

# The Use of *Gethsemane* by Church Leaders, 1859–2018

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Many commentators have noted that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (herein referred to as “the Church”) has a distinctive focus on Gethsemane.<sup>1</sup> For example, Douglas J. Davies

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1. Although the Church focuses more on Gethsemane than many other Christian denominations, there are some prominent Christians who have emphasized Gethsemane. For example, Adam Clarke, a British Methodist theologian who authored an influential commentary on the Bible, wrote regarding Luke 22:43–44, “How exquisite must this anguish have been, when it forced the very blood through the coats of the veins, and enlarged the pores in such a preternatural manner, as to cause them to empty it out in large successive drops! In my opinion, the principal part of the redemption price was paid in this unprecedented and indescribable agony.” Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, 2 vols. (New York: J. Collord, Printer, 1831), 1:237. An early eighteenth-century commentator wrote of Luke 22:39–46, “We have here the awful story of Christ’s agony in the garden, just before he was betrayed. . . . He afflicted his own soul with grief for the sin he was to satisfy for, and an apprehension of the wrath of God to which man had by sin made himself obnoxious. . . . Some reckon this [was] one of the times when Christ shed his blood for us, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission.” Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 1903–4. Similarly, Alfred Edersheim, a nineteenth-century author whose works were frequently quoted by Elders James E. Talmage and Bruce R. McConkie, wrote, “Alone, as in His first conflict with the Evil One in the Temptation in the wilderness, must the Saviour enter on the last contest. With what agony of soul He took upon Him now and there the sins of the world, and in taking expiated them.” Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols. (Grand

has written that the “LDS interpretation of Christ’s garden experience involves a most interesting relocation of the act of atonement within Christian theological accounts that have, traditionally, seen the cross as the prime site of assuming human sin”<sup>2</sup> and that “Mormonism relocates the centre of gravity of Christ’s passion in Gethsemane rather than upon the cross and Calvary.”<sup>3</sup>

Restoration scripture provides the Church with additional understanding of the significance of Gethsemane, and modern Church leaders have clearly taught about its important role in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. For example, President Thomas S. Monson declared, “Then came the Garden of Gethsemane. . . . He [Christ] wrought the great Atonement as He took upon Himself the sins of all. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

While it is true that the Church emphasizes Gethsemane more than other Christian denominations do, a polemic sometimes used against the Church is that it focuses primarily on Gethsemane as opposed to the cross as the site of Christ’s Atonement. These arguments point to statements such as the following from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*: “For Latter-day Saints, Gethsemane was the scene of Jesus’ greatest agony, even surpassing that which he suffered on the cross.”<sup>5</sup>

Does the Church teach that Christ’s agonies in Gethsemane surpassed those he experienced on the cross? Is Gethsemane crucial to Latter-day Saints? What have Church leaders taught about Gethsemane? Have these teachings evolved over time? If so, in what ways? The purpose of this study is to identify what Church leaders have taught about Gethsemane by analyzing their talks as recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* and general conference reports. Before outlining the methodology of this study, we briefly survey what the scriptures themselves teach about Gethsemane.

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Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 2:539. For insight into Alfred Edersheim’s influence on Latter-day Saint thinking, see Marianna Edwards Richardson, *Alfred Edersheim: A Jewish Scholar for the Mormon Prophets* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2008).

2. Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 48.

3. Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 49.

4. Thomas S. Monson, “The Way of the Master,” *Ensign* 26, no. 5 (May 1996): 50.

5. S. Kent Brown, “Gethsemane,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 2:542.

## SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNTS OF GETHSEMANE<sup>6</sup>

The scriptural narrative of Christ in Gethsemane appears in four passages: Matthew 26:36–56; Mark 14:32–52; Luke 22:39–53; and John 18:1–11. Both Matthew and Mark (the only two scriptural authors to use the word *Gethsemane*<sup>7</sup>) describe Jesus as being deeply distressed (see Matt. 26:37–38; Mark 14:33–34). They, along with Luke, record Christ praying, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39; see also Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Luke adds the details that an angel came and strengthened Christ and that Christ “being in an agony . . . prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).<sup>8</sup> John does not record any of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane but rather records the intercessory prayer, offered before entering Gethsemane. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all describe Christ’s capture in Gethsemane, although they differ in specific details.

These biblical passages, taken by themselves, do not clearly indicate that the Savior’s Atonement took place—in whole or in part—in Gethsemane. This key teaching of the Church comes from Restoration scripture and, in particular, modern Church leaders. Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19 provides the clearest scriptural explanation of the importance of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane. In this passage the Savior says, “I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not

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6. This section utilizes text from John Hilton III, “Teaching the Scriptural Emphasis on the Crucifixion,” *Religious Educator* 20, no. 3 (2019): 133–53.

7. The phrase *Garden of Gethsemane* never appears in scripture, but rather it combines *Gethsemane* (Matt. 26:36; Mark 14:32) and *garden* (John 18:1).

8. This passage has a complicated textual history, with some scholars arguing it is not part of the original text of Luke. For an in-depth discussion of these verses, see Lincoln H. Blumell, “Luke 22:43–44: An Anti-Docetic Interpolation or an Apologetic Omission?” *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 19 (2014): 1–35. The Joseph Smith Translation changes this phrase to, “*he sweat as it were great drops of blood*,” perhaps shifting the emphasis to the blood that was shed. Robert J. Matthews commented on this JST revision as follows: “This change tends to place the emphasis upon the blood as such, instead of on the sweat that was ‘as blood.’ In one instance *sweat* is the subject; in the other it is the action brought about by the Savior’s agony. That *blood* and not *sweat* was the result of our Lord’s suffering on this occasion is substantiated by passages from the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 3:7) and the Doctrine and Covenants (19:18).” Robert J. Matthews, “*A Plainer Translation*”: *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, a History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 373, emphasis in original.

suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.” Although this passage does not explicitly provide a location for these sufferings, its connections to Luke 22:44 (“his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground”) and Matthew 26:39 (“if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”) indicate that Christ is likely referring to Gethsemane.<sup>9</sup>

Outside of these passages, only one scripture reference can be directly connected to the events of Gethsemane with relative textual certainty. In Mosiah 3:7, King Benjamin said Christ “shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.”<sup>10</sup> Other scriptural passages that members of the Church sometimes associate with Gethsemane (for example, Isa. 53:4–5; 2 Ne. 9:21; Alma 7:11–13; D&C 18:11) do not have an explicit connection to Gethsemane.<sup>11</sup>

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9. The phrases “tremble because of pain” and “suffering both body and spirit” could potentially also refer to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Christ states that he “finished [his] preparations,” perhaps indicating that Gethsemane was a completion of preparation that would further culminate through his Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Second Coming. Elder Mark E. Petersen used Doctrine and Covenants 19:18 specifically to discuss “blood shed on the cross.” Mark E. Petersen, “O America, America,” *Ensign* 9, no. 11 (November 1979): 13. Similarly, President John Taylor (then president of the Quorum of the Twelve) connected Christ’s sweating blood with his Crucifixion, stating, “Jesus himself sweat great drops of blood, and in the agony of his suffering cried out, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 20:259 (March 2, 1879).

10. Neither Mosiah 3:7 nor Doctrine and Covenants 19:18 (a clear cross-reference) make it explicit that Christ bled from every pore in Gethsemane. However, these verses appear to connect to Luke 22:44, which describes Christ’s bleeding in Gethsemane.

11. Several scriptural passages speak of redemption through the blood of Christ (for example, Eph. 1:7; Mosiah 3:18). However, it is not clear whether such passages allude to suffering in Gethsemane that caused Christ to “bleed at every pore” (D&C 19:18) or “the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). For a comprehensive analysis of scriptures relevant to Gethsemane and Christ’s Crucifixion, see John Hilton III, “Teaching the Scriptural Emphasis on the Crucifixion,” *Religious Educator* 20, no. 3 (2019): 133–53.

Given the paucity of explicit scriptural teachings regarding Gethsemane, the teachings of modern Church leaders have clearly played an important role in our understanding of what transpired there. Because Joseph Smith did not provide any teachings regarding Gethsemane outside of Doctrine and Covenants 19, we must turn to later Church leaders to learn more about the Savior's suffering in Gethsemane.

## METHOD

To analyze how Church leaders have discussed the events connected with Gethsemane, we used the "LDS General Conference Corpus"<sup>12</sup> to identify every instance of their use of the word *Gethsemane*. This corpus contains more than ten thousand talks; we utilized those coming from the *Journal of Discourses*<sup>13</sup> and general conference covering the years 1851–2018 (the first use of *Gethsemane* among Church leaders was in 1859<sup>14</sup>). We also utilized a similar corpus of talks hosted by WordCruncher, a program developed at Brigham Young University, to verify our results.<sup>15</sup> After comparing the corpora and resolving minor discrepancies, as well as removing instances in which the word was used multiple times in quick succession, we had 376 total references to Gethsemane. We next searched both corpora for the word *garden* to see if there were any references to Gethsemane by that nomenclature that we had not already identified. This yielded an additional 20 references; for

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12. Accessed at <https://www.lds-general-conference.org/>. The work of Gregory Schultz was invaluable in identifying and collating these references.

13. Recent scholarship has indicated that the published versions of the *Journal of Discourses* are different from the shorthand notes. See Gerrit Dirkmaat and LaJean Purcell Carruth, "The Prophets Have Spoken, but What Did They Say? Examining the Differences between George D. Watt's Original Shorthand Notes and the Sermons Published in the Journal of Discourses," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2015): 24–118. Given the very few references to Gethsemane in the *Journal of Discourses*, these differences are minimal in the context of our overall study.

14. In 1856, Brigham Young may have alluded to Gethsemane without directly referring to it by name. He said, "At the hour when the crisis came for him to offer up his life, the Father withdrew Himself, withdrew His Spirit, and cast a veil over him. That is what made him sweat blood. If he had had the power of God upon him, he would not have sweat blood; but all was withdrawn from him, and a veil was cast over him, and he then plead [*sic*] with the Father not to forsake him." Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:206 (February 17, 1856). While sweating blood is likely a reference to Gethsemane, others have connected it to Christ's Crucifixion (see n. 9).

15. This program can be downloaded at <https://wordcruncher.com>. We acknowledge the invaluable assistance Monte Shelley provided us with this corpus.

simplicity we refer to these as references to Gethsemane although that specific word was not utilized in these passages.

Our primary data were the approximately ninety words spoken before and after each use of the word *Gethsemane*.<sup>16</sup> A complete table of these references is available online.<sup>17</sup> Once our collection of references to Gethsemane was in place, we read each statement, looking for common themes. A process of emergent coding led to ten themes that we used to code each reference. Table 1 summarizes these codes.

**Table 1. Thematic Coding Structure**

Code Name	Code Description	Example Quote
Sins	Christ atoned for our sins.	“Do we remember his intense agony . . . in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he took upon himself the sins of mankind?” <sup>18</sup>
Pains	Christ suffered for, or felt, our pains.	“There is no infirmity, affliction, or adversity that Christ did not feel in Gethsemane.” <sup>19</sup>
Incidental	Used in passing, not directly related to the Atonement of Jesus Christ.	“We crossed the Brook Kedron, passed the Garden of Gethsemane, and ascended the Mount of Olives, to the spot as near as we could determine, where Christ stood when He looked at Jerusalem.” <sup>20</sup>
Cross— Atonement	A proximate reference to the Crucifixion that implies a union between the two with respect to the Atonement of Jesus Christ.	“The Savior . . . [suffered] indescribable pain in Gethsemane and on the cross in order to perfect His Atonement.” <sup>21</sup>

16. We also selectively searched for phrases such as “bleed . . . pore” or “sweat . . . blood.” Such instances were not included in our phrase counts but did provide additional context used in the paper. In addition, we consulted selected publications by Church leaders, such as *Jesus the Christ*. Throughout this paper as we discuss dates and quantities of phrases, we are referring to the primary data as found in our corpus.

17. See “Gethsemane Quotations in Context,” BYU Studies, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/gethsemane-quotations-context>.

18. Henry D. Taylor, “And Always Remember Him,” *Ensign* 3, no. 7 (July 1973): 47.

19. Rafael E. Pino, “Faith in Adversity,” *Ensign* 39, no. 5 (May 2009): 41–42.

20. David O. McKay, in *The Ninety-Second Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1922), 69.

21. Quentin L. Cook, “The Eternal Everyday,” *Ensign* 47, no. 11 (November 2017): 52.

Cross— in passing	The Crucifixion and Gethsemane are mentioned jointly, but somewhat vaguely in connection with salvation.	“Obedience in Gethsemane prepared the Savior to obey and endure to the end on Golgotha.” <sup>22</sup>
Blood	Explicit mention of Christ sweating blood, or bleeding from every pore.	“Luke reported Jesus’ sweating in Gethsemane ‘as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.’” <sup>23</sup>
Thy will	Focuses on Christ’s submissive obedience in Gethsemane.	“Jesus provides the ultimate example of righteous responsiveness and willing submission as He suffered intense agony in Gethsemane.” <sup>24</sup>
Love	Christ suffered because of His or God’s love for us.	“The angel told King Benjamin that the suffering of our Lord as experienced in Gethsemane was due to the wickedness and abominations of the people. This was because he loved them so, his love being perfect.” <sup>25</sup>
Prayer	Christ’s prayers in Gethsemane used to teach how we should pray.	“In his perfect life he set the pattern. He prayed . . . at the beginning of his public ministry; he prayed in the wilderness; . . . he prayed for strength in Gethsemane.” <sup>26</sup>
Our Gethsemane	We will have our own trying experiences.	“Like the Savior, we will all have our Gethsemane.” <sup>27</sup>

Each reference received at least one code; however, a quote could receive more than one code, depending on its content. For example, the following excerpt from a talk by President Ezra Taft Benson received two codes, Sins and Blood: “To possess a testimony of Jesus is to know

22. Robert D. Hales, “If Ye Love Me, Keep My Commandments,” *Ensign* 44, no. 5 (May 2014): 38.

23. Neal A. Maxwell, “Overcome . . . Even as I Also Overcame,” *Ensign* 17, no. 5 (May 1987): 72.

24. David A. Bednar, “Meek and Lowly of Heart,” *Ensign* 48, no. 5 (May 2018): 32.

25. George F. Richards, in *The One Hundred Seventh Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1937), 109.

26. Marion G. Romney, in *The One Hundred Twenty-Second Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), 90.

27. Henry D. Taylor, “A Time of Testing,” *Ensign* 1, no. 12 (December 1971): 44.

that *He voluntarily took upon Himself the sins of all mankind in the Garden of Gethsemane*, which caused Him to suffer in both body and spirit and to *bleed from every pore*.<sup>28</sup>

Two independent raters read each reference in the data set and assigned codes based on the above descriptions. Their codes were compared, and in cases of disagreement, a third rater reviewed their work and made a final determination of the codes assigned.<sup>29</sup>

### THE USE OF GETHSEMANE OVER TIME

Within our corpus, a total of 139 speakers have collectively referred to the word *Gethsemane* 396 times between 1859 and 2018. Just over one-third of all uses (134) came from the nine speakers who used the word ten or more times. These speakers include President Thomas S. Monson (24), Elder Neal A. Maxwell (20), Elder Robert D. Hales (19), President Marion G. Romney (15), President James E. Faust (13), President Spencer W. Kimball (12), Elder Bruce R. McConkie (11), President J. Reuben Clark (10), and Elder David B. Haight (10).

As illustrated in figure 1, the use of *Gethsemane* has risen dramatically in the past few decades. The median point for the usage of *Gethsemane* between 1859 and 2018 is 1987.

Prior to 1900, the word *Gethsemane* was used in the *Journal of Discourses* and general conference addresses only five times. It was not until the 1940s that the word appeared on average more than once per year. Significant increases in the use of *Gethsemane* occurred in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. During these three decades, the individuals who most frequently emphasized the importance of Gethsemane were Presidents Spencer W. Kimball (11) and Marion G. Romney (8).

The largest numerical jump from one decade to the next was from the 1970s to the 1980s, in which the use of *Gethsemane* nearly doubled. In the 1980s, twenty-four different speakers used the word *Gethsemane*; 29 percent of the occurrences came from either Elder Neal A. Maxwell (11) or Elder Bruce R. McConkie (8). In the 1990s and 2000s, *Gethsemane* was used an average of fifty times per decade, with a jump up to seventy-seven times between 2010 and 2018. In addition to the overall numerical differences across decades, it is interesting to note the shift in how the ten themes described in the Methods section occur across

28. Ezra Taft Benson. "Valiant in the Testimony of Jesus," *Ensign* 12, no. 5 (May 1982): 62, emphasis added.

29. Anne Robinson Driggs and Joshua P. Barringer did the initial coding; John Hilton III oversaw the coding process and resolved discrepancies in the codes.

FIGURE 1. Church Leaders' Use of *Gethsemane* by Decade

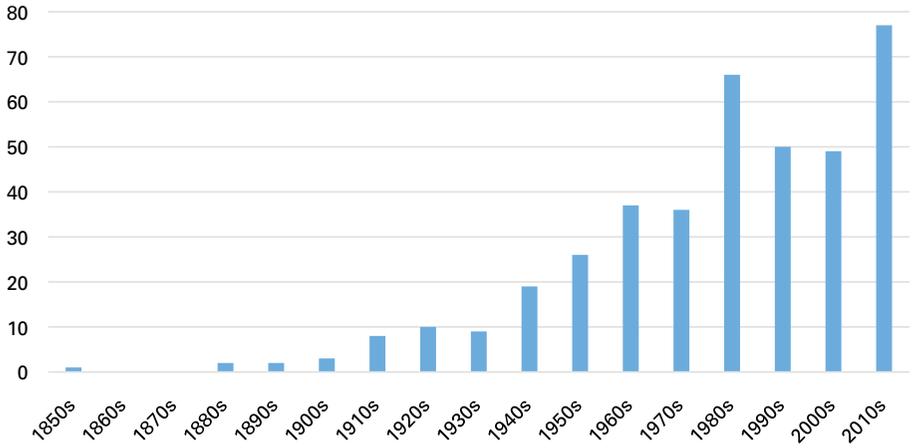


FIGURE 2.1. Primary Thematic Usages of *Gethsemane* across Decades

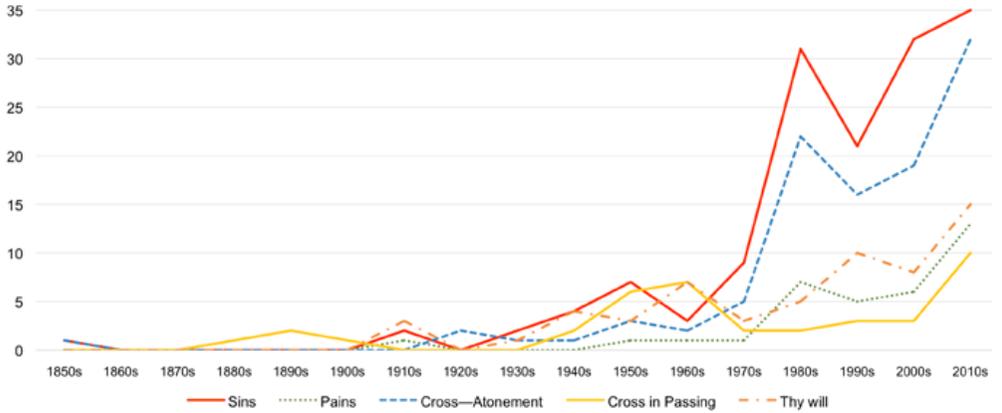
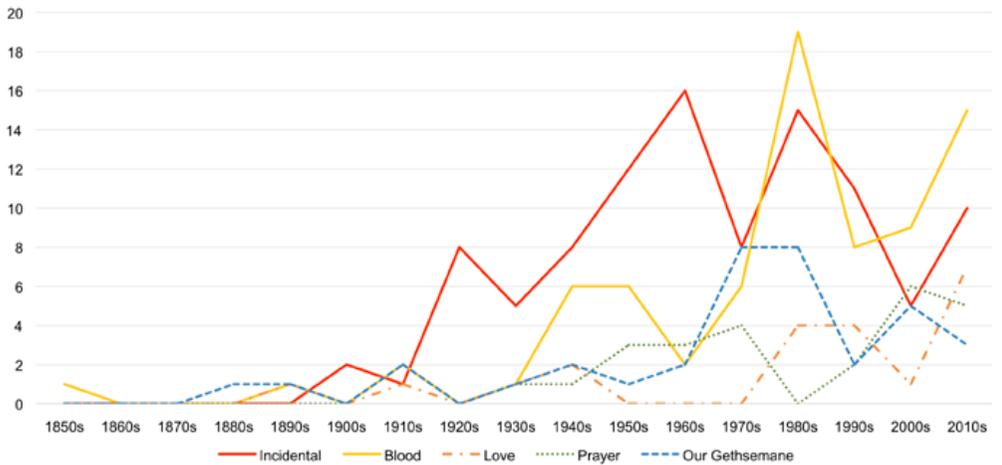


FIGURE 2.2. Secondary Thematic Usages of *Gethsemane* across Decades



decades. Though the use of each theme experienced marked change over time, our significant findings center primarily on the themes relating to Christ suffering our sins and pains, connections to his Crucifixion, and his statement about doing the will of his Father. These shifts are illustrated in figure 2.1. The development of the remaining themes is represented in figure 2.2.

One evident trend is the growth in the usage of most themes over time, often connected with the overall increasing use of *Gethsemane*. It is, however, interesting to note that from the 1920s to the 1960s, the most frequent reason for using *Gethsemane* was to mention it in passing. This has become a much less common usage since the 1980s, an indication that *Gethsemane* has become an increasingly theological topic in conference addresses in recent decades—for example, Church leaders more frequently focus on Jesus’s submission to his Father’s will.

One key insight provided by these data is a remarkable increase in statements regarding Christ atoning for our sins in *Gethsemane*, beginning in the 1980s. Another significant insight is that for the past forty years, the second most prevalent theme regarding the use of the word *Gethsemane* in general conference addresses emphasizes the atoning power of Christ’s suffering in *Gethsemane* in direct connection to his Crucifixion. We also see a large increase, beginning in the 1980s, in the number of times the use of *Gethsemane* relates to Christ’s suffering our pains.

### **GETHSEMANE THEMES EMPHASIZED BY CHURCH LEADERS**

Across the decades, Church leaders have emphasized several key themes in connection with the events in *Gethsemane*. In this section, we examine their teachings with respect to Christ’s submission to his Father, Christ’s suffering for our sins, Christ’s suffering our pains, and the importance of the events that took place in *Gethsemane* relative to the Savior’s Crucifixion.

#### **Christ’s Submission to the Will of the Father**

Beginning in 1910, thirty-eight different speakers made a total of fifty-nine statements concerning the Savior’s submitting his will to his Father’s with specific references to *Gethsemane*. In the 1910s, this was the most prevalent way in which *Gethsemane* was utilized in general conference. For example, in 1914, President Anthon H. Lund taught, “When Jesus was suffering in the Garden of *Gethsemane*, he asked the Lord, if it were possible, to take that bitter cup away from Him. Can you wonder at it when you remember that He was in such agony that the sweat fell like

drops of blood upon the ground? But He added, ‘Not my will, but thy will be done,’ giving us a pattern to follow in our prayers, that although we ardently desire certain things; and believe that they would be for our best good still we should be submissive to the Father’s will.”<sup>30</sup>

A notable increase in these types of statements began in the 1990s. In 1995, Elder Richard G. Scott said, “The Master is our perfect example. . . . How grateful I am personally that our Savior taught we should conclude our most urgent, deeply felt prayers when we ask for that which is of utmost importance to us, with ‘Thy will be done.’”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in 2012, Sister Ann M. Dibb stated, “In Christ’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, He expressed to the Father, ‘Not my will, but thine, be done.’ This should be our prayer as well.”<sup>32</sup>

In 2018, Elder David A. Bednar taught, “Jesus provides the ultimate example of righteous responsiveness and willing submission as He suffered intense agony in Gethsemane. . . . The Savior’s meekness in this eternally essential and excruciating experience demonstrates for each of us the importance of putting the wisdom of God above our own wisdom.”<sup>33</sup> One lesson from Gethsemane that has been frequently taught by Church leaders is the importance of following the Savior’s example in submitting our wills to the Father’s.

### **Christ’s Suffering for Our Sins in Gethsemane**

A key theme, emphasized primarily between 1982 and the present, is that in Gethsemane Jesus Christ vicariously paid the penalty for our sins. Although two significant scriptural passages link the Savior’s suffering in Gethsemane with his paying the price for our sins, in the early years of the Church, few Church leaders invoked Gethsemane to discuss the expiatory aspect of Christ’s Atonement.

As far as we were able to identify, President John Taylor, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, was the only Church leader within our corpus prior to 1892 to explicitly connect Gethsemane with Christ’s

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30. Anthon H. Lund, in *The Eighty-Fifth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1914), 12.

31. Richard G. Scott, “Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign* 25, no. 11 (November 1995): 17.

32. Ann M. Dibb, “I Know It. I Live It. I Love It,” *Ensign* 42, no. 11 (November 2012): 11.

33. David A. Bednar, “Meek and Lowly of Heart,” *Ensign* 48, no. 5 (May 2018): 32–33.

suffering for our sins.<sup>34</sup> He did so in 1859 when he taught that Jesus “came to atone for the transgressions of men. . . . Then again, in Gethsemane, he was left alone, and so great was the struggle that, we are told, he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood.”<sup>35</sup> In 1883 he similarly stated, “When [Christ] found the accumulated weight of the sins of the world rolling upon His head, his feelings were so intense that He sweat great drops of blood. Could I tell it, or could you? No. Suffice it to say that He bore the sins of the world, and, when laboring under the pressure of those intense agonies, He exclaimed, ‘Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass.’”<sup>36</sup>

From 1883 to 1982, connections between Gethsemane and our sins occurred only twenty-seven total times, or on average once every three and a half years. Many of these instances linked Christ’s actions in Gethsemane to humanity’s sins but did so without explicitly defining the anguish borne in the garden as Jesus’s literal vicarious bearing of sins.

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34. The only earlier documented expression we have discovered that Christ suffered for our sins in Gethsemane potentially comes from a letter written by Orson Hyde in 1842 while traveling in the Holy Land. Describing his experience of looking out at Jerusalem, he states, “The fact that I entered the garden and plucked a branch from an olive, and now have that branch to look upon, demonstrates that all was real. There, there is the place where the Son of the Virgin bore our sins and carried our sorrows.” Context makes it likely that Hyde is referring to Gethsemane, but it is possible he is referring to the Savior’s Crucifixion. See Orson Hyde, “A Sketch of the Travels and Ministry of Elder Orson Hyde,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 18 (July 15, 1842): 851.

35. “Discourse by Elder John Taylor, Tabernacle, Nov. 13, 1859,” *Deseret News–Salt Lake Telegram*, April 11, 1860, 1. In the very next sentence, President Taylor states, “In the great day when he was about to sacrifice his life, he said, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” and it is possible that the reference to Christ atoning for the transgressions of men has reference to this latter event. However, President Taylor was specific about the atoning efficacy of Gethsemane in *Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, writing that Christ “obeyed the requirements of His Heavenly Father, although laboring under the weight of the sins of the world, and the terrible expiation which He had to make, when, sweating great drops of blood, He cried: ‘Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done,’ and when expiring in agony upon the cross He cried, ‘It is finished,’ and gave up the ghost.” John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 127, see 149–51; see also John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:34 (January 21, 1883), in which President Taylor makes a similar statement without explicit references to Gethsemane.

36. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:34 (January 21, 1883).

For example, in 1910, Elder Melvin J. Ballard taught that in Gethsemane, Jesus was “weeping over the sins of the world.”<sup>37</sup>

In the 1980s, there were thirty-one instances of speakers connecting Gethsemane with suffering for our sins, more than a 300 percent increase from any previous decade. This spike was not merely the result of the rising number of overall mentions of Gethsemane; rather, references tying the events in Gethsemane to suffering for sin made up nearly one-half of the decade’s total mentions of the garden. Prior to the 1980s, this teaching constituted about 18 percent of mentions of the word *Gethsemane*. Since the 1980s, the principle of Christ’s suffering for our sins in Gethsemane has been taught in conference approximately thirty times per decade and accounts for roughly 50 percent of all references to Gethsemane.

### Christ’s Suffering Our Pains in Gethsemane

Another important theme, similarly emphasized in recent years, is that in Gethsemane Jesus Christ vicariously experienced each of the pains, infirmities, and sorrows suffered by all humanity. The scriptures are specific that Jesus Christ would take upon him the infirmities of his people (see Alma 7:11–13) and “[suffer] . . . the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children” (2 Ne. 9:21; see also Isa. 53:3–5 [compare Mosiah 14:3–5]; D&C 18:11). However, the scriptures do not specify where this suffering took place, although some of the passages speak of the Savior suffering our pains in connection with his death.<sup>38</sup>

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37. Melvin J. Ballard, in *The Eighty-First Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1910), 82.

38. As pointed out in Hilton, “Teaching the Scriptural Emphasis on the Crucifixion,” the scriptures speak of death in connection with Christ suffering our pains. Doctrine and Covenants 18:11 states, “The Lord your Redeemer suffered *death in the flesh*; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men” (emphasis added). Jacob taught, “He suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. *And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass* upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day” (2 Ne. 9:21–22, emphasis added). In this verse, Jacob connects Christ’s suffering the pains of all people with suffering that allows the resurrection to take place—perhaps an allusion to the death of Christ. Alma 7:11–12 speaks of Christ taking upon him the infirmities of his people in connection with the phrase “and he will *take upon him death*” (Alma 7:12, emphasis added). Isaiah 53:3–5 is often cited in

In the nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century, Church leaders occasionally referenced Christ's suffering our pains, but it was not a frequently emphasized theme. When mentioned, typically no location was associated with the suffering.<sup>39</sup> Prior to 1961, within our corpus, Church leaders explicitly spoke of Christ's suffering for our pains in Gethsemane on only two occasions. In each instance, the speaker specifically referenced both Gethsemane and the cross when speaking of the Savior suffering our sorrows.<sup>40</sup> It was not until 1961 that Gethsemane was identified in a conference talk as the specific location of Christ's suffering our pains.<sup>41</sup> Elder Marion G. Romney (then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve) taught, "I think of him in Gethsemane, when he suffered the pain of all men, that we might be forgiven of our sins on conditions of repentance."<sup>42</sup> The next reference to this aspect of the Savior's Atonement came in 1978, again from President Romney (then a member

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association with Gethsemane; however, the verses themselves do not explicitly state that Christ's suffering took place at that location. In fact, the author of the Gospel of Matthew references this passage from Isaiah in connection with Christ's healing the sick (see Matt. 8:16–17).

39. For example, President George Q. Cannon taught, "When you are afflicted and bowed down in sorrow and pain, let the reflection enter into your hearts to comfort you, that our Father and God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, trod the path we are now treading, that there is no affliction and sorrow that we are acquainted with, or can be, that the Lord has not already had an experience in." George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:174 (October 8, 1865). Additional examples of such statements (among others) come from Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:123 (October 6, 1853); and Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:26 (October 1879).

40. Lorenzo N. Stohl, in *The Eighty-Second Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1912), 122; Milton R. Hunter, in *The One Hundred Twenty-Third Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), 39.

41. President John Taylor, in *Mediation and Atonement*, quotes Isaiah 53:4 in connection with Gethsemane and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ but appears to focus on suffering for sins rather than pain. John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement*, 151. Elder James E. Talmage does not discuss Christ's suffering our pains in *Jesus the Christ*, nor does Elder Bruce R. McConkie in the 1958 edition of *Mormon Doctrine*.

42. Marion G. Romney, in *The One Hundred Thirty-First Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1961), 119. Elder Romney references Doctrine and Covenants 18:11 and places Christ's suffering in Gethsemane.

of the First Presidency), who made a statement similar to the one he made in 1961.<sup>43</sup> In 1982, President Romney again returned to the topic, stating that Christ did “suffer the pains of all men . . . in Gethsemane.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, in our corpus, President Marion G. Romney was the only general conference speaker prior to 1983 to identify Gethsemane as the principal location where Christ suffered our pains.

Between 1983 and 2018 the emphasis on Christ’s vicarious suffering of our pains specifically in Gethsemane became much more common, appearing thirty-one times, a more than 1,000 percent increase from 1859 to 1982.<sup>45</sup> Speakers used these statements to help Church members understand that the Savior deeply empathizes with and can strengthen them. For example, Elder Neal A. Maxwell (the only speaker to speak on this topic more than twice between 1983–2018<sup>46</sup>) said, “We can confidently cast our cares upon the Lord because, through the agonizing events of Gethsemane, . . . Jesus is already familiar with our sins, sicknesses, and sorrows. . . . He can carry them now because He has successfully carried them before!”<sup>47</sup>

A unique aspect of Christ’s suffering our pains was taught by Elder Merrill G. Bateman of the Seventy in 2005. He focused on Christ’s personal connection with each of us, stating,

For many years I thought of the Savior’s experience in the garden and on the cross as places where a large mass of sin was heaped upon Him. Through the words of Alma, Abinadi, Isaiah, and other prophets, however, my view has changed. Instead of an impersonal mass of sin, there was a long line of people, as Jesus felt “our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15), “[bore] our griefs, . . . carried our sorrows . . . [and] was bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4–5).

The Atonement was an intimate, personal experience in which Jesus came to know how to help each of us.<sup>48</sup>

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43. Marion G. Romney, “The Worth of Souls,” *Ensign* 8, no. 11 (November 1978): 13.

44. Marion G. Romney, “The Resurrection of Jesus,” *Ensign* 12, no. 5 (May 1982): 6.

45. Approximately half of these occurrences also mention the Savior’s Crucifixion as a place of his suffering our pains.

46. Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke of Christ’s suffering our pains in Gethsemane on five occasions.

47. Neal A. Maxwell, “Yet Thou Art There,” *Ensign* 17, no. 11 (November 1987): 32.

48. Merrill J. Bateman, “A Pattern for All,” *Ensign* 35, no. 11 (November 2005): 75–76.

Emphasizing the same idea, Sister Carole M. Stephens taught, “The Savior . . . understood their [the early Saints’] personal adversity because He suffered it for them in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross,”<sup>49</sup> and President Boyd K. Packer said, “We worship and recognize Him for the pain He suffered for us collectively and for the pain He endured for each of us individually, both in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross.”<sup>50</sup>

These powerful teachings help us see that while we may not fully understand how or what the Savior suffered, there is a personal connection between what he experienced in Gethsemane and each of us individually.

### The Relative Importance of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion

A significant finding from our analysis of references by Church leaders to Gethsemane comes in identifying three basic phases of discourse with respect to the relationship of Gethsemane to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. While there is some fluidity in these phases and they cannot be concretely specified, in general terms, we categorize these phases as follows:

- Phase 1 (1850s–1930s): Teachings about Gethsemane are rare and ambiguous, often leading up to statements that indicate a greater relative importance of Calvary.
- Phase 2 (1940s–1970s): Gethsemane is more commonly identified as a key location of Jesus’s Atonement and is at times elevated above the cross.
- Phase 3 (1980s–2010s): Leaders most frequently present Gethsemane and Calvary as joint locations of Jesus’s grand sacrifice.

**Phase 1 (1850s–1930s).** In the first ninety years of addresses found in the *Journal of Discourses* and general conference talks, the Garden of Gethsemane was referenced only thirty-six times—an average of four times per decade. Only five of these instances identify Gethsemane as a physical location of Jesus’s suffering of our sins or pains. Even in these five

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49. Carole M. Stephens, “Wide Awake to Our Duties,” *Ensign* 42, no. 11 (November 2012): 116.

50. Boyd K. Packer, “The Reason for Our Hope,” *Ensign* 44, no. 11 (November 2014): 6.

instances, the tendency is to speak of Christ as feeling sorrow for our sins in Gethsemane rather than explicitly stating that he atoned for them there. During these same years, it was much more common for speakers to reference “the great atonement that was wrought out on Mount Calvary”<sup>51</sup> than to refer to Gethsemane in connection with that atonement.

An example of the nature of references to Gethsemane during this phase occurs in teachings regarding the cup that Jesus asked to pass from him. During phase 1, four of the seven references to the cup in our corpus refer to the future suffering on the cross rather than to any expiation in the garden, suggesting that some or most of the agony in Gethsemane came from contemplating the future Crucifixion. For example, Lorenzo Snow taught, “In the Garden of Gethsemane, . . . the time approached that He was to pass through the severest affliction that any mortal ever did pass through. He undoubtedly had seen persons nailed to the cross, because that method of execution was common at that time, and He understood the torture that such persons experienced for hours. He went by Himself in the garden and prayed to His Father, if it were possible, that *that cup* [the Crucifixion] might pass from Him; and His feelings were such that He sweat great drops of blood.”<sup>52</sup>

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51. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:327 (February 11, 1872). By way of rough comparison, the corpus at <https://www.lds-general-conference.org> for these decades shows 242 instances of the word *crucifixion*, and 96 instances of the word *crucify*. Additional relevant words such as *Golgotha*, *Calvary*, *cross*, and *die* in conjunction with *sins* would significantly add to these numbers. For a more in-depth analysis of Church leaders’ treatment of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, see John Hilton III, Emily Hyde, and McKenna Trussel, “The Use of *Crucifixion* by Church Leaders: 1848–2018,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* (forthcoming).

52. Lorenzo Snow, “Discourse by President Lorenzo Snow [October 6, 1893],” *Millennial Star* 56, no. 4 (January 22, 1894): 50, emphasis added. Similarly, in 1899 Lorenzo Snow wrote, “When He knelt there in the garden of Gethsemane, what agony He must have experienced *in contemplating His sufferings on the cross!*” Lorenzo Snow, “Discourse by President Lorenzo Snow [May 8, 1899],” *Millennial Star* 61, no. 34 (August 24, 1899): 531, emphasis added. This appears to be an echo of the common Protestant view of the day (and of many still today) that the pain Christ experienced in Gethsemane was primarily in anticipation of the suffering he knew he would experience on the cross. A similar viewpoint was expressed by Joseph L. Wirthlin, in *The One Hundred Eighteenth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1948), 143.

In one of the seven instances, the cup likely refers to Gethsemane, and two of the seven references are ambiguous. Thus, more than half of the statements regarding the cup in phase 1 identify it as the agony associated with the Savior's Crucifixion. This trend contrasts with the later characterization of the cup in phase 2.

Although the overall trend in phase 1 was to emphasize the redemptive power of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, some speakers highlighted Gethsemane in ways that foreshadowed its rise in doctrinal importance. As stated previously, John Taylor taught that Christ suffered for our sins in Gethsemane.<sup>53</sup> In 1929, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith (then of the Quorum of the Twelve) spoke of "the Savior of men suffering in the garden and upon the cross,"<sup>54</sup> and in 1937, Elder Rulon S. Wells taught, "The crucifixion represents death, and suffering, or punishment for sin. We cannot appreciate the enormity of that suffering—that punishment for sin, which Christ endured in the garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross."<sup>55</sup> Although not part of our corpus, Elder James E. Talmage, in *Jesus the Christ*, also emphasized the importance of Gethsemane.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the most influential general conference teaching regarding Gethsemane during this period came from an 1889 address by Bishop Orson F. Whitney, who recounted a dream in which he saw Christ in Gethsemane. Although Bishop Whitney never refers to Christ's atoning for our sins in Gethsemane, he states that after seeing Christ pray that the "bitter cup" (which he does not define) would pass from him, the circumstances of the dream changed. Although still in Gethsemane, Whitney understood that the Crucifixion had already taken place and that Christ was about to leave the earth with Peter, James, and John. Whitney recounted:

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53. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:34 (January 21, 1883).

54. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *One Hundredth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1929), 63.

55. Rulon S. Wells, in *The One Hundred Seventh Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 68.

56. Talmage wrote that in Gethsemane, "in some manner, actual and terribly real though to man incomprehensible, the Savior took upon Himself the burden of the sins of mankind from Adam to the end of the world." James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915), 613. His strong wording regarding Gethsemane may have influenced how later generations of Latter-day Saints came to emphasize Gethsemane more than their predecessors.

I ran out from behind the tree where I had stood gazing upon the picture, and fell down at His feet, clasped His knees, and asked Him to take me with Him.

I shall never forget the look of indescribable tenderness, affection, and compassion with which He gazed down upon me as I knelt before Him. He lifted me up and embraced me. I could feel the very warmth of His bosom, against which I rested; and as He took me in His arms with all the tenderness of a father or an elder brother, He shook His head and said: "No, my son, your work is not finished; you must remain and perform your mission. These (pointing to His Apostles) have finished their work; they can go with Me; but you must remain."

I was so anxious, I felt such a love for Him and a desire to be with Him, that I clung to Him and pleaded with Him to let me go. But He continued to shake His head. I then said: "Promise me that when I have finished my life I will come to You at last."

Again he gazed with tenderness and compassion, and uttered these words in tones which pierced my very soul, "That, my son, will depend entirely upon yourself."<sup>57</sup>

**Phase 2 (1940s–1970s).** Phase 2 is characterized by more clear and frequent identification of Gethsemane as a location of Jesus's vicarious suffering for sin, differing from the lack of specificity regarding Gethsemane during phase 1. As such teachings became more common, the number of explicit mentions of Gethsemane increased dramatically. From 1940 to 1979, Church leaders referenced Gethsemane 118 times, averaging 30 times per decade, which represents a 750 percent increase from phase 1.<sup>58</sup>

In 1945, Elder Marion G. Romney (then an Assistant to the Twelve) provided a clear example of the emphasis on Gethsemane, stating, "Jesus held true to this course, even through Gethsemane where he bore the sins of all men through suffering which caused him 'to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit.' As he came to the climax of that suffering, he cried out in agony: . . . Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will,

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57. Orson F. Whitney, "Bishop O. F. Whitney," *Millennial Star* 51, no. 47 (November 25, 1889): 739–40.

58. We do note that some of this increase came from incidental references to Gethsemane rather than from references that had a strong theological focus.

but thine, be done.”<sup>59</sup> Elder Romney specifies the nature and purpose of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane as an expiation for our sins. He also places the “climax of that suffering” in the garden and does not mention the crucifixion in this address. Finally, his words identify the cup as the Savior’s current suffering in the garden, rather than the cross. Though not without exception, this characterization of Gethsemane became the dominant trend throughout phase 2.

In some instances, this new focus on the garden rose to the level of emphasizing the role of Gethsemane above Calvary. So far as can be determined, in 1944, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, then of the Quorum of the Twelve, became the first Church leader to explicitly attribute greater salvific importance to Gethsemane than to the cross.<sup>60</sup> He stated,

I think it is understood by many that the great suffering of Jesus Christ came through the driving of nails in His hands and in His feet, and in being suspended upon a cross, until death mercifully released Him. That is not the case. As excruciating, as severe as was that punishment, coming from the driving of nails through His hands and through His feet, and being suspended, until relieved by death, yet still greater was the suffering which He endured in carrying the burden of the sins of the world—my sins, and your sins, and the sins of every living creature. This suffering came before He ever got to the cross, and it caused the blood to come forth from the pores of his body, so great was that anguish of His soul, the torment of His spirit that He was called upon to undergo.<sup>61</sup>

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59. Marion G. Romney, in *The One Hundred Fifteenth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1945), 88.

60. Although James E. Talmage did not directly compare the salvific value of Gethsemane and Calvary, he did write that what Christ experienced in Gethsemane would not be exceeded on the cross: “From the terrible conflict in Gethsemane, Christ emerged a victor. . . . The further tragedy of the night, and the cruel inflictions that awaited Him on the morrow, to culminate in the frightful tortures of the cross, could not exceed the bitter anguish through which He had successfully passed.” Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 614.

61. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *The One Hundred Fourteenth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1944), 50. Elder Smith made similar comments in *The One Hundred Eighteenth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1947), 147–48; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:130;

In 1953, Elder Marion G. Romney also clearly stated that Gethsemane was the location of the greatest suffering. He taught, “Jesus then went into the Garden of Gethsemane. There he suffered most. He suffered greatly on the cross, of course, but other men had died by crucifixion; in fact, a man hung on either side of him as he died on the cross.”<sup>62</sup> Elder Romney made two other explicit comparisons in 1982 between Gethsemane and Christ’s Crucifixion, both emphasizing Gethsemane. Thus, across our entire corpus we found five statements made in general conference that regard Gethsemane as the place where Christ’s greatest suffering occurred. Although Elder Bruce R. McConkie did not make such statements in general conference, some of his writings reflected this sentiment.<sup>63</sup> In each of these statements, the individuals appear to perhaps discount the possibility that Christ suffered pains beyond the physical torture of crucifixion while on the cross, a position not congruent with statements from other Church leaders.

In at least six instances between 1940 and 1983, a speaker’s focus on Gethsemane was reflected implicitly by the omission of the cross when discussing salvific events or by stating that Christ suffered his “greatest anguish” in Gethsemane without explicitly comparing it to the cross. For example, note the emphasis on Gethsemane and the omission of the Savior’s Crucifixion in the following 1982 statement by Elder Ezra Taft Benson: “A testimony of Jesus is to know that the laws which He prescribed as His doctrine are true and then to abide by these laws and ordinances. To possess a testimony of Jesus is to know that He voluntarily took upon Himself the sins of all mankind in the Garden of Gethsemane, which caused Him to suffer in both body and spirit and

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and Joseph Fielding Smith, *Seek Ye Earnestly* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 119–21.

62. Marion G. Romney, in *The One Hundred Twenty-Fourth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1953), 35.

63. For example, Elder McConkie wrote, “It is to the Cross of Christ that most Christians look when centering their attention upon the infinite and eternal atonement. And certainly the sacrifice of our Lord was completed when he was lifted up by men. . . . But in reality the pain and suffering, the triumph and grandeur, of the atonement took place primarily in Gethsemane.” Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 1:774; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 4:127–28.

to bleed from every pore. All this He did so that we would not have to suffer if we would repent. To possess a testimony of Jesus is to know that He came forth triumphantly from the grave with a physical, resurrected body.”<sup>64</sup>

Although this emphasis on Gethsemane over the cross is evident during phase 2 and continues into the first few years of phase 3, some speakers had different insights regarding the relative importance of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. For example, in 1960, President J. Reuben Clark identified the cup as the upcoming crucifixion, as was prevalent in phase 1: “Have you ever been struck with the thought that here [in Gethsemane] was the Son praying to the Father to let the cup of crucifixion pass by?”<sup>65</sup> Even those who seemed to at times downplay Christ’s suffering for our sins on the cross did not always do so. In 1948, Elder Marion G. Romney taught, “I believe that in Gethsemane *and on the cross* Jesus suffered for the sins of all men”;<sup>66</sup> President Joseph Fielding Smith said in 1967, “He had power to lay down his life, and *on the cross he paid the price for our sins* and at the same time for Adam’s transgression”;<sup>67</sup> and Elder Bruce R. McConkie emphasized the Crucifixion and omitted any reference to Gethsemane when he wrote, “A testimony in our day consists of three things: . . . the knowledge that Jesus is the Lord, that he is the Son of the living God who was *crucified for the sins of the world*; . . . the fact that Joseph Smith was a prophet . . . ;

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64. Ezra Taft Benson, “Valiant in the Testimony of Jesus,” *Ensign* 12, no. 5 (May 1982): 62.

65. J. Reuben Clark, in *The One Hundred Thirtieth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1960), 90. In 1963, Elder Henry D. Taylor similarly attributed Jesus’s discomfort in the garden to the contemplation of future events. “The Savior had his dark and dreary days, and in Gethsemane’s garden he suffered untold agony as he contemplated the events that confronted him while fulfilling his exalted mission.” Henry D. Taylor, in *The One Hundred Thirty-Third Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1963), 121.

66. Marion G. Romney, in *The One Hundred Eighteenth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 77, emphasis added.

67. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *The One Hundred Thirty-Seventh Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1967), 122, emphasis added.

and . . . knowing that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true and living Church.”<sup>68</sup>

**Phase 3 (1980s–2010s).** Phase 3 is characterized by clear and frequent teachings about Gethsemane being a location where Christ suffered our sins and pains. Another hallmark of this phase is including statements about the cross when speaking of Gethsemane in connection with Christ’s Atonement. During this period, total mentions of Gethsemane continued to rise, averaging sixty-one per decade, a 200 percent increase from phase 2 and an astonishing 1,500 percent increase from phase 1.

Although teachings acknowledging the unity of Gethsemane and the cross in the Atonement had occurred nine times prior to 1980, the union of the two events became much more prominent in the early 1980s. In 1982, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, “In the garden and on the cross [Christ] paid the ransom and finished his atoning work.”<sup>69</sup> He made similar statements in 1984<sup>70</sup> and 1985.<sup>71</sup>

In the 1982 and 1985 talks just cited, Elder McConkie introduced a unique principle related to Gethsemane and Christ’s Crucifixion that, so far as we can ascertain, had not explicitly been stated before in general conference. In 1982, Elder McConkie stated that “the sufferings of Gethsemane returned [on the cross].”<sup>72</sup> In 1985, he said, “While [Christ] was hanging on the cross for another three hours, . . . all the infinite agonies and merciless pains of Gethsemane recurred.”<sup>73</sup> These statements echo a cautious suggestion from Elder James E. Talmadge in *Jesus the Christ*: “It seems, that in addition to the fearful suffering incident to crucifixion, the agony of Gethsemane had recurred, intensified beyond

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68. Bruce R. McConkie, “Gaining a Testimony of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* 10, no. 12 (December 1980): 15, emphasis added.

69. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Seven Christs,” *Ensign* 12, no. 11 (November 1982): 33. In the early years of phase 3, there were varying perspectives about where Christ suffered for our sins. In 1982, President Marion G. Romney taught that Jesus suffered the pains of all men “principally in Gethsemane,” which, while acknowledging that a portion of Jesus’s vicarious suffering may have occurred on the cross, still emphasized Gethsemane. Marion G. Romney, “The Resurrection of Jesus,” *Ensign* 12, no. 5 (May 1982): 6.

70. Bruce R. McConkie, “Patterns of Prayer” *Ensign* 14, no. 5 (May 1984): 33.

71. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” *Ensign* 15, no. 5 (May 1985): 9.

72. McConkie, “Seven Christs,” 33.

73. McConkie, “Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” 10.

human power to endure.”<sup>74</sup> Where Elder Talmage was tentative, Elder McConkie was direct.<sup>75</sup>

So far as we can determine, nobody since Elder McConkie has unambiguously stated in general conference that the specific agonies of Gethsemane returned on the cross. However, statements have been made that support this idea. For example, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught, “Jesus Christ suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane more than you can comprehend. Willingly and lovingly, He took upon Himself not only our sins but the pains, sicknesses, and sufferings of all mankind. *He suffered similarly on the cross.*”<sup>76</sup> President Russell M. Nelson declared, “In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Savior took upon Himself . . . all of the anguish and suffering ever experienced. . . . Under the weight of that excruciating burden, He bled from every pore. *All of this suffering was intensified as He was cruelly crucified on Calvary’s cross.*”<sup>77</sup>

It is possible that Elder McConkie’s statements regarding Gethsemane’s suffering reoccurring on the cross were part of the reason for the dramatic increase, beginning in the 1980s, in the number of general conference addresses that connect Christ’s Crucifixion to Gethsemane. As illustrated in figure 3, instances in which Gethsemane and the Savior’s Crucifixion are jointly linked as elements of the Atonement of Jesus Christ has dramatically increased in the past forty years, with a notable increase in the 2010s.

This increase is not simply a byproduct of increased overall mentions of Gethsemane during general conference, but rather it represents a shift in the way that the Savior’s Atonement was discussed. In the 1970s, for example, there were ten references in our corpus to Jesus’s

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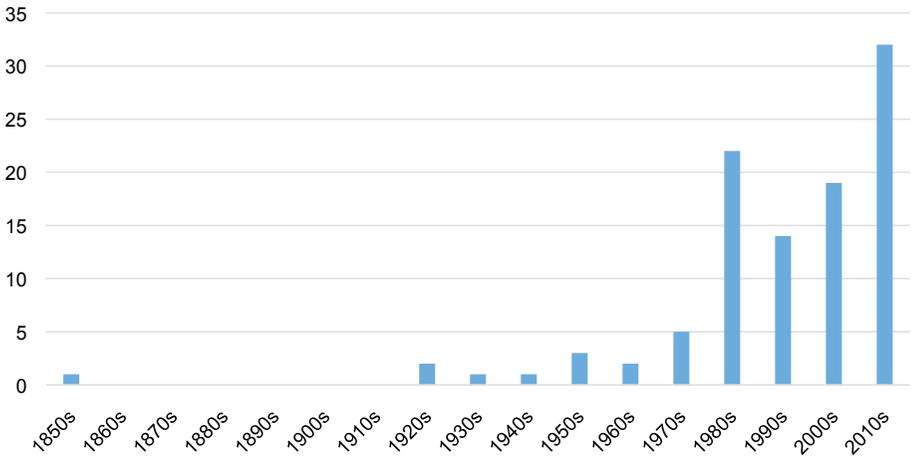
74. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915), 661, emphasis added.

75. It is interesting to note that Elder McConkie in previous writings *had* been more tentative, writing, “If we interpret the holy word aright, . . . all of the anguish, all of the sorrow, and all of the suffering of Gethsemane recurred during the final three hours on the cross, the hours when darkness covered the land. Truly there was no sorrow like unto his sorrow, and no anguish and pain like unto that which bore in with such intensity upon him.” McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 4:232 n. 22, emphasis added.

76. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Growing into the Priesthood,” *Ensign* 29, no. 11 (November 1999): 40, emphasis added.

77. Russell M. Nelson, “The Correct Name of the Church,” *Ensign* 48, no. 11 (November 2018): 88, emphasis added.

**FIGURE 3.** Gethsemane and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ Jointly Linked in the Savior’s Atonement, by Decade



suffering for our sins or pains in Gethsemane. Nine of these attribute Christ’s experiences to Gethsemane alone, while one also mentions the cross. Compare that nine-to-one ratio with that of the 1980s. Seventeen references in the 1980s mentions Gethsemane alone in terms of redemptive agony, while another seventeen refer to the cross and Gethsemane together under those same terms, resulting in a one-to-one ratio. In the 2010s, twelve references mention Gethsemane’s role in the Atonement of Jesus Christ without including Calvary, while twenty-three speak to the unity of the two locations, nearly a one-to-two ratio.

Speakers during these later years used phrases such as “in Gethsemane and on the cross” or “at Gethsemane and Calvary” to describe the Savior’s Atonement.<sup>78</sup> For example, Sister Jean B. Bingham, Relief

78. Despite most general conference speakers referring to Gethsemane and Calvary in tandem as equals during phase 3, occasional references may implicitly put Gethsemane above the cross in importance, although those implications might be unintended. For example, Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated, “Our willingness to do so, here and now, is consistent with Christ’s kneeling alone, there and then, in Gethsemane. In the final atoning process, ‘none were with [Him]’ (D&C 133:50; see also Matt. 26:38–45).” Neal A. Maxwell, “The Seventh Commandment: A Shield,” *Ensign* 31, no. 11 (November 2001): 80. This talk focused on chastity, and it does not appear that Elder Maxwell

Society General President, declared, “In the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary, He felt all of our pains, afflictions, temptations, sicknesses, and infirmities.”<sup>79</sup> President Henry B. Eyring similarly stated, “Jesus Christ bore in Gethsemane and on the cross the weight of all our sins. He experienced all the sorrows, the pains, and the effects of our sins so that He could comfort and strengthen us through every test in life.”<sup>80</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The immutable and eternal Atonement of Jesus Christ stands as the greatest and most transcendent act in human history. Through the events of Gethsemane, Calvary, and his Resurrection, Jesus Christ suffered our pains and sins, and conquered death for all humanity. It is precisely due to the unfathomable significance of this great event that Latter-day Saints strive to understand as much as possible about each component of the Savior’s great sacrifice.

Throughout the history of the Church, discourse surrounding the Savior’s Atonement has shifted, as different aspects of the Atonement have been variously emphasized. In recent years, Gethsemane’s role within the plan of happiness has grown from almost an afterthought in the discourse of early Church leaders into a doctrinal focal point. These teachings help us understand Christ’s submission to his Father and his suffering for our sins and experiencing our pains. The increased focus on Gethsemane over the past forty years is a manifestation of a growing emphasis by Church leaders on the centrality of the Savior’s Atonement.

While the collective teachings of Church leaders emphasize the importance of Gethsemane, they do not justify polemics that the Church elevates Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane above the suffering experienced on the cross. It is true that a handful of statements by Church leaders explicitly compared the Savior’s sufferings in Gethsemane and on the cross and identified Gethsemane as the more important location in terms of redemption. However, as demonstrated in this article, the

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was trying to make a theological statement about the relative importance of Gethsemane and Christ’s Crucifixion. Such is typically the case with similar statements during phase 3.

79. Jean B. Bingham, “That Your Joy Might Be Full,” *Ensign* 47, no. 11 (November 2017): 86.

80. Henry B. Eyring, “Try, Try, Try,” *Ensign* 48, no. 11 (November 2018): 90.

three individuals who explicitly taught the supremacy of Gethsemane (Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith and Marion G. Romney and Elder Bruce R. McConkie) also focused on the importance of the Crucifixion and the unity of Gethsemane and the cross in our salvation. Literally hundreds of statements by Church leaders emphasize that Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross.<sup>81</sup>

Why was there a brief period in which Gethsemane appeared to be given a preeminent place in discussions of the Savior's atoning sacrifice? These words from Robert L. Millet may explain why some have emphasized Gethsemane relative to Calvary: "It is inevitable that over time individuals and whole faith communities begin to define themselves, at least to some extent, over against what others believe and thus to emphasize most strongly those doctrinal distinctives that make them who they are. And so it was with the hours of atonement. Because we had come to know, through the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, concerning the purposes for the Master's pains in the Garden, we seem to have begun to place a greater stress upon Gethsemane than upon the cross."<sup>82</sup>

Although the Church emphasizes Gethsemane differently than most of Christianity does, a holistic examination of the teachings of Church leaders on Gethsemane does not support the notion that Church leaders de-emphasize the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In fact, recent decades have shown an increasing tendency for Church leaders to speak of Christ's Crucifixion when discussing Gethsemane.

Speaking of our quest to understand the Savior's sacrifice, President Boyd K. Packer taught, "We do not know exactly how the Lord accomplished the Atonement. But we do know that the cruel torture of crucifixion was only part of the horrific pain which began in Gethsemane—that sacred site of suffering—and was completed on Golgotha."<sup>83</sup> Just as President Packer suggests, though we do not understand everything, it is clear from the teachings of modern Church leaders that the events that transpired in the Garden of Gethsemane were a vital part of the Savior's Atonement.

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81. See Hilton, Hyde, and Trussel, "Use of *Crucifixion* by Church Leaders."

82. Robert L. Millet, *What Happened to the Cross? Distinctive LDS Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 107.

83. Boyd K. Packer, "The Atonement," *Ensign* 32, no. 11 (November 2012): 77.

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