

The Joseph Smith Translation and Ancient Texts of the Bible

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THE QUESTION THIS ESSAY ATTEMPTS to answer is whether the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST) represents in any way a restoration of text that originally existed in ancient manuscripts but was later altered or removed by scribal carelessness or malice. It is often assumed in Church classrooms, periodicals, and manuals that the JST does in fact represent the original or ancient state of a biblical passage.¹ Many a Sunday School discussion over a problematic biblical passage ends with reference to the JST version and the assertion that it represents the original wording. Of course, a perfect restoration would be in the language of the original, but the idea is that the JST gives the English sense of the original Greek or Hebrew texts of the Bible. Many JST passages demonstrate commendable sensitivity to problems inherent in the English of the King James Version (KJV). I think that the JST has considerable worth and merits careful study from the perspectives of both faith and scholarship. However, this essay deals with a narrower question: Does the JST restore the original text of parts of the Bible?

Robert J. Matthews, the Church's foremost authority on the JST, believes that the JST restores the intent of the original to some extent, although he does not insist that every JST reading is a restoration of ancient textual material (Matthews 1975a, 234–37; 1975b; 1980; 1982; 1983; 1969; 1976, 24).

Some scholars have a different understanding of the JST. For them, the JST does not presuppose a different Hebrew or Greek text underlying a given biblical passage; rather, it is an inspired commentary on what the passage means to us in a more modern context. As an illustration of how this approach differs from the view that the JST is a textual restoration, consider the KJV of Genesis 6:6: "And it repenteth the Lord that he had made man on the

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¹ The rationale for this view is largely based on the eighth Article of Faith, 1 Nephi 13:28, and J. F. Smith 1976, 327; see also Ehat and Cook 1980, 256.

earth, and it grieved him at his heart." The JST of this verse (Moses 8:25) reads: "And it *repented Noah, and his heart was pained* that the Lord had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at *the heart*." According to the restorationist view, the original text read in Hebrew as does Moses 8:25 but was at some point altered by scribes for some unknown reason to read as it does in the KJV. The JST restored the text to its original state as translated into English.

If we view the JST as commentary, we need not postulate two forms of the Hebrew text. Rather, the JST reflects Joseph Smith's concern about the theological implications of having the Lord "repent." Repentance implies sin, and the Lord does not sin. The point of the JST change, then, is not that Noah repented, but that the Lord did not. In a discourse by the Prophet on 15 October 1843, he said: "As it [the Bible] read it repented the Lord that he had made man. and also God is not a man that he should repent. —which I do not believe. —but it repented Noah that God made man. —this I believe. & then the other quotation stands fair" (Ehat and Cook 1980, 256). Here we learn that Joseph Smith was harmonizing Genesis 6:6, which he evidently regarded as problematic, with Numbers 23:19, which states that God need not repent. In several other verses where the Old Testament says that the Lord "repented," the JST reworks the passage to avoid this wording (see, for example, Exod. 32:12, 14; 1 Sam. 15:11; 1 Chron. 21:15; Jer. 26:19; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:10). If we see these changes in the JST as a pattern reflecting Joseph Smith's belief that the Lord does not repent, then we have an accurate interpretation of the text, for the verb *nicham* means simply to grieve, while *repent* is not used in modern Bible translations of this verse. The Hebrew text merely says that "the Lord grieved," not that Noah repented. In short, the JST phrasing is apparently Joseph Smith's way of getting his theological point across. This process can be given many different names: inspired commentary, interpretation, paraphrase, midrash, targumization, or even translation (Anderson 1976, 50; Nibley 1976, 49; Stendahl 1978, 142; Hutchinson 1982; 110).

There are three fundamental difficulties with the restorationist point of view: (1) Is it possible to restore ancient texts by inspiration? Since this is a metaphysical inquiry beyond the scope of this essay, I shall simply assume that such a process is possible. (2) No parallel ancient variants exist for the majority of JST readings. This lack of textual support suggests that the JST does not restore actual textual material. Some scriptural exegetes have hypothesized deliberate and widespread textual corruptions early enough to be incorporated into biblical manuscripts which have survived (Nyman and Millet 1985, 44–45). Since the original autographs are irrecoverable, this assertion cannot be completely disproven, but it has been weakened with the discovery of Hebrew texts from the Old Testament as early as the second century B.C. which support the basic integrity of the later manuscripts. Some New Testament manuscripts date to the fourth, third, and even second centuries A.D., leaving an increasingly small frame of time in which the hypothesized textual corruptions could have occurred.

(3) These supposed textual corruptions are inconsistent with what we know of scribal tendencies. For instance, the JST is almost entirely comprised of additions to the KJV. Thus, the corrupting scribes would have had to make massive deletions in the earliest copies of Bible manuscripts. Indeed, Matthews asserts that deletions were the most common form of deliberate scribal errors and the JST's expansion of the KJV is consistent with what we would expect in a textual restoration (1975a, 267). Unfortunately, Matthews's source for this claim is John William Burgon's 1896 book entitled *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896). "Traditional Text" here means the *textus receptus*, or "received text," the late-Byzantine form of text underlying the KJV (Matthews 1975a, 128–29).² Burgon was one of several scholars who wrote at the turn of the century in a last-ditch effort to refute the scholarship that had conclusively demonstrated the *textus receptus* to be the poorest form of the New Testament text available. In fact, the most common deliberate scribal corruptions were additions to the text, not deletions. Therefore, the tendency of the JST to expand the KJV text by adding material is the opposite of what we should expect in a textual restoration.

An analysis of extant Bible manuscripts shows that most JST changes have no ancient parallels with the exception of about a dozen JST passages. If any passages in the JST restore ancient textual material, then these would be by far the most likely candidates. With a single exception, it is unlikely that Joseph Smith learned of these variants from a modern source. Even if Joseph Smith had learned enough Greek to read the New Testament (which is doubtful, especially considering that the Prophet's limited Greek studies came after the bulk of the JST was completed), printed editions of the Greek New Testament in his day gave only the *textus receptus*. It was not a common practice to compare textual variants until the middle and late nineteenth century. Modern textual criticism and the discovery of the most important early texts came after Joseph Smith's death. The few contemporary scholarly works that compared variants were typically written in Latin and there is no evidence Joseph Smith had access to them. In the discussion which follows, references to "original" readings should be understood as readings on which scholarly consensus currently exists about the most probable state of the now-lost original manuscript. It is possible, of course, for such consensus to be mistaken; but those who work in the field of textual criticism do not lightly dismiss their probable accuracy.

What follows is an analysis of fifteen passages of the JST in which an ancient text offers a parallel not reflected in the KJV. It is possible that there are more, but I did not find them. As far as I know, only two of them have been discussed in print as having ancient textual support: the gospel titles, and Matthew 5:22. This analysis is based on the methods of textual criticism and

² Matthews was using this source as quoted in J. Reuben Clark (1950, 203–4). Clark relies heavily on Burgon (Clark 1979, 25). On the problems with Clark's attempted resurrection of Burgon's views, see Hutchinson 1980, 104.

presupposes that extant biblical manuscripts give us insight into the now-lost original text.³

The first passage is the titles of the gospels. In the KJV, they read "The Gospel According to . . ." The JST reads "The Testimony of. . ." As Matthews correctly observes, the KJV form of the titles dates to the second century A.D.; hence, he conjectures, the JST may be a restoration of ancient textual material (1975a, 242-43).

In their original form, however, the gospels probably did not bear titles at all,⁴ and there is a more likely explanation for the change. The form of the titles in Alexander Campbell's 1828 translation of the New Testament, *The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ, Commonly Styled the New Testament* (A. Campbell, J. McKnight, and P. Doddridge, trans., Bethany, Va.: Alexander Campbell, 1828) could be the source of the JST emendation. Campbell's titles are:

The Testimony of MATTHEW LEVI, The Apostle

The Testimony of JOHN MARK, The Evangelist

The Testimony of LUKE, The Evangelist

The Testimony of JOHN, The Apostle

As Matthews himself writes, "Campbell's Testament could not have escaped the attention of Joseph Smith when Rigdon, Pratt, and the others came into the Church in 1830" (Matthews 1975a, 10). In fact, Rigdon served as principal scribe for the JST.

Campbell draws a distinction between the two apostles, Matthew and John, and the evangelists, Mark and Luke. In his preface, he stresses:

Let it be supposed that Luke and John wrote with a design to supply certain omissions in Matthew, to make some improvement upon this testimony; how will such a supposition affect the character of Matthew as an Apostle, or the *Spirit* by which he wrote? The *Evangelists*, Mark and Luke, on this hypothesis, appear as correctors or improvers upon an *Apostle*!! (1828, xxv; italics in original)

The 1979 LDS edition of the Bible gives the change as "The Testimony of . . ." for all four gospels, as does the 1944 RLDS Inspired Version. However, the original manuscript of the JST, in possession of the RLDS Church, makes title changes in the books of Matthew and John only, that is, for the apostles (Matthews 1975a, 243 n. 6). Apparently, the RLDS and 1979 LDS editors assumed that the lack of a change in Mark and Luke was simply an oversight. It seems more probably a result of the influence of the Campbell translation, which stresses the special character of an apostle's mission.

³ General introductions to the principles of text criticism include Metzger (1968) and Würthwein (1979). Matthews (1975a, 111-15) uses the same basic principles in establishing the text of the JST itself. Briefly, textual criticism involves the weighting of variant readings based on factors such as date and geographical diversity, psychological factors affecting deliberate alterations, and mechanical copying errors of hand, eye, and ear.

⁴ For each passage discussed, the texts of the KJV and the JST are given in parallel columns. All verse citations are to the KJV. The textual evidence for the New Testament readings discussed in this article is from Nestle, Nestle, and Aland (1979) and Aland (1975). The Old Testament textual evidence is from Kittel and Kahle (1937).

The JST reading for the three passages which follow parallels what appears to be the original text from scholarly reconstruction. If such a thing as textual restoration by inspiration exists in the JST, then these seem to be the clearest examples.

KJV Matthew 5:22

But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

JST Matthew 5:24

But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of his judgment.

Ancient Variants

- (1) whosoever is angry with his brother
- (2) whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause

The JST omits the words “without a cause,” as does 3 Nephi 12:22. “Without a cause” is also absent from reading 1. It is fairly certain, despite the rather strong textual evidence for reading 2, that reading 1 is original, and that reading 2 was an early attempt by scribes to soften the rigor of this morally stark precept allowing no anger (Metzger 1975, 13). Therefore, the JST parallels the original text in this passage.

However, this parallel could be a coincidence caused by a problem with the wording of the KJV. The KJV uses the three words “without a cause” to render one Greek adverb, *eike*, which might better have been translated “rashly,” “thoughtlessly,” or “unjustly.” Joseph Smith could have been struck by the fact that there is always some cause when a person gets angry, even though it may not be a just cause. Thus, the JST may have deleted the words “without a cause” as being too broad.

This is one of very few examples of deletions in the JST. Since scribes tended to add material rather than delete it, extensive textual restorations in the JST should appear primarily as deletions rather than additions. Matthews notes this verse as a model for the restorationist argument (1975a, 251), but it is not characteristic of the JST.

Romans 7:6**KJV**

But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

JST

But now we are delivered from the law wherein we were held, being dead to the law, that we should serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

Ancient Variants

- (1) But now we are delivered from the law, being dead to that in which we were held
- (2) But now we are delivered from the law of death in which we were held
- (3) But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held

The JST parallels reading 1, which is clearly original, given its superior textual attestation. Reading 2, which represents the Western form of the

text, seems to simplify a construction in Greek that is somewhat obscure. There is no competent manuscript authority for reading 3, on which the KJV depends. This mistaken reading arose when Desiderius Erasmus, the sixteenth-century Dutch scholar, misunderstood a comment of John Chrysostom, the fourth-century patriarch of Constantinople (Tischendorf, verse cited). The JST clearly parallels the original text for this passage.

This reading of the JST could be an assimilation of verse 6 to KJV Romans 7:4: "Ye also are become dead to the law." Joseph Smith seems to have been concerned with the wording of KJV Romans 7:6 which suggests that the law was dead. In fact, the JST makes similar adjustments throughout Romans 7. For instance, the preceding verse, KJV Romans 7:5, reads: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." The JST alters this to read: "The motions of sins, which were not according to the law," apparently lest sin be thought to be sanctioned by the law.

Genesis 18:3

In this passage, Abraham entertains three visitors who announce the impending destruction of Sodom and the forthcoming birth of Isaac. Abraham asks them to remain for a meal in these words:

KJV

And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

JST

And said; My brethren, if now I have found favour in your sight, pass not away, I pray you, from thy servant.

Ancient Variants:

- (1) And said, My lords . . . your sight . . . I pray you . . . your servant
- (2) And said, My Lord . . . thy sight . . . I pray thee . . . thy servant

In Genesis 18, the relationship between the Lord (verse 1) and the three men (verse 2) is not clear. It may be that all three represent the Lord; thus, the plurality becomes a single person in verses 10 and 13. However, it seems more likely that the Lord was one of the men, and that the other two were angels attending him, a view suggested by verse 22 ("the men turned their faces from thence, . . . but Abraham stood yet before the Lord") and Genesis 19:1 ("two angels" visit Lot in Sodom), and it is not inconsistent with the single spokesman in verses 10 and 13.

The JST shifts the word "Lord" in verse 3 to "brother," but more importantly it shifts from the singular "Lord" to the plural "brethren." The Hebrew word *adonai* underlying "lord(s)" in verse 3 is definitely plural in form; is it plural or singular in meaning? Although this particular word literally means "my lords," it was regularly substituted in reading for the divine name of God (YHWH). The Masoretic scribes marked this specialized use of the plural form with a singular meaning by a slight difference in vocalization, and it so appears in the Masoretic Text of Genesis 18:3. Thus, the entire

verse is singular in its Hebrew construction. This is reading 2, followed in the KJV.

Reading 1 is a literal plural, “lords,” and probably represents the original reading. The literal plural is preserved in the Samaritan Pentateuch. This same literal plural is also found in Genesis 19:2, where Lot addresses the two angels as “my lords.” This usage was probably meant to parallel the expression in Genesis 18:3. Therefore, some modern translations of the Bible put Genesis 18:3 in the plural. The New English Bible (1970) has “sirs.” The singular of the Masoretic Text appears to have been caused by scribal assimilation to the word “Lord” (YHWH) in verse 1.

The JST parallels reading 1 by using the plural (“brethren”). In the KJV, the singular in verse 3 is inconsistent with the plural in the surrounding verses. But the JST harmonized the number in verse 3 to make it consistent with those verses.

The next two passages involve contradictions created in the ancient manuscripts because of special problems not apparent in the English of the KJV. The JST harmonizes these contradictions.

Daniel 5:25, 28

At Belshazzar’s feast, the hand of the Lord appears, writing on the wall. Daniel tells the King what was written and supplies the translation.

KJV

And this is the writing that was written,
MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN
. . . PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and
given to the Medes and Persians.

JST

And this is the writing that was written,
MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.
. . . UPHARSIN; Thy kingdom is divided,
and given to the Medes and Persians.

Ancient Variants

- (1) PERES . . . PERES
- (2) UPHARSIN . . . PERES
- (3) UPHARSIN . . . UPHARSIN

Determining the original reading for this particular passage has been a complex undertaking. Most scholars have favored reading 1 (Montgomery 1927, 262–65; Charles 1929). Presumably, scribes substituted *upharsin* (the plural of *peres* preceded by the conjunction “and”) in verse 25 to emphasize the word play between *peres* and “the Persians” (*upharas*) found in verse 28. This would account for reading 2, which the KJV follows.

Notwithstanding this conventional approach, the New English Bible has conjecturally emended the text to read *upharsin* in both verse 25 and verse 28 (reading 3). Apparently, its editors felt that *upharsin* was original in verse 28 and simplified by scribes to *peres* to emphasize the word play with the passive participle “divided” (*perisath*) in the same verse.

The JST’s change parallels that in the New English Bible. The triple word play between *peres* or *upharsin*, “divided,” and “Persians” does not come

across in English, so the JST is unconcerned with it. Whatever the original text may have been, Joseph Smith was apparently harmonizing the words of verses 25 and 28. It is unclear, however, whether the JST has harmonized them correctly.

2 Chronicles 22:2

KJV

Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem.

JST

Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem.

Ancient Variants

- (1) forty-two years old was Ahaziah
- (2) twenty years old was Ahaziah
- (3) twenty-two years old was Ahaziah

Reading 1, although it may be the original reading, is historically improbable. 2 Chronicles 21:20 states that Ahaziah's father died at the age of forty; Ahaziah could not have acceded to the throne at forty-two. Reading 3 does not appear to be based on any Hebrew manuscript; rather, a scribe seems to have harmonized this verse with 2 Kings 8:26, which gives Ahaziah's age as twenty-two. Another tradition, recorded in the major Septuagint manuscripts, gives Ahaziah's age at the time of his accession as twenty (reading 2). J. M. Meyers suggests that reading 1 is actually an effort to preserve both traditions — $22 + 20 = 42$ (1965, 125). Either twenty or twenty-two is more likely than forty-two, but it is impossible to know which is historically correct.

The JST parallels reading 3, but seems to make the change to harmonize with 2 Kings 8:26. If the JST were independently correcting 2 Chronicles, it would probably read "twenty and two" to match the original "forty and two." The JST reading may reflect the historically correct tradition, but it is unclear whether it restores the original text.

Within its earliest manuscripts, the Bible shows inconsistencies, incongruities, and contradictions. Although the scribes generally were faithful in copying their manuscripts, there was a tendency to harmonize contradictions and rectify perceived doctrinal difficulties. The eight passages which follow show Joseph Smith's similar concerns and his attempts to resolve historically perplexing problems. These changes, however, do not seem to restore the original text.⁵

⁵ For the sake of completeness, we note Colossians 2:2 here. The JST alters, "the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ" to "the mystery of God and of Christ, who is of God, even the Father." The original reading was "the mystery of God, Christ." Because of the obscurity of this reading, a host of ancient variants (including the one represented in the KJV) arose attempting to clarify what it means (Brown 1967, 13-14). The JST emendation has a certain superficial similarity to some of these variants but is actually concerned with the apparent reference to three persons: God, the Father, and Christ. A similar apparent reference to a plurality of gods is found in Revelation 1:6: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." There the JST solved the problem by dropping the word "and," so as to read "God his Father" (Matthews 1975a, 181-84). The

Proverbs 18:22

KJV

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing,
and obtaineth favour of the Lord.

JST

Whoso findeth a good wife hath obtained
favor of the Lord.

Ancient Variants

- (1) Whoso findeth a wife
- (2) Whoso findeth a good wife

Reading 1, which is reflected in the KJV, is considered to be the original. Reading 2 has “a good wife” by anticipation of the adjective “good.” This seems to be a common-sense reaction to the idea that finding just any wife is desirable. It is doubtful that a scribe would have deliberately deleted the adjective “good” modifying “wife” if it were original. However, we should note the possibility of mechanical omission due to the repetitions of “findeth” in the sentence.

The JST parallels reading 2, and seems to echo the concern of the scribes. *Thing* in the KJV is italicized, and Joseph Smith often crossed out italicized words in the Bible he used as an aid in producing the JST. Many JST emendations demonstrate a special concern with the italicized words in the KJV. A similar phenomenon occurs in the Book of Mormon version of Bible passages (Larson 1977, 11, n. 9). A reinforcing editorial by W. W. Phelps (*Evening and the Morning Star*, 1 [Jan. 1833]: 58 observes: “The book of Mormon, as a revelation from God, possesses some advantage over the old scripture: it has not been tinctured by the wisdom of man, with here and there an Italic word to supply deficiencies.” If we delete the italicized words in this passage, it is a short step from “findeth a wife findeth a good thing” to “findeth a good wife.”

Matthew 27:5

KJV

And he [Judas] cast down the pieces of
silver in the temple, and departed, and
went and hanged himself.

JST

And he cast down the pieces of silver in
the temple, and departed, and went
and hanged himself on a tree. And straightway
he fell down and his bowels gushed out,
and he died.

Luke preserves a conflicting tradition of the death of Judas in Acts 1:18: “Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.” Some scribes tried to harmonize these contradictory accounts by making both events

apparent reference to a plurality of Gods in these verses is the result of poor translating in the KJV; but Joseph Smith’s struggles with these verses, as well as with Exodus 22:28, while producing the JST no doubt provided fuel for the fire when he learned that the Hebrew word *elohim* was literally a plural. On 16 June 1844, the Prophet publicly reversed his emendations of Revelation 1:6, Exodus 22:28, and by implication Colossians 2:2, and declared that the doctrine of a plurality of gods was “all over the face of the Bible” (Ehat and Cook 1980, 378).

part of the narrative. However, these ancient variants are usually associated with Acts 1:18 rather than with Matthew 27:5:

- (1) and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.
- (2) and being swollen, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.
- (3) and being hanged, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

Reading 1 has overwhelming textual support and is widely considered to be the original. Reading 3 is found only in Latin texts. The Vulgate follows reading 3. Nevertheless, Jerome probably did not invent this reading, for the text of Acts that Augustine read in his dispute with Felix the Manichean contained a similar harmonization: "Therefore, he [Judas] took possession of a field he had acquired with the reward of his iniquity, and he bound himself around the neck [*et collum sibi alligavit*], and when he had fallen on his face he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out."⁶ A number of ancient authors and commentators made similar harmonizing efforts (Harris 1900).

The JST parallels reading 3 and the harmonizing tradition it represents. There are a limited number of ways of dealing with these two accounts. One would be to say that Matthew is correct and Luke is not; the other would be to say that Luke is correct and Matthew is not. But neither of these options is palatable to the harmonist, since they both suggest an error. The logical alternative is to say that both are right, and put them in a temporal sequence: Judas hanged himself, and then (somehow) fell. The JST parallels this ancient harmonizing tradition, not the original text.

Luther, following the Vulgate, inserts the phrase *und sich erhängt* ("and he hanged himself") into his rendering of Acts 1:18. Joseph Smith, who was studying German and reading Luther's German translation of the New Testament in the spring of 1844, stated in the King Follett Discourse, 7 April 1844: "I have been readg. the Germ: I find it to be the most correct that I found & it corresponds the nearest to the revns. [revelations] that I have given the last 16 years" (Ehat and Cook 1980, 351). Luther was not a source for the JST. Joseph Smith's German studies came too late, and he would have emended Acts rather than Matthew had he been relying on Luther. But it is very possible that the JST of Matthew 27:5 is one of the revelations Joseph Smith was thinking of.

Scholarly attempts to harmonize these accounts were abandoned as early as 1879 (Meyer 2:247); today scholars generally regard both traditions as irreconcilable and unhistorical. Matthew's account was probably fashioned on the hanging suicide of Achitophel, representing the classic example of a traitor in Jewish tradition (2 Sam. 17:23). Jesus himself had evidently applied

⁶ The text is from Migne (PL 42:522). Based on this passage, Albert C. Clark (1933) included the phrase in his critical edition of Acts, translated back into Greek as *kai ton trachelon katedesen autou*.

Psalms 41:9 to Judas (John 18:18), which had long been regarded by the rabbis as a reference to Achitophel (Dupont 1961). If either account were authentic, it would be Luke's account in Acts, not Matthew's, yet even this tradition appears to represent the typical death of the sinner, such as that described in Wisdom 4:18–19, where sinners are described as dying prostrate (*preneis*). Interestingly, Heber C. Kimball adapted Acts 1:18 to represent a typical sinner's death in early Mormon theology:

It is said in the Bible that his bowels gushed out; but they actually kicked him until his bowels came out. "I will suffer my bowels to be taken out before I will forfeit the covenant I have made with Him and my brethren." Do you understand me? Judas was like salt that had lost its saving principles — good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. It is just so with you men and women, if you do not honour your callings and cultivate the principles you have received. It is so with you, ye Elders of Israel, when you forfeit your covenants (JD 6:125–26).

Mark 1:8

KJV

I indeed have baptized you with water; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

JST

I indeed have baptized you with water; but he shall not only baptize you with water, but with fire, and the Holy Ghost.

Ancient Variants

- (1) but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost
- (2) but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire

Most scholars agree that reading 1, which is reflected in the KJV, is probably original, given the wide diversity of early witnesses that support it. A few late manuscripts support reading 2. The addition of the words "and with fire" simply incorporates the parallel accounts in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, both of which say, "with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Had these words been in the original, it seems unlikely that a scribe would have deliberately deleted them. It is possible, though not likely, in my opinion, that the omission resulted from periblepsis, or the scribe's skipping words. Since verse 9 begins with "and" (*kai*), the word "fire" (*pyri*) would have been immediately preceded and followed by the word "and" (KAIPYRIKAI), so that his eye could have slipped from the first to the second "and."

The JST parallels reading 2 by adding the words "with fire." This wording is apparently a simple assimilation to the better-known version. Whatever John the Baptist may have historically said, the words "and with fire" did not originally stand in the text of Mark.

Furthermore, the JST inverts the order of "Holy Ghost" and "fire," probably because the JST is primarily concerned with a separate question: did Jesus physically perform water baptisms? John 3:22 says that he did; KJV John 4:2 says "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples." The JST harmonizes this contradiction with "though he himself baptized not so many as his disciples." Thus the assimilation in the JST of Mark 1:8 to the more popular wording of Matthew and Luke seems incidental to this concern.

Luke 1:1-3

This passage opens Luke's gospel.

KJV

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee. . . .

JST

As I am a messenger of Jesus Christ, and knowing that many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee. . . .

Ancient Variants

- (1) It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding
- (2) It seemed good both to me and to the Holy Ghost, having had perfect understanding

The tone of Luke's preface is more like a history than a gospel. He explains what his sources are rather than claiming inspiration in writing this history. Reading 2, found in a few Latin witnesses, tries to cure this perceived defect by borrowing the words "and to the Holy Ghost" from Acts 15:28. The JST resolves the same problem in a different way, by having Luke assert his divine authority. Reading 1, which is reflected in the KJV, is actually the original text.

Luke 11:4**KJV**

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

JST

And let us not be led unto [sic] temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom and power. Amen.

Ancient Variants

- (1) lead us not into temptation
- (2) let us not be led into temptation

Scholars consider reading 1 to be almost certainly original. But if these words are read too literally, they suggest that God deliberately draws people into temptation, a theologically unsettling idea. Therefore, Marcion in his version of Luke put the phrase into a passive construction (reading 2) (Metzger 1975, 156). This reading was preserved by several Church Fathers. For instance, Augustine says: "Many when praying speak as follows: 'Let us not be led into temptation'" (PL 34:1282). Jerome offers: "Do not lead us into temptation that we cannot bear" (PL 25:485).

The JST parallels reading 2, resolving this doctrinal difficulty in much the same way as Marcion: "and let us not be led unto temptation." In the Matthew 6:13 version of the Lord's Prayer, the JST reads: "And suffer us not to be led into temptation." Joseph Smith later suggested still another solution: "Leave us not in temptation" (Stevenson 1974, 87).

Assuming that either Matthew or Jesus meant that the Father compels people into temptation creates theological contradictions that so conflict with other portions of the scriptures as to make such a reading highly improbable. The verb “lead” was used in a figurative, weakened sense of an unintentional action, as opposed to an absolute imposition of divine will (Hutchinson 1980, 109). Indeed, since the doctrinal problem was unintended in the original, it may be advisable to translate the phrase using a passive construction (Reiling and Swellengrebel 1971, 430). There is no question in this passage that the JST is a correct interpretation or “translation” of reading 1; but reading 2 is not a restoration of the original Greek text, even though both it and the JST may be satisfactory paraphrases.

The phrase “but deliver us from evil,” which ends the verse in the KJV, is absent from a number of excellent witnesses. This phrase seems to have been added to make it match the prevailing form of the prayer in Matthew 6:13. Interestingly, the JST makes a further accommodation to Matthew 6:13 which concludes the prayer with “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen.” Scholars agree that this doxology, as it is called, was not an original part of the text but was appended to the end of the prayer in a variety of forms for liturgical purposes. It is entirely absent in several early and widespread texts. The JST omits “and the glory for ever.” Some ancient texts omit “kingdom,” others “power,” while some add “and ever,” and a few late manuscripts add a reference to the trinity. The JST form of the doxology generally resembles these ancient non-original variants. Joseph Smith may have freely reproduced the expression because it was part of a well-known prayer.

Luke 11:13

KJV

If ye then, being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

JST

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good gifts, through the Holy Spirit, to them who ask him.

Ancient Variants

- (1) how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit
- (2) how much more shall your heavenly Father give a good spirit
- (3) how much more shall your heavenly Father give a good gift
- (4) how much more shall your heavenly Father give good gifts
- (5) how much more shall your heavenly Father give the good gift of the holy spirit
- (6) how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things

Reading 1, which has overwhelming textual support, is reflected in the KJV and is almost certainly the original form of the text. Readings 2 through 6 were shaped by three influences. The first is assimilation to the first half of the verse. Jesus argues that since an earthly father gives his children good gifts,

and since the heavenly Father is greater than an earthly father, it is even more certain that He will give His children good gifts. We naturally expect the object of the verb "give" in the second part of the argument to repeat the object of the verb "give" in the first part; namely, "good gifts." The fact that it does not caused a number of scribes to assimilate to the wording in the first half of the verse. Second, reading 6 directly assimilates to Matthew 7:11, which reads "good things." Third is a phenomenon known as conflation. A scribe faced with two different readings would often have the text include both lest something sacred be lost, thus the conflations in readings 2 and 5.

The JST also appears to assimilate to the first half of the verse, since it preserves the precise wording found in the first part of the verse in the KJV. Also, rather than substituting its emendation for "the Holy Spirit," the JST conflates the two readings, somewhat like reading 5. This assimilation and conflation closely parallel the ancient nonoriginal textual variants.

John 1:12-13

KJV

But as many received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

JST

But as many received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; only to them who believe on his name.

He was born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Ancient Variants

- (1) Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God
- (2) They were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God
- (3) Who was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God
- (4) He was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The overwhelming weight of the Greek manuscript evidence favors reading 1, which is followed in the KJV. Reading 2 omits the relative, and readings 3 and 4 shift into the singular, with and without the relative. Readings 3 and 4 come from a few Latin Fathers and do not appear in Greek.

Given the meager textual evidence, it is interesting that an impressive array of scholars, following the lead of A. Resch (1896, 57; Schmid 1957) have defended the singular. In fact, Friedrich Blass (1969, 234-37) preferred not only the singular but the singular without a relative (reading 4).⁷ The singular was also adopted in the Jerusalem Bible (1966).

⁷ This reading is attested by Tertullian, who went so far as to accuse the Valentinians of deliberately altering the text (Blass 1969, 234-37). Blass argued (1) that the singular was original and the plural was due to assimilation to "the sons of God" in verse 12 and (2) that the relative was suspect due to John's tendency to omit it. A more attractive argument was

Aside from the weight of the manuscript evidence, reading 1 is supported by the fact that it is consistent with Johannine teaching. According to John 3:3, "Except a man be begotten from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁸ This concept in the gospel is stated more boldly in the Johannine epistles: "Whosoever is begotten of God doth not commit sin; for his seed [*sperma*] remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God" (1 John 3:9).

The JST parallels reading 3 generally and reading 4 in particular. Both of these ancient variants and the JST can best be accounted for by (1) a desire to have John refer explicitly to the virginal conception of Jesus and (2) assimilation to the singular at the end of verse 12 in "his name," which immediately precedes the relative.

John 10:8

KJV

All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

JST

All that ever came before me who testified not of me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them.

Ancient Variants

(1) All that ever came before me

(2) All that ever came

(3) Whoever came before me

When Jesus told the parable of the sheepfold, his hearers did not understand it (John 10:6). Jesus then identified himself as both the door and the good shepherd, but the only clarification he offered for the thieves and robbers was that they were "all that ever came before me," which reads very much like a blanket condemnation of the Old Testament prophets. Indeed, Valentinus understood it in just this sense (Hippolytus, in PG, 16.3:3247). The omission of "before me" in reading 2 and "all" in reading 3 appear to be scribal attempts to limit the extent of Jesus' criticism. Similarly, the JST seems to have added the clause "who testified not of me" to exempt the prophets and the righteous.

offered by Burney (1922, 34–35) who asserts that the singular becomes a much more plausible reading if we assume an Aramaic original underlying John. Unlike the Greek relative, the Aramaic relative does not vary in form depending on whether the antecedent is singular or plural. Therefore, in the Aramaic the verb is the only difference between the singular and plural. Since the last letter of the Aramaic verb (if it were plural) would be *u*, and since the next verse begins with the same letter, Burney suggests that the final letter of the plural was not original but arose through dittography (i.e., an accidental doubling of the first letter of verse 14). Although this is an ingenious conjecture, Burney's premise that an Aramaic original lies underneath John's Greek has been rejected by later scholars. See Fitzmyer, 1979, 1–27 and Maloney 1981, 12–13. Anthony Hutchinson's dissertation at Catholic University of America (in progress) deals with semitic interference in John and substantiates Maloney's conclusions.

⁸ I have altered the KJV of these passages to reflect the fact that the passive of the verb *gennao*, when used with a male agent, means "to be begotten," not "to be born." See also 1 John 5:1.

Revelation 2:22

KJV

Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

JST

Behold, I will cast her into hell, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

Ancient Variants

- (1) I will cast her into a bed
- (2) I will cast her into prison
- (3) I will cast her into a furnace
- (4) I will cast her into illness
- (5) I will cast her into sorrow

This verse details the punishment to be given to Jezebel, the false prophetess. To be cast into a bed does not appear to be much of a punishment, and so the JST and readings 2 through 5 substitute a worse fate.

Reading 1, however, has scholarly support as original on the basis of the earliest manuscripts. According to R. H. Charles, the bed is a bed of illness, and the Greek simply represents a Hebrew idiom to that effect (1920, 1:71).

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the majority of JST changes lack ancient textual support. Although we cannot say with complete assurance what stood in the original text, manuscript discoveries have made the argument that there could have been massive early deletions from the text untenable, at least for the New Testament. We have also examined the few passages that parallel ancient variants; if inspired textual restoration exists in the JST, these would be the most likely examples. A few of these JST emendations parallel the original text, although these changes could be due to reasons other than inspiration. But most of them do not; they parallel nonoriginal ancient variants and seemingly for the same reasons these ancient variants arose: assimilation to better known wording, harmonization of contradictions, and doctrinal clarification of problematic texts. For these reasons, it is unlikely (with very few exceptions) that the JST represents a literal restoration of material that stood in the original manuscripts of the Bible.

We emphasize that this does not mean that the JST cannot be regarded as an inspired "translation" in the sense of a paraphrase or interpretation of Joseph Smith's exemplar, the King James Version of the Bible. In fact, this may be the most promising approach to understanding the JST from a believer's perspective.

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