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APPROACHING THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MATTHEW 4:1–12

JULIA CHIOU

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the King James Bible, now designated among Latter-day Saints as the Joseph Smith Translation (hereafter JST), has proven itself to be an intriguing and complex document. The prophet himself never identified the exact purpose of his translation, and thus scholarship has adopted the challenge of deciphering the document’s form and function. The common starting point of this conversation is Joseph Smith’s belief that the Bible as received had been corrupted. This was prompted by a statement in the Book of Mormon which described that “many plain and precious things” had been taken from “the book” (1 Nephi 13:28). On February 16, 1832, while in the second year of his translation project, the prophet wrote, “From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points, touching the salvation of man, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled.” Again on October 15, 1843, ten years after the project was finished, he remarked, “I believe the bible [sic] as it read

1. Joseph Smith and his contemporaries referred to the prophet’s work on the Bible as the “New Translation.” In 1867, the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) published the manuscripts as the “Inspired Version.” In the 1970s, the LDS Church adopted the name “Joseph Smith Translation” and the acronym “JST” to appear in the footnotes of the revised 1979 English edition of the LDS canon. See Kent P. Jackson, “1830: Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible,” in Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 67–69.
when it came from the pen of the original writers; ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”

From this starting point, it was natural for LDS scholars to conclude that the New Translation was a restoration of the missing parts of the Bible. Indeed, Bruce R. McConkie explicitly promoted the JST as a restoration of original text. In his work *Mormon Doctrine*, published in 1958, Elder McConkie described the JST as follows:

As all informed persons know, the various versions of the Bible do not accurately record or perfectly preserve the words, thoughts, and intents of the original inspired authors. (Eighth Article of Faith; 1 Ne. 13.) In consequence, at the command of the Lord and while acting under the spirit of revelation, the Prophet corrected, revised, altered, added to, and deleted from the King James Version of the Bible to form what is now commonly referred to as the Inspired Version of the Bible.

Consequently, Elder McConkie often quoted the JST, citing its passages as how the biblical author “originally wrote it.”

More recent studies attempt to nuance this model while still maintaining that the JST is, in a sense, a restoration of text. Robert J. Matthews, considered the first leading scholar on the JST, offered a model for interpretation in his groundbreaking monograph, “A Plainer Translation”: *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary*. He argued that Joseph Smith’s changes can be described by four categories: (1) restorations of material written by biblical authors that had been deleted from the Bible, (2) inclusions of actual historical events never recorded in the Bible, (3) inspired commentary related to the situation of the Latter-day Saints, and (4) harmonization of doctrinal concepts revealed to Joseph Smith but contradicted in the Bible. Likewise, Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews offered a five-part model in the introduction to their 2004 publication of the JST manuscripts. Their approach included: (1) “Restoration of original text,” (2) “Restoration of what was once said or done but which was never in the Bible,” (3) “Editing to make the Bible more understandable for modern readers,” (4)...

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6. Full quote: “Matthew's account, as he originally wrote it, says: ‘Then'—that is, following his baptism—‘Jesus was led up of the Spirit, into the wilderness, to be with God’” (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–81), 1:408; emphasis added.
“Editing to bring biblical wording into harmony with truth found in other revelations or elsewhere in the Bible,” and (5) “Changes to provide modern readers teachings that were not written by original authors.”

The common ground between these models is the initial assumption that the JST, at least in part, restores original biblical text or authentic historical events.

However, there are inherent issues in these models and their common assumptions. Those who argue that the JST is a historical restoration do so with the absence of evidence as evidence. The JST is seen to restore either a text that was deleted before the earliest manuscripts of the Bible can attest, or the records of historical events that were never extant. Because it has been demonstrated that the prophet’s revisions are not found in the earliest manuscripts of the Bible, scholars use the absence of these revisions as proof positive that the JST is a restoration. In other words, the evidence that the JST restores lost text is that that restored text is lost. For this paper, the concern is not that this type of “proof” is insufficient, for the absence of evidence can neither disprove that the JST is a historical restoration. Rather, the concern is that by this argument, there is no direct method of differentiating one type of JST change from another—from restoration or inspired commentary or English modernizations—because none would appear in biblical manuscripts. Thus, all changes can initially be assumed as historical restorations and readers are licensed to build their faith upon this foundation of unstable assumptions. The discovery that a particular passage is not a historical restoration then may have an uncomfortable, even unrecoverable, effect on faith.

The JST rendition of Matt 4:1–12—the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness—provides a prime case study that highlights these challenges. Assuming that this passage represents a restoration of lost text, this paper will engage the expectations associated with such an assumption. First, if the JST indeed restores a text that was originally in the Bible but later deleted, it can be expected that the revised version will enhance the continuity of the narrative by restoring the deletions. Second, as a more historically (and, presumably, theologically) correct account, the JST is expected to be used authoritatively in place of the altered King James passages.


11. Here, “authoritative” will be used in the sense of described authority, rather than prescribed authority. See Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrinal Restoration,” in *The Joseph
these expectations are left unmet and the assumption that it is a historical restoration is dismantled. Ultimately, this study will illustrate that the approach to the JST as a historical restoration is hermeneutically problematic. This examination is not an attempt to make definitive claims about what the JST changes are or are not. Rather, this paper will open a conversation that reevaluates not only the models for interpreting the JST but also the assumption upon which these models have been founded.

**COMPARISON OF KJV AND JST**

Joseph Smith made twenty revisions to the King James translation of Matt 4:1–12. Some changes modernize the language, such as replacing “saith” with “said” (vv. 6, 9, 10). Others clarify the narrative, such as changing an indefinite “he” to the specific identification “Jesus” (v. 4). Still others modify word order (v. 1), add a conjunction or preposition (vv. 8, 9, 12), or replace an indefinite with the definite article (v. 5). There are also revisions of more significant consequence. JST Matt 4:1 describes the purpose of Jesus's seclusion as “to be with God,” rather than “to be tempted of the devil.” Likewise, in the JST the Spirit is the agent managing this event, while the devil merely interrupts the scenes (vv. 5–6, 8–9). Finally, the description of angels ministering to Jesus has been removed from this pericope and carried into the passage following, describing John the Baptist as having been ministered to by angels while in prison. 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KJV Matt 4</th>
<th>JST Matt 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.</td>
<td>1 Then Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be with God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.</td>
<td>2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, and had communed with God, he was afterwards an hungred and was left to be tempted of the devil.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.</td>
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12. The text of the KJV and JST have been taken from Thomas A. Wayment, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament: A Side-by-Side Comparison with the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 8–9. Punctuation, versification, and spelling follow that model. The text cited is NT2; there are no significant doctrinal or narrative changes from NT1 to NT2 for this passage. Also note that the JST of the parallel passage in Mark (2:12–13) is left unabridged with regard to the ministry of the angels; see Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation*, 92. Such incidences where a correction is made in one Gospel but left in another is addressed in Matthews, “A Plainer Translation,” 207–18.
4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

The JST is assumed to have restored the “many plain and precious things” that were taken from the Bible and fixed the “many errors” committed by “corrupt priests.” As such, it can be expected that the JST changes will enhance the integrity of the text as received in the King James Bible. If the JST smooths disruptions to the Bible, its changes should then be a seamless addition to the narrative that increases the overall continuity and message of the passage. Likewise, if the JST restores unrecorded historical events, a clearer historical picture should appear. Upon investigation, however, JST Matt 4:1–12 does not

14. This pericope will be examined based on the English King James Version rather than the original Greek text, as that is the text with which the JST engages.
fit into the biblical narrative, but rather takes on a unique and alternate meaning. To demonstrate this, the meaning of the King James passage must first be established, followed by that of the JST.

THE TEMPTATION IN THE KJV

The text of the King James translation of Matt 4:1–11 has immediate parallels with the Old Testament narrative of Israel in the wilderness. The relationship between God and Israel was often characterized as a father-son relationship (see Exod 4:22–23; Hos 11:1). This became a running motif throughout Deuteronomy, particularly when Moses spoke of Israel’s covenant with God and their wandering in the wilderness for forty years (see Deut 1:31; 8:5; 14:1; 32:5–6, 18–20). The purpose of that wandering was described as a test to prove that Israel would honor the covenant relationship: “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deut 8:2). God’s agent for their testing was the devil. As described in Job 1–2, Zech 3:1–2, and 1 Chr 21:1, the devil was seen as the prosecutor in God’s heavenly court.

The temptation of Jesus begins following the baptism, when God declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). Jesus as the covenant Son of God has now taken upon himself the position of the Israelites. Similar to them, he is led by God into the wilderness to wander, not for forty years, but for forty days. Parallel to the experience of the Israelites, this is a time of testing to prove that Jesus will keep the covenant relationship he had just begun at baptism. The agent of this testing is the devil, specifically identified also as the tempter or tester. The devil tests this covenant relationship by calling into question Jesus’s divine sonship. He begins his temptations, “If thou be the Son of God...” (Matt 4:3, 6). By quoting Deuteronomy three times (8:3; 6:16; 6:13), Jesus defends himself against the accusations of the devil. Thus, where Israel failed their divine testing in the wilderness, Jesus, as the true Son of God, is triumphant.15

As a sign that he has passed his tests, angels minister to Jesus. The implication of the ministry of angels is that they administered food to Jesus, similar to the angelic ministry to Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kgs 19:5–6). Thus, Jesus finally receives the bread and angelic help he had denied in order to keep the commandments of God.16 By this act, God responds to the challenges of the

devil and reaffirms that Jesus is his Son. The demonstration of divine sonship by means of angels persists throughout Matthew. Jesus will again deny the aid of angels in Gethsemane by saying to Peter, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Matt 26:53–54) Again, God will prove Jesus’s faith by later sending an angel to the empty tomb, marking the resurrection as another sign that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt 28:2).

THE TEMPTATION IN THE JST

By redacting the purpose of Jesus’s time in the wilderness and removing the ministry of angels, the allusion to the Israelites and the message inherent in the biblical text are not found in the JST. The meaning of the New Translation perhaps springs from the baptism marking the beginning of Jesus’s ministry. Thus, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be with God, and after forty days he communes with God, perhaps to receive instruction in preparation for his coming work. The period in the wilderness is then characterized as a divine experience which the devil interrupts. Surprisingly, this narrative is not unlike Joseph Smith’s own experiences in the Sacred Grove. As recorded in Joseph Smith—History, at the beginning of the prophet’s ministry, he sought communion with God in the woods and, upon attempting to pray vocally, was seized upon by a dark power (vv. 13–16). Both the Joseph Smith rendition of the temptation and the record of his own experience may teach the principle that great ministries are often begun with significant divine experiences that the devil may attempt to hinder.

The additional JST changes come together to characterize Jesus’s ultimate power and authority. In the JST rendition, the devil does not have the power to transport Jesus. Instead it is the Spirit, a divine power, that moves Jesus from the wilderness to the pinnacle, then to the mountain. The change in the object of the angels’ ministry also supports the characterization of Jesus’s ultimate authority. When he declares that the devil must not tempt the Lord, Jesus may be referring to himself as the Lord of the devil. With this reading, when Jesus sends the angels to minister to John, he confirms that he is the Lord, because he has the power to send angels, as the devil had challenged. Whereas in the King James translation the devil is defeated with God’s own power (proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God), in the JST the devil is defeated with Jesus’s own power (proclaiming that he is God the Son).

To be sure, not all of Joseph Smith’s additions are mutually exclusive to the events described in the King James narrative. It is conceivable that the purpose
of being in the wilderness was both for Jesus to commune with God and to be tempted by the devil. Likewise, angels could have ministered to both Jesus and John on separate occasions. However, by removing these pieces of the King James Bible and replacing them with different material, the implication is that Joseph Smith did not intend for them to be interpreted with the narrative. Additionally, some changes are explicitly contradictory, such as the Spirit, rather than the devil, taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. Consequently, between the King James translation and the JST, the LDS scholar is faced with two different, meaningful, and compelling accounts of the same event. With the assumption that theological truth is based on historical events and that these accounts are mutually exclusive, the reader is left to choose which to accept. This can be an uncomfortable position for the believing Latter-day Saint.

**LDS AUTHORITATIVE USE OF JST MATT 4:1–12**

If it is assumed that JST Matt 4:1–12 represents a more accurate record of a historical event, it can be rightly expected that this passage be used authoritatively in place of the altered King James passage. Additionally, it can be expected that if a single portion of a JST pericope is authoritative, then the entire pericope is authoritative as well. However, JST Matt 4:1–12 in its totality is not universally used by LDS authorities in place of the King James translation. Instead, the King James Bible, the JST, and modern LDS teaching interact with each other in a variety of different patterns, perhaps suggesting the need to amend the current models to the JST which lead readers to initially interpret it as a historical restoration. Through a study of the citations of these scriptures in the *Journal of Discourses* from 1839 to 1886, in the general conference corpus from 1942 to the present, and in various publications by prominent LDS authorities, this paper identifies two distinct patterns that describe how the King James translation and the JST have been used in LDS teaching. These are outlined as follows:

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17. Additional publications by James E. Talmage, J. Reuben Clark, David O. McKay, Bruce R. McConkie, Howard W. Hunter, Dallin H. Oaks, and Jeffrey R. Holland were included in this study. As not every reference to KJV Matt 4:1–11 and JST Matt 4:1–12 in the history of LDS teaching has been footnoted—nor was every publication by all LDS general authorities examined—this study is not capable of proving how many instances one version of the pericope is quoted over another. Rather, this study elucidates a general pattern of KJV and JST interactions within modern LDS teaching. Additionally, not every category of interaction is mentioned in this paper. For example, some authors reference a noncontradictory passage of the KJV such as v. 4, without referencing any portion of the JST (for example, see D. Todd Christofferson, “Let Us Be Men,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 48). Likewise, not every example that falls into one of these categories has been cited. Only those which most clearly demonstrate the pattern have been mentioned in this paper.
1. Citing a King James passage, such as Satan taking Jesus to a pinnacle, without reference to any portion of the JST pericope, though available and accepted.

2. Citing a King James passage, such as angels ministering to Jesus, in addition to referencing a separate portion of the JST pericope, such as Jesus’s communion with God.

Also worthy of mention is that no instances citing only the full JST pericope have been found.

**PATTERN 1: CITING THE KJV ALONE**

By February 2, 1833, Joseph Smith recorded in his journal that he had “completed the translation and review of the New Testament.”

Five months later, on July 2, 1833, Joseph and his scribes had finished working through the entire Bible.

Seven years later, on June 2, 1839, Joseph Smith delivered an address in Commerce, Illinois, that quoted the King James translation of Matt 4:5. This is the prophet’s only known, explicit quotation of the temptation narrative, and he notably did not cite his own revision. Rather, to teach the Saints to be aware of false spirits and warn them of the power of the devil, the prophet said, “Every spirit, or vision, or singing is not of God. The Devil is an orator. He is powerful. He took our Savior onto a pinnacle of the Temple [Matt 4:5], and kept him in the wilderness for forty days.”

Additionally, there are no known instances of Joseph Smith citing his revision of the temptation narrative.

In 1867, the RLDS Church published the manuscripts of the JST under the title “Inspired Version,” which was available to Latter-day Saints. However, until the 1960s it was the general attitude of the LDS Church to suspect this publication as inaccurate and untrustworthy. Yet some prominent leaders still used the JST with caution. B.H. Roberts believed the JST to be an accurate historical restoration and wrote, “What [Joseph] did was to revise the English text of the Bible under inspiration of God; and that led him to not only give different renderings of various passages, but also to supply missing parts.”

Interestingly, on January 28, 1884, Roberts gave an address citing the King

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James translation of Matt 4:5–7. He used this passage to teach the congregants not to boast of the godly favor and power they will receive:

That is, we shall not boast before the world that God has promised to deliver us of these things. We may learn a lesson from Jesus on this subject—The devil took Him to the pinnacle of the temple, and now, said he, if thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, I will give mine angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy food against a stone. "It is also written," replied Jesus, “thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God [Matt 4:5–7].”

No additional reference to either the King James or Joseph Smith translation of this pericope appeared in the speech.

In 1979, the LDS Church published a revised edition of the English King James Bible that included footnotes with quotations of specific JST passages. These selected quotations were to be used freely and without need for caution. JST Matt 4:1–12 was included in this edition. Despite easy access and ready acceptance of the new JST verses, the King James translation of this pericope is still quoted. In his general conference address in October 2003, President Thomas S. Monson cited KJV Matt 4:1 to teach about obedience to the Father in the face of opposition. He quoted, “When [Jesus] was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan, He was weak from fasting.” This was the only reference to the temptation narrative in his address.

PATTERN 2: CITING THE KJV AND JST

Though still in the era that regarded the RLDS publication of the New Translation with suspicion, Elder Wilford Woodruff appreciated the insight of the JST. On December 12, 1869, he presented a discourse addressing the Holy Ghost, laboring in faith, the kingdom of God, and patriarchal marriage. Within it, Elder Woodruff quoted the JST passages of 2 Cor 5:10 and Gen 50:24. However, in the same address, when mentioning the temptation of Jesus, passages specific to the King James translation were used. To warn that the devil and his followers will try to overthrow the righteous, Wilford Woodruff quoted, “You see this manifested when [the devil] took Jesus on to the loftiest pinnacle of the temple and showed him all the glory of the world [KJV Matt 4:9].…” On another occasion in 1880, he taught a similar message, though quoting the JST. He cited, “One-third part of the heavenly host was cast down to the earth … and they labor to overthrow all the Saints and the kingdom of God. They even tried to overthrow Jesus Christ [JST Matt...
Interestingly, though he cited the JST, the information quoted is not specific to the Joseph Smith revision. He had made the same observation eleven years earlier with reference to the King James translation.

Bruce R. McConkie has been one of the most vocal supporters and strict interpreters of the JST. Addressing the validity of the JST in the context of Joseph Smith’s revelations canonized in the Pearl of Great Price, Elder McConkie wrote, “Of course we should use the Joseph Smith Translation in our study and teaching. Since when do any of us have the right to place bounds on the Almighty and say we will believe in these revelations but not those?”

Noticeably, Elder McConkie was still innovative in his use of both the King James translation and the JST. In volume 1 of his 1965 publication, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, four JST passages and one King James passage from the temptation narrative were quoted. In his explication of the temptation of Jesus, Elder McConkie observed that “it is particularly important to note the changes made by the prophet in the Inspired Version.” Specifically mentioned are the changes that add the notion of Jesus being with God, communing with God, and being transported by the Spirit rather than the devil. Later in the work, Elder McConkie cited the JST addition concerning the ministering of angels to John the Baptist: “While in Herod’s prison, angels sent by Jesus had ministered comfort and assurance to John (I.V. 4:11).” In addition to this reference, the King James translation of Matt 4:11 was also included in a later portion of the book. In the chapter addressing the events on the Mount of Transfiguration, Elder McConkie commented, “Similar comfort had been given [to Jesus] by angelic visitants following his forty-day fast and its attendant temptations (Matt 4:11).” Elder McConkie again cited this same collection of KJV and JST quotations throughout his later multivolume work, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, published from 1979 to 1981.

Elder Howard W. Hunter used the King James and Joseph Smith translations of the temptation narrative creatively. In 1976, at a time when the JST was gaining acceptance in the LDS community, Elder Hunter gave a masterful

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29. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:261. Note that as the 1979 edition of the King James Bible had not yet been published, “I.V.” stands for “Inspired Version”—the versification follows that publication rather than the model used in this paper.
sermon on the temptation of Jesus.\textsuperscript{32} In his explication of the text, he quoted the JST: “When Jesus had completed the fast of forty days and had communed with God, he was, in this hungry and physically weakened state, left to be tempted of the devil.” Using this passage, Elder Hunter emphasized the preparatory purpose of Jesus’s time in the wilderness. Later in the sermon, part of the King James translation of the pericope is cited: “Matthew tells us that ‘angels came and ministered unto him.’ (Matt 4:11.)” With this passage, Elder Hunter taught that relief and miracles come to the righteous after the trial of faith.

In a 1982 BYU devotional, President Jeffrey R. Holland also delivered a significant exposition on the temptation of Jesus entitled “The Inconvenient Messiah.”\textsuperscript{33} In it, President Holland explored the temptation narrative, using it to illustrate the high cost of discipleship while encouraging Saints to pursue the worthwhile course. His discourse was closely tied to a text of the narrative, which he quoted in its entirety at the opening of his speech. Markedly, his quotation was a combination of both the Joseph Smith and King James translations. The New Translation of Matt 4:1–10 was quoted word for word and directly cited, followed immediately, as if from the same text, by the exact King James translation of Matt 4:11. The citation reads as follows: “JST Matt. 4:1–10; KJV Matt. 4:11.” Notably, in the remainder of his speech, President Holland does not employ the doctrinal points added by the JST changes to teach a specific message. However, at the end of the speech, the King James translation of Matt 4:11 was requoted to emphasize the relief and aid that will be given to those who pay the cost of discipleship.

A NEW APPROACH

By evaluating these modern LDS texts, we note that JST Matt 4:1–12 is not universally viewed as authoritative by LDS authorities, particularly JST Matt 4:11–12. If evaluated by the terms of enhanced narrative continuity and authoritative usage, the assumption that JST Matt 4:1–12 is an accurate historical restoration is called into question. This study is not the first to notice these types of discrepancies nor is it the first to address them. Similar issues have been noted in the Joseph Smith revisions of Mal 4:5–6, Rom 13, Heb 11:40, and Rev 1:5–6. Robert L. Millet offered that at times when the JST seems to alter the context of a King James passage, it cannot be determined which translation of the Bible is historically correct. Instead of restoration, such a JST


\textsuperscript{33} Speech later published in Jeffrey R. Holland, However Long and Hard the Road (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985; repr., 2002), 26–38.
passage could be prophetic commentary or harmonization. He also stated that though the prophet had finished his work on the Bible, he may have continued to quote the King James translation when a JST correction perhaps reflected a teaching the Lord wanted the Saints to know only at the time it was first revealed.\textsuperscript{34} Likewise, Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews included in their model the possibility that rather than supplying a restoration of text, some changes were to give additional meaning more applicable to modern Latter-day Saints. In such cases, these distinctions cannot be fully determined.\textsuperscript{35} As previously noted, the types of JST changes cannot be distinguished on the grounds of the absence of evidence. Still, both models continue to approach such questions from the perspective of restoration, explaining that when difficulties arise, they are the exception, not the rule. This is an irresponsible hermeneutic. These models build belief in an accessible historical theology, and faith in the JST as a historical restoration, without the proper tools to respond to concerns. This is not to say that the JST can in no way represent a restoration of text. It is to say, however, that there is danger in initially approaching it as such.

On the other hand, in an address at a BYU symposium on the JST, Elder Dallin H. Oaks presented an alternate angle to the conversation. He offered, “Suppose a person quotes the King James Version and not the Joseph Smith Translation in a circumstance where the Joseph Smith Translation makes a substantive change? We do it all the time. This is the same as quoting one of the four gospels without quoting a parallel but different phraseology in another gospel.”\textsuperscript{36} This approach is radically different than the current precedent. Rather than viewing the JST as a tool to restore a more accurate history and superior theological truth, this perspective places the New Translation on the same hermeneutical “playing field” as other independent works, with its own unique point of view, occasional nature, audience, and message. Consequently, the LDS exegete is freed from the task of fitting the JST into the prescriptive boxes of a King James revision or a nonexistent autograph, and is given license to accept it as an independent entity. Simultaneously, Joseph Smith as its prophetic and inspired author is free to teach a theology unbound by the limits of strict historicity. This may be hard to recognize initially, as the JST interacts with every canonical book rather than being a singular scriptural work. It may understandably be even harder to accept, as it goes against the grain of a traditional harmonizing hermeneutic and a theology attached to history. However,

\textsuperscript{34} Robert L. Millet, “Hard Questions About the JST,” in \textit{Plain and Precious Truths Restored}, 151–52.

\textsuperscript{35} Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, \textit{Joseph Smith’s New Translation}, 10–11.

its advantages are clear. This hermeneutic may explain why the King James translation and the JST can have alternate yet equally valid meanings that stand in dynamic tension. Both teach truths using similar narratives, shaped differently to explain their individual messages. This may also account for why the JST has not supplanted the King James Bible in authoritative LDS teaching. Either the JST or the King James translation may more properly and appropriately fit a teacher’s message on that occasion. For these reasons, it may be more profitable for LDS scholars to approach the JST first as an independent work, then as a historical restoration in certain instances where it can be reasonably demonstrated.

CONCLUSION

The exact purpose and authority of the JST are still unclear. As the conversation now stands, there are few effective tools for deciphering this document. For example, the use of the absence of evidence to support an argument for historical restoration is problematic. Models that are built upon such a foundation offer that there are multiple types of changes in the JST without providing the proper tools for distinguishing them. The ability to accurately identify types of JST changes proves important because it has bearing on the lived faith of Latter-day Saints. As there is no sure method of identifying these types of changes, there may be need of a new approach. Rather than offering a method of identifying changes, this paper suggests a new view of the JST that sees it as an independent work. To be sure, more research must be conducted to substantiate this suggestion. Hopefully, however, a new angle to the conversation has been opened that will yield fruitful discussion on the JST.