

# LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION TO THEMES; D&C 1

## READING 1—READ DOCTRINE & COVENANTS SECTION 1

### Studying the Scriptures by Theme

This year's scripture study will be different. Instead of studying narratives that unfold chronologically, like the books of Acts or Mosiah, we will study themes as they are found woven throughout the Doctrine & Covenants. This study will give you one more way to increase your knowledge of the Savior and your familiarity with his teachings in the word of God.

Picking themes out of the scriptures is not like sorting laundry. You can't take a verse and throw it in the "faith" bin, then throw another in the "prayer" bin, and finally, throw the next one in the "Second Coming" bin. Rather, themes are like colors, mixing and blending in changing patterns: one verse may have mostly blue, a little green, and a touch of gold.

Here, for example, is verse 17 of D&C 33: "Wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom." All of the themes mentioned above are found in this one verse, including others not mentioned, such as preparation and taking the spirit as a guide. This, by the way, illustrates a problem with complex colored pencil scripture marking schemes. Theme colors weave in and out of verses like a tapestry. If you try to be too rigid in marking verses, picking only one idea, or bin, to put the verse into, you will end up cutting up the tapestry for the sake of neatly labeling all its threads. You will lose the sense of the overall picture. It is far better to study a theme, let's say prayer for example, by looking at many scriptures that throw light on prayer, until you feel you understand prayer and how it fits into your life. Then study another subject or theme until you feel you have a good sense of its meaning in the word of God. It is for this reason that we are going to study one theme per lesson. Sometimes the same passage of scripture will be used in more than one lesson because it teaches something on both topics.

For those of you who like a systematic way of studying the scriptures, we suggest "collections" of scriptures. If there is a theme or subject that speaks to your heart, list the scriptures that speak to that topic on the blank pages found at the beginning and end of books of scripture. I have several there that I refer to often in teaching. One for example is a collection of scriptures about the spiritual danger of riches, another about the fatherhood of Christ and becoming His child. Such personal lists could also be kept in a computer program or a notebook. Elder Bednar spoke in conference about cutting and pasting scriptures he had printed out from the Internet in notebooks he kept on various topics of interest to him. There is no one right way to harness the power of scriptural themes. The topical guide to the scriptures is an example of this. You can use it to study a scripture theme, but you may still want to make a more personal collection of your favorites.

The question arises as to whether the Lord Jesus Christ himself is one of the themes of scripture? No, he is not. In our color metaphor, He is not any one color. He is light itself. Section 93 tells us that Christ is "the light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth...and in him was the life of men and the light of men." (93:9) All truth, and therefore all scripture, shines and illuminates our understanding of the Son of God. He is like the white light that is formed by combining all the colors of the rainbow. Everything we learn helps us know him better. That is why we won't be having a lesson on "Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the World." All our lessons are ultimately about Him.

1. A. Very often in the sections of the Doctrine & Covenants you will find one or more verses at the beginning, and sometimes again at the end, that specify who is speaking. So--who is speaking the words of the revelation known as Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants and what verse or verses did you use to identify this?

B. Though this is not the first revelation that Joseph received and included in the Doctrine & Covenants, it was put first in the book for a specific reason. Can you find the verse that tells what this is?

2. The first theme in our study is the Word of God. This is one of those phrases that have multiple meanings in scripture. But at its simplest meaning, it connotes the things God says. Look at verse 14.

A. The word of the Lord here is called the "voice" of the Lord. Through whom can this voice come?

B. What happens to those who will not hear these voices?

- C. What do you think is the meaning of this particular consequence?
3. The second theme of this study is Obedience to God's Commands. How many times is the word "commandment" found in Section 1?
4. A. From verses 17 & 18, who did God give His commandments to in these latter days?
- B. Who do you think the "others" are in verse 18?
- C. From verse 18 through 23, the Lord lists the reasons he has sent a new "download" of His commandments to the earth at this time. Name as many as you can find.
5. THOUGHT QUESTION: If a stranger stopped you on the street and "commanded" you to give him ten percent of your income (no gun or force of any kind, just a command), you would probably just laugh. However, as we read in verse 5 & 6, God sends his servants and his commandments into the earth with "authority." Why does God have authority to command mankind to do things; or, in other words, in what does God's authority originate?
6. The third theme of the study is the New and Everlasting Covenant. Included in this theme will be the subject of the atonement of Jesus Christ—it is because of the atonement that we are able to make saving covenants with God. Can you identify the two verses that use the phrase "mine everlasting covenant"? From these verses, why was the Restoration necessary?
7. A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. It is by virtue of keeping the covenants that we have made with the Lord that we are rescued from all of the effects of being born into a fallen world. List three of the covenants that you have made with God and how these covenants have effected your daily living. Don't forget to list the things God has done for you as a result of your covenants.
8. The fourth theme is the Church. God has reestablished an organization on the earth that is His authorized church organization. What do you learn about it from Section 1?
9. A. From verses 11, 34 and 35, explain who the "target audience" is for the message of Section 1.
- B. What great mission of the church is necessitated by the answer to the last question?

C. Is there more than one way for women in the church to fill this responsibility?

10. The fifth theme is Zion vs. Babylon. The two cities represent opposites in the Lord's view. Babylon in history was a great city that was the capital of a wicked worldly empire. Zion, the actual city, was the city we read about in the Book of Moses that became so righteous under the leadership of the prophet Enoch that it was literally taken up out of the earth. What are some things these cities refer to when they are used as metaphors in the scriptures? Babylon:

Zion:

12. What is something you learn about Babylon from verse 16?

13. The sixth scripture theme of this year's study is HUMILITY. As we study the themes of this year, we will not focus only on the single word that defines the themes, but on anything that throws light on our subject. For example, under the topic of humility, we will look at all the human weakness and frailties that we have to be humble about, what man's position is in relation to God, a proper knowledge of our dependence on Him, and God's promises to the humble.

We will do the first one together.

A. Look at Section 1:19. What do you learn about man, his relationship to God, and the necessity of humility in this one verse?

B. What do you learn on this theme from verse 24?

C. What do you learn from verse 28?

2. What is one thing that you have learned about humility in these verses that you can make application of in your life?

14. The seventh theme is Revelation and the Holy Ghost. This is the Lord's guidance system for his covenant children. What is another word for this guidance system?

15. From verse 39, what kind of revelation can the Holy Ghost provide for a person who is reading The Doctrine and Covenants?

16. PERSONAL: Have you ever had the Spirit do this for you when you were reading scripture? Explain.

17. The eighth theme we are going to study is Repentance. Repentance is the way one changes to the path of God after having gone along a sinful path. As it says in verse 16, "every man walketh in his own way..." What sort of God has a person made for himself or herself when they do this? (v. 16)

18. Verses 24 through 28 speak of several different reasons the Lord gave "these commandments," or, in other words, the book we know as The Doctrine and Covenants. One is, "inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent." Explain how reading scriptures can bring a person to repentance.

19. The ninth theme is Judgment. Section one makes reference to two ways the Lord can act as a judge. How does verse 10 explain one way in which the Lord shall judge the life of every person?

20. What sort of judgment is referenced in verses 12, 13 and 36?

21. A. The Lord says he is speaking in these revelations in a "voice of warning." Great numbers of people on the earth today have no regard for God's commands, if they believe in him at all. What do verses 2 and 3 tell us will happen to the ungodly?

B. Does this verse have anything to say to us, as Latter-day Saint women, or is it just meant to warn unbelievers?

22. The last theme that we will study is Preparation. The Lord is gracious and is giving all men time so that they might prepare for the things that are coming on the earth. What perspective on preparation do you get from verse 12?

23. Why might a study of the Doctrine and Covenants be a good way to prepare for the future?

### **The Ten Themes for the 2008-2009 Study of the Doctrine and Covenants:**

1. The Word of God
2. Obedience to the Commandments
3. The New and Everlasting Covenant
4. The Church
5. Zion vs. Babylon
6. Humility
7. Revelation and the Holy Ghost
8. Repentance
9. Judgment
10. Preparation