The first two scripture study tips were covered in Part 1. We talked about using the footnotes and the importance of knowing where sentences start and stop. In this part of the series we'll look at looking for context, learning new words, comparing accounts and sources, and finally, the importance of prayer. Search the scriptures using these tools and your life will be greatly enriched.

Tip 3 - Look for context

There aren't many things more deadly from a spiritual standpoint than taking scriptures out of context. By not knowing what a scripture is really talking about, and why the prophet said what he did, individual verses can be misconstrued to mean almost anything in the hands of the right person. This problem is compounded by translation problems with the Bible, and the history of preachers being the only ones versed in the scriptures, so no one questioned their interpretations.

Here is a small example of a verse without a home. This is 1 Corinthians 15:58. It is the last verse of the chapter and reads thus:

> 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

I ask you, what is Paul talking about when he says that our labor is not in vain in the Lord? You could give all kinds of legitimate answers or explanations, but the one that fits the context of this verse is found in the subject of the whole chapter. The whole chapter is proving to the Sadducees (who did not believe in resurrection) that there is such a thing as resurrection. Paul has talked about the resurrection of Christ, the common practice of baptizing for the dead, the three degrees of glory, etc. Because all men will be resurrected through Christ's atonement, our mortal labors in God's behalf are not done in vain. We will all be raised one day and rewarded for what we have done here.

Our lives derive more meaning based on when and where we lived, in the context of our times and in the context of our family's mission on earth. A verse derives more meaning based on what came before it and what comes after. It is the context of the teaching that aids in its place and power in the scriptural repertoire.

Tip 4 - Learn new words

Between Old English (think Beowulf) and Modern English was Middle English, the language of Shakespeare and the Bible. The names of all sorts of things have changed in the last 300 plus years. I doubt there is a store in New York City where you could walk in and ask for a jerkin or bodkin and walk out with the correct purchase. But that is the language of our scriptures. This means we need to learn a few of the words used in the scriptures so we know what is being referred to.

Even our prayer language is an approximation of the reverential language of the middle ages. The prophets have told us we need to learn to speak to the Lord in our prayers using these older terms of thee, thy, thou, art, and so forth. These terms help us remember our place as a supplicant to the Lord. The very awkwardness of using this form of language helps us be more humble in our prayers. As we read the scriptures and become more familiar with the language and how it is used it will help us feel more comfortable using the same form of language in our prayers.

Many of the terms used in the scriptures just add an "eth" on the end of the word. The word means the same thing, it just has a more formal look and feel. Examples are "asketh," "reproveth," "wanteth," etc. Some words are close to what we have today, like "sheweth." Sheweth means to show. If I were to say, "Shew thyself approved unto

God," I am only saying that I want you to show yourself approved to God. In other words, live in such a way that God would approve of you and your actions.

This adventure into old words (new to you) and language use will be quite comfortable for some people and totally terrifying for others. It depends in large measure on how you were raised, and your exposure to this kind of language. If you need some help in this department, try looking for some commentaries on the Old or New Testaments and see how the commentator translates what is being said in the raw verse into modern English. I promise that this gets much easier with practice.

Tip 5 - Compare accounts

Sometimes reading in the Old Testament leaves me wondering what it was I just read. Even if I ignore the doctrine and just look at the surrounding story it can be difficult to know if I have it right. This is where General Conference talks, Liahona (Ensign) articles, and CES firesides, etc. come in handy. Many times in Devotionals given at the various BYUs and in other publications by the Church we can find the same stories we just tried to read on our own in the Bible, but they are explained and discussed in modern English. This way we can go back and reread the original account with a fresh understanding of what the modern scholars have said about it or what the General Authorities of the Church have said about the events.

Don't ever feel like you are trapped into reading only one account of a sacred event, especially if the prophets have spoken of it elsewhere. This is one of the great blessings of living in the latter days, we have a ready supply of prophets to comment on past revelations and even more prophets to teach us how those older stories and prophecies fit in with the modern days.

Tip 6 - Compare sources

This tip is almost an extension of the previous tip. In many places in sacred writings one prophet will talk about an event or teaching, but that is not the only place you can find references to that event or teaching. Prophets often refer back to what others before them have talked about and apply the lessons of the past to their own day. This is done all throughout the Bible, Book of Mormon, and even in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price.

How many places can you find references to the story of the creation and to Adam and Eve? The Old Testament is our first source. The Pearl of Great Price also talks about them in the Books of Moses and Abraham. The New Testament also refers back to these events, as does the Book of Mormon. So don't think that just because you found a reference to something in one book of scripture that you have reached a dead end. A great example of this is the writings of Isaiah. Isaiah is quoted and referenced in many places throughout the scriptures. He was a very popular prophet. And of course, the teachings of Jesus are found on every page of every book of scripture, since all scripture comes from him.

Tip 7 - Pray

This is probably the most important of all the tips. We have been told time and time again that learning about the Lord has to come through the Spirit. The Spirit most often only comes by invitation, and that invitation is generally through prayer. We cannot understand the teachings of Isaiah except through the spirit of revelation. That has been made abundantly clear by multiple prophets. The Lord wants us to come to know Him and His works, and to do that we need His Spirit to guide us and prompt us. Having the help of the Holy Ghost will guide us to learn what we need to learn today so we can be prepared to learn more tomorrow.

As we pray for guidance in what we need to learn as we search the scriptures, the Holy Ghost will help us find what is most needful for our eternal welfare. He will help us to remember what we have learned, to connect past learning with present learning, and to begin to see how all of the gospel of Christ fits into one great body of knowledge where everything is connected. The gospel of Christ is a complete package or body. It lacks nothing that is needed for our salvation. It is our responsibility to search the scriptures and learn what the prophets before us have taught about Christ and God's plan for us. By inviting the Spirit to be our companion as we study and seek, our lives will be enriched, and the eyes of our understanding will be opened to glorious new discoveries that will bring joy and gratitude into our lives.

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7 Scripture Study Tips - Part 2