural passages from the Book of Moses.

¹⁹ Jan Shippis, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 112.

²⁰ Conversation of Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen with Elwin Robinson in St. George, 2013.

²¹ David O. McKay, Los Angeles Temple Dedication, 11 March 1956, quoted in Madsen, Truman G. 1978. "House of glory." In *Five Classics by Truman G. Madsen*, 273-85. Salt Lake City, UT: Eagle Gate, 2001, 282. Reprint, Madsen, Truman G. 1978. "House of glory." In *The Temple: Where Heaven Meets Earth*, 1-14. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008, 11.

²² *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 268.

²³ Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. "The LDS book of Enoch as the culminating story of a temple text." *BYU Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014): 39-73. www.templethemes.net. (accessed September 19, 2017), 44.

²⁴ Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock. "Moses 1 and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Twin sons of different mothers?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 179-290. www.templethemes.net, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/moses-1-and-the-apocalypse-of-abraham-twin-sons-of-different-mothers/>. (accessed July 29, 2020), 190.

²⁵ Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 134.

²⁶ Terryl Givens, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.

²⁷ Articles of Faith 1:2.

²⁸ Givens, *Pearl of Greatest Price*, 30-41.

²⁹ "How Firm a Foundation," *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985, #85.

³⁰ Nelson, Russell M. "Drawing the power of Jesus Christ into our lives." *Ensign* 47, May 2017.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2017/04/drawing-the-power-of-jesus-christ-into-our-lives?lang=eng>. (accessed August 16, 2020), 40.

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³¹ Ibid.

³² Allan Rau, email message to Bruce C. Hafen, June 25, 2012. Emphasis added.

³³ Eliot, Thomas Stearns. 1943. "Little Gidding." In *Four Quartets*, 49-59. New York City, NY: Harcourt, 1971, 5:239-242, p. 59.

³⁴ Maxwell, Neal A. "'Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds'." *Ensign* 21, May 1991.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1991/05/lest-ye-be-wearied-and-faint-in-your-minds?lang=eng>. (accessed August 16, 2020).

³⁵ Hinckley, Gordon B., Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust. "The family: A proclamation to the world. Proclamation of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve presented at the General Relief Society Meeting, September 23, 1995." Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995.

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