



Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

Volume 8 | Number 2

Article 12

7-1-2007

The Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Judas, and Other Bad Ideas

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Holzapfel, Richard N. "The Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Judas, and Other Bad Ideas." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 8, no. 2 (2007). <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol8/iss2/12>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

The Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Judas, and Other Bad Ideas

Richard Neitzel Holzappel

Richard Neitzel Holzappel is managing director of the Religious Studies Center publications office and a professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU.

Jesus of Nazareth is currently headline news, thanks at least in part to Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*, the discovery of the Gospel of Judas, and recent media attention regarding the so-called "Lost Tomb of Jesus." Often these attention-grabbing news stories are based on misconceptions—bad ideas—that can confuse those seeking to learn about the past. This heightened interest in these topics has generated a marvelous opportunity to talk about things that matter most, and therefore it is all good news.

The purpose of this essay is to review several bad ideas—misconceptions—about issues that are currently being debated in and out of the Church regarding these topics. We will conclude on a positive note by highlighting some of the good news about the "Good News."

Bad Idea Number 1. *We can learn something about Jesus Christ and early Christianity from The Da Vinci Code.*

A surprising number of people claim they have learned something about Jesus Christ, the New Testament, and the history of the early Christian church through this novel. *The Da Vinci Code* has sold more than sixty million copies; therefore, the impact on many people's perception on these topics is great. However, we need to remember several facts about the book.

First, *The Da Vinci Code* is a novel. Second, the author of *The Da Vinci Code* has no academic training that would suggest he is an expert on the New Testament and early Christianity. Third, the author of *The*

Da Vinci Code does not claim to be an apostle or prophet, and therefore he cannot provide prophetic insight to the past.

Given that the book is found in the fiction section of the bookstore, we might rightfully ask, “What is all the fuss about?” We may appropriately respond that it is all about a statement printed in the introduction of the book and other statements the author has made elsewhere. The author’s statement in the book has caused people to wonder what is fiction and what is fact in this novel: “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”¹

The author’s statement has generated numerous inquiries regarding the historical accuracies of the context for the novel. As a result, a cottage industry has developed in an attempt to review the historical claims of the novel.²

For our purposes, we can identify only a few examples of the flagrant historical problems found in the book—problems that both liberal and conservative scholars agree are blatantly inaccurate:

1. “More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament” by the early Church (Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 231). This is false. Only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were seriously considered for inclusion in the New Testament.³
2. The New Testament canon “was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great” (231). This is false. The early Church had, by the end of the second century, identified most of the texts they felt were reliable—based on apostolic authority—long before the reign of Constantine (AD 306–37).⁴
3. Until the Council of Nicea in the fourth century, Jesus was not considered divine but was “a mortal,” “viewed by His followers as . . . a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless” (233). This is false. Paul’s own writings, dating from AD 49 until the mid-60s, contain specific references to Jesus’s divinity (see Galatians 2:20; Philippians 5:5–11).
4. The Catholic Church “tried very hard to suppress the release of [the Nag Hammadi codices],” which *The Da Vinci Code* mistakenly identifies as the “Coptic Scrolls” (234). This is false. The scholarly efforts to publish these texts were done independently of any religious body.
5. The Dead Sea Scrolls are “the earliest Christian records” (245). This is false. The vast majority of the scrolls date from the period before Jesus’s ministry. In those texts that date from the first century, there are no references to Jesus, the early Church or any New Testament writing.

In short, anyone who is interested in reading the novel should do so for entertainment and not to learn about the past.

Bad Idea Number 2. *The Gospel of Judas, along with other Gnostic texts such as the Nag Hammadi Library, provides insights into the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.*

Sensational stories in the media in early 2006—in the midst of *The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon—captured the attention of many people when it was reported that a new “Gospel” had been found. With typical media hype, the National Geographic Society announced that it was about to publish the long-lost Gospel of Judas (known to have existed from second-century sources). The codex (dating from AD 300 to 400) that contained the Gospel of Judas was torn and crumbling before conservation work began. Today, the text has been carefully restored and published.⁵

Gaye Strathearn, a faculty member at BYU and a Gnostic expert, provides a succinct description of the text: “The Gospel of Judas views Jesus and his ministry from a Gnostic perspective—a very different perspective from the one described in the canonical Gospels.”⁶ Because the Gospel of Judas was written well after any of the canonical Gospels, we can assume that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John provide more reliable accounts of Jesus’s last twenty-four hours. Like other Gnostic texts, the Gospel of Judas was produced simply too late to provide us with any reliable historical information about Jesus and Judas. And it thoroughly reflects the heretical ideas of its Gnostic authors.

The Gospel of Judas fits well with a larger body of Gnostic texts. A significant collection of Gnostic texts was discovered in 1945 near Nag Hammadi, Egypt—hence the name by which they are known today, the Nag Hammadi Library. Dating from the third and fourth centuries AD, these texts have generated interest among many scholars and Latter-day Saints. Some Latter-day Saints have assumed that some golden nuggets could be mined from the Gnostic texts.

As is the case with the Gospel of Judas, nonscholars can access these documents in English, allowing them to determine how familiar the story, the doctrine, and the world of the Gnostic texts are. The authoritative translation of these Gnostic documents is found in James Robinson’s *The Nag Hammadi Library* (1978), updated in 1990.⁷

Professor Strathearn continues her assessment of Gnostic texts: “Latter-day Saints, however, must be cautious. They must guard against any endeavor to study Gnostic writings with the purpose of identifying proof-texts for their own doctrine. We have noted, for example, that the Gnostics had a very different understanding of the

nature and purpose of mortal existence and the identity of the God of the Old Testament. They believed that salvation was possible only for a select, predetermined group of people. In addition, their concept of ‘temple marriage’ was a celibate union between individuals and either Christ or their own divine image. Any Gnostic teachings found in these writings must be understood within their own Gnostic context.”⁸

It is important to remember the chronological context of the Nag Hammadi documents. Today we have copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that date to AD 150 or earlier (as early as AD 125), meaning that these texts predate any other documents that purport to provide information about the historical Jesus, including the Nag Hammadi library. In some cases, we are only thirty or forty years removed from the original canonical Gospels in these early copies of the four Gospels—making the New Testament documents the earliest documents about Jesus and therefore the most reliable.

Bad Idea Number 3. *The Dead Sea Scrolls are proto-Mormon documents that can help us prove the Church is true.*

Since their initial discovery in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls have captured the attention of scholars and laypeople alike. The more than 850 texts found in the caves near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea are written in Aramaic and Hebrew, with a few in Greek, mostly on leather (gazelle, bovine, and ibex skin parchments). There is an example of a text written on metal, known today as the *Copper Scroll* (3QTreasure). Among these manuscripts were examples of every book from the Hebrew scriptures (except Esther) and many other texts, including the book of Enoch.⁹

The significance and the importance of the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls have been hotly debated and have generated a significant amount of speculation, especially on those texts previously unknown (nonbiblical material found among the manuscripts). Exaggerated reports among some Latter-day Saints have suggested that those who collected and copied these scrolls were proto-Mormons, even suggesting that many doctrines of the Restoration are found in these writings.¹⁰ As a result, some unwise members of the Church, including missionaries, have attempted to use the Dead Sea Scrolls as a means to bolster our claims—to prove the Church is true from these ancient records.

BYU professor Dana M. Pike provides a thoughtful response to these exaggerated claims: “Let me now answer the question posed in the title of this paper: ‘Is the Plan of Salvation Attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?’ From a Latter-day Saint perspective, the answer is a definite no.”¹¹ Dr. Pike’s assessment should not surprise us, given the historical context of

the people who gathered at Qumran. First, those who collected and produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, like other Jews during this period, lived in a partial state of apostasy without prophetic leaders. Second, the community did not respond to Jesus's call to "follow him" (individuals may have). Third, unlike the Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem who were warned by revelation of the impending destruction and fled to safety, the Qumran community was destroyed, and the people were most likely killed by the Roman army during the Jewish War (AD 66–73).

A careful and thorough reading of the nonbiblical texts found at Qumran not only reveals the basic worldview of these people but also reveals some important gaps in their understanding of the plan of salvation. The texts discovered in the caves demonstrate that the people who wrote and preserved these texts, unlike the writers of the Book of Mormon, were not Christians in any way. They did not have a clear idea about the role of the Messiah ben David (they believed that the Messiah ben Aaron was superior). They did not believe that the Messiah was God's Son. They did not believe in a personal Savior. As a result, they did not know about a final redemptive sacrifice. Clearly, they did not know about eternal ordinances performed by Melchizedek Priesthood authority. They did not know about the basic plan of salvation, including any knowledge about the degrees of glory and eternal progression.

Nevertheless, the scrolls are important. Two experts, both faithful Latter-day Saint scholars who can read the texts in their original languages and have the necessary academic training to place the scrolls in context, have provided a balanced assessment of the importance of the scrolls: "The scrolls, of course, do not contain the lost records we await, but they do provide new information about the transmission of the Bible, the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, and the variety of beliefs and practices of some Jews in the late Second Temple period."¹²

Fortunately, as a result of careful scholarly work, anyone interested in learning about what these people believed can discover for themselves, as the most important nonbiblical texts from Qumran are available in an English translation. Published in 2004, the revised edition of Geza Vermes's *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* in English provides a readable and authoritative translation of the important nonbiblical materials in the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹³

Bad Idea Number 4. *The New Testament apocrypha contains the "plain and precious things" removed from the Bible.*

There are some major differences between the New Testament Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi library. First, the New Testament Apocrypha was not a collection of texts

found at a specific geographical location. They were not all compiled by a specific group of people. They are, in fact, a disparate compilation of a variety of materials collected over the centuries. They are not a collection in the sense that they constitute the sacred library of any specific group of people. They were composed over a long period of time by diverse individuals over a large geographical area.¹⁴

As with the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Gospel of Judas, and the Nag Hammadi texts, nonscholars can access the New Testament Apocrypha through English translations of these texts—allowing anyone to read what these texts have to offer.¹⁵

In contrast to the wild and exaggerated claims made by some Latter-day Saints who argue that these documents reveal some of the “plain and precious parts” lost from the Bible, there are voices of warning about the use and misuse of the texts.¹⁶ BYU professor Stephen E. Robinson has written, “The degree to which the apocryphal literature proves that the Latter-day Saints are right or supports our beliefs has been greatly exaggerated in the unofficial literature of the Church, and I believe that those who make these exaggerated claims either do so in ignorance or else perpetrate a ‘pious fraud.’ Some of the tapes and other material that circulate in the Church on the subject are very misleading.”¹⁷

Robinson adds an important context to his discussion: “I want to affirm the importance of the apocryphal literature for our understanding of biblical history, of biblical languages, and of the background of the biblical books themselves. There is much valuable information here for the Latter-day Saints if we understand the texts for what they really are and use them appropriately. It is not the *use* of this literature that is objectionable, but the *misuse*. For if we try to pass them off as ‘hidden scriptures,’ and otherwise misrepresent them in misguidedly trying to prove that the Church is true, we shall, like the comforters of Job, ‘speak the thing that is not right,’ and become as much as the original pseudonymous authors ‘liars for God.’”¹⁸

Bad Idea Number 5. *The 1611 King James Version is a new revelation from God and is superior to the original Hebrew and Greek texts on which the translation was based.*

The King James Version of the Bible (KJV) was first published in 1611. This English translation has had immense influence. However, many do not realize that there are several different editions of the KJV. As a result, any dogmatic assertions about the 1611 edition must be tempered by the fact that the current KJV used by most English-speaking readers, including members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is not the 1611 edition.

During the past fifty years, strong feelings about the KJV have emerged, mostly in reaction to some modern-day translation efforts that purportedly deemphasize the divinity of Jesus Christ and the ability of Old Testament prophets to see beyond their own day.¹⁹ James R. White has outlined five different positions regarding the KJV that are held by various Christian groups today, including some rather extreme and untenable positions that divert our attention from those things that matter most.

First, many people love the KJV because the language is majestic and the translation reveals a deep respect for Jesus Christ. Second, some people believe the Hebrew and Greek texts used by the KJV translators in the seventeenth century are superior to any other text, even those texts that predate those used by the KJV translators. Third, some people argue that the Lord preserved the Hebrew and Greek texts used by the translators for His special purpose, and therefore we should rely upon those texts above all others. Fourth, some people have claimed that the KJV is an inspired translation, and therefore any question about the reliability of the manuscripts is not important. Fifth, some believe that the KJV is not simply an inspired translation but that it is, in fact, a new revelation from God, and therefore the text should be preferred above any ancient manuscript, including the originals. The most extreme position argues that the KJV existed in heaven before the creation of the world and that Moses, Isaiah, Matthew, and Paul read the 1611 KJV.²⁰

The following important contributions to the Restoration have come because of the KJV:

1. Joseph Smith read from a KJV Bible in the spring of 1820, and that event led him to seek God in prayer, thereby opening a new dispensation.
2. Joseph Smith read from a KJV Bible (1830–33) during his work on the text (JST), which blessed the Church through increased understanding of God’s plan.
3. The KJV provides the language of the Restoration in English.
 - a. It is the language of the Book of Mormon translation.
 - b. It is the language of the Doctrine and Covenants.
 - c. It is the language of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. (As has been adequately demonstrated by Kent P. Jackson, the JST does demonstrate the Prophet’s efforts to simplify and modernize the KJV for a modern audience.)
 - d. It is the language of prayer.

The KJV will continue to play a significant role among the English-speaking members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

However, it is important to remember some facts about the edition we currently use, as noted above.

The 1979 Latter-day Saint edition used the 1769 Benjamin Blayney edition of the King James Version.²² It contains significant differences from the original 1611 edition and is also slightly different from that used by the Prophet Joseph Smith and the majority of the early Saints—Joseph Smith’s Bible was based on the 1769 Cambridge University Press edition (which was more or less identical to the current LDS edition) but with additional modernizations.²³

Bad Idea Number 6. *The Joseph Smith Translation is only a footnote to the King James Version text.*

The current edition of the Bible published by the Church (1979) provides some six hundred Joseph Smith Translation verses, many of them as notes at the bottom of the page or included as an appendix at the end. The position of these verses, however, does not imply any sort of inferior status. The Joseph Smith Translation (JST) is of the greatest importance and significance to Latter-day Saints in their study of the Bible.

The Prophet’s work on the New Translation began in June 1830 and proceeded through 1833, when he finished his work on the Bible (at least the major effort). Kent P. Jackson, one of the most important JST scholars in the Church today, has described the Prophet’s efforts as “a careful reading of the Bible to revise and make corrections to it as prompted by revelation.”²⁴

The significance of Joseph Smith’s efforts to translate the Bible for himself and the Church cannot fully be told. It was his major focus from June 1830 through July 1833 and was one of the means through which the Lord tutored his Prophet and was the catalyst for many revelations now found in the Doctrine and Covenants (see, for example, D&C 76).

One historian captured the importance of the New Translation when he compared the Prophet’s efforts with academic translations that require language skills, dictionaries, and ancient texts: “Unlike the scholarly translators, [Joseph Smith] went back beyond the existing texts to the minds of the prophets, and through them to the mind of God.”²⁵

We owe an immense debt to several people and groups for preserving the JST and printings of the Prophet’s work. Foremost among the Latter-day Saints is Robert J. Matthews, who pioneered the effort to make the JST known among Church members. He casts a long shadow across the landscape. Two giants, Scott H. Faulring and Kent P. Jackson, stand in that shadow and continue to make enduring contributions to our understanding of the importance of the Prophet’s

work, which he described as a “branch of [his] calling.”²⁶ In 1996, they began the lengthy process of preparing for publication a typographic transcription of the original manuscripts of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. The result is a groundbreaking 851-page volume, published by the Religious Studies Center.²⁷

Based on the pioneering work of Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, BYU professor Thomas A. Wayment has provided the most correct and handy comparative edition of the JST New Testament available to date. This is an important contribution to any New Testament study.²⁸

Bad Idea Number 7. *New Testament scholars are evil, they are atheists (agnostic at best), and they deserve to go to you-know-where.*

Certainly, just as we know of bad doctors, lawyers, and mechanics, we can identify New Testament scholars who question the reliability of the New Testament in reconstructing the life of Jesus of Nazareth. However, we would be unwise and unfair to categorize an entire group based on some individuals within that group. In fact, an increasing number of scholars are deeply committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Inside and outside the Church, many stalwart Christians and scholars not only respond to critics of the New Testament but also provide all who will listen and read thoughtful discussions regarding the life of the one whom God had sent to save the cosmos.

Joseph Smith is an example of one who learned “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). The Lord called Joseph Smith to provide three important translations: the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Joseph’s efforts in these regards might be better understood as an inspired translation because he did not learn any ancient languages to accomplish his task.

However, we sometimes forget that the Prophet did not see his approach to studying the word of God as an either-or proposition. Joseph took time to follow the Lord’s counsel to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D&C 90:15). He studied ancient languages and modern languages in his effort to understand the scriptures.

Joseph Smith noted: “Attended the school and read and translated with my class as usual. My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original, and I am determined to pursue the study of the languages, until I shall become master of them, if I am permitted to live long enough.”²⁹ On another occasion, Joseph opined, “Our latitude and longitude can be determined in the original Hebrew with far greater accuracy than in the English version.”³⁰

President Spencer W. Kimball offered the following challenge to the Brigham Young University faculty, including religious education faculty: “Your double heritage and dual concerns with the secular and the spiritual require you to be ‘bilingual.’ As LDS scholars, you must speak with authority and excellence to your professional colleagues in the language of scholarship, and you must also be literate in the language of spiritual things. We must be more bilingual, in that sense, to fulfill our promise in the second century of BYU.”³¹

Bad Idea Number 8. *Past Latter-day Saint scholarship is the best scholarship.*

An increasing number of Latter-day Saint scholars trained in various disciplines relating to New Testament studies (ancient history, Greek and Latin, textual criticism, Roman civilization, and geography) are reexamining sources (old and recently discovered), including the New Testament text itself. Taking advantage of recent discoveries and modern technologies, faithful scholars are in a position to clarify the historical context and linguistic nuances of the biblical texts.

Latter-day Saint scholars, working from within the framework of the doctrinal standard established by past and present Church authorities who have written about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, are attempting to provide additional historical and cultural context inside the parameters established by these authorized servants.

Sometimes students resist any discussions that go beyond some previously published work, especially works that have become classics in the truest sense. Although some literary classics, such as Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, probably never should be updated, other classics that deal with history and science probably should be updated when new information comes to light.

Elder James E. Talmage, whose language and sensitivity in describing the life of Christ may never be surpassed, has provided one of the most important books, *Jesus the Christ*, from which current Latter-day Saint scholars often commence.³² We should speak with great reverence and even awe when approaching this book, and we should especially appreciate Elder Talmage’s use of language and testimony. Yet we should provide a context to our discussion in light of newly discovered historical, cultural, and language insights.

Jesus the Christ, a classic in the truest sense, continues to play a significant role in the lives of those who are seeking to understand the life of the Master. However, Elder Talmage’s scholarship reflects what was known of history and scriptures in the late 1880s. He did not have access to the Joseph Smith Translation, the Dead Sea Scrolls, other

recently discovered texts, or the many archaeological and historical advances that open new windows of understanding on the world of the first century. Moreover, Elder Talmage was not aware of and did not use the Prophet Joseph Smith's doctrinal contributions to the text itself.³³

If Elder Talmage were alive today and had an opportunity to update his marvelous prose (based on the fact that he carefully studied and quoted from scholars of other faiths before writing his masterpiece), he would most likely take advantage of the additional light and knowledge God has revealed through various means, including remarkable discoveries dealing directly with the New Testament text and the world of Jesus (see Articles of Faith 1:9).

Current scholars build upon the work of previous generations. In this sense, they stand on the shoulders of giants, an outcome that allows them to see further than was possible in the past. Scholars of an earlier generation anticipate that their work will be added upon just as they improved upon the work of the generation before them.

The works of all scholars, past and present, should be judged according to their context, using a standard such as that given in the introduction of the LDS Bible Dictionary: "This dictionary . . . is *not* intended as an official or revealed endorsement by the Church of the doctrinal, historical, cultural, and other matters set forth. Many of the items have been drawn from the *best available scholarship of the world* and are subject to reevaluation based on new research and discoveries or on new revelation."³⁴

The Good News about the "Good News"

We should not end our discussion with the bad ideas that are floating around. I firmly believe that the glass is not half empty but is, in fact, half full. This is the best time to be alive. During this time of increased media attention to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the New Testament, and the history of the early Christian church, Latter-day Saints have much to be grateful for as we reflect upon what the Lord has done and what He continues to do. We are blessed with a better understanding of His glorious gospel through divine witnesses of His ministry—modern prophets and apostles who testify of His continuing presence in the Church. We also benefit from the efforts of faithful scholars to provide us a rich context for the good news. That good news includes the following:

1. Some of those who met Jesus along the way decided to write down what He said and did.

2. Some early Christians collected the writings of the New Testament during a critical period when the writings could have been lost.
3. The early Church decided to preserve the books now contained in the New Testament.
4. The early Christian Church decided not to include the books that compose the New Testament Apocrypha.³⁵
5. Catholic monks copied New Testament manuscripts—preserving the texts for future generations.
6. Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and others learned biblical languages—Hebrew and Greek—so they could translate the Bible because they knew that the Bible was more authoritative in the original languages than any translation.
7. The 1611 KJV was translated by scholars with remarkable skills—including knowledge of Hebrew and Greek—producing an important English version of the Bible that would influence the Restoration.
8. Protestant translators and publishers dedicated their lives to making the Bible available to the whole world in the languages of common people.³⁶
9. Archaeological advances, including the discovery of early New Testament manuscripts, provide scholars better sources than we had a century ago to help us reconstruct the world of Jesus and the Apostles.
10. Recent discoveries and advances in our understanding of early New Testament manuscripts enable us to reconstruct the New Testament text better than was possible in the day of the KJV translators.
11. God called Joseph Smith to speak again in the name of the Lord, providing prophetic insight and application to the New Testament. Additionally, the Lord called successors who continued to provide prophetic insight to New Testament scripture.
12. The Church promotes the education of both the spirit and the mind—including the study of ancient history and biblical languages.
13. The Church released the 1979 edition of the KJV with important Bible helps prepared by some of the best scholars of the Church under the direction of the Church's scripture committee: Greek and Hebrew alternative translations (GR/HEB), explanations of idioms and difficult constructions (IE), the inclusion of Joseph Smith Translation material in the footnotes and the appendix (JST), Bible Dictionary, and Topical Guide.

14. The Lord is pouring out His Spirit, touching the hearts of many Latter-day Saints to pursue degrees in ancient history and biblical languages. Their consecrated work helps us to have a deeper appreciation for context of the story that matters most—the life and ministry of God’s unique Son.

The Best News of All

We can thank the Lord for His goodness, especially when we consider the points mentioned above. However, the best news of all is a powerful witness of God’s love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul succinctly outlines the best news of all: “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Galatians 4:4–5).³⁷

In other words, God did not send Jesus a year too early or a year too late—but at the very right time. That God “sent” His Son before Jesus was born seems the best way to understand Paul’s passage; Jesus was foreordained to complete God’s rescue mission of the cosmos (see Revelation 13:8).

As several scholars have noted, J. B. Lightfoot’s discovery of a chiasm in this pericope further highlights the importance of the message:

- A. God sent his Son
- B. Born under the Law
- B.' To redeem those under the law
- A.' That we might receive adoption as sons³⁸

Our story ends where it began, nearly two thousand years ago in the land where Jesus walked and where He talked about the “Good News.” One of His disciples, one who witnessed the miracle of His life, death, and Resurrection, left us his witness, his testimony, in the form of a book—the Gospel of John. As he concluded his story of the Lamb of God, John testified, “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). **RE**

Notes

1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 1.
2. For example, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Andrew Skinner, and Thomas Wayment, *What Da Vinci Didn't Know: An LDS Perspective* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006). Additionally, there is a vast collection of non-LDS literature by competent scholars who deal with the historical problems found throughout the novel, including two thoughtful reviews, Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in*

The Da Vinci Code: *A Historian Reveals What We Really Know about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

3. The standard scholarly book on the formation of the canon is Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origins, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987). For a recent perspective on the New Testament Apocrypha, see Thomas A. Wayment, “False Gospels: An Approach to Studying the New Testament Apocrypha,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 292–303.

4. See Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*. For a recent LDS perspective on this point, see Kerry Muhlestein, “From Clay Tablets to Canon: The Story of the Formation of Scripture,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, 43–61.

5. Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, Gregor Wurst, eds., *The Gospel of Judas* (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 2006).

6. Gaye Strathearn, “The Gnostic Context of the Gospel of Judas,” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 27.

7. James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1990).

8. Strathearn, “The Gnostic Context of the Gospel of Judas,” 33–34.

9. See S. Kent Brown and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, *The Lost 500 Years: What Happened between the Old and New Testaments* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 85–91.

10. Hugh Nibley was one of the first trained Latter-day Saint scholars to focus attention to the newly discovered ancient Jewish and Christian manuscripts that suddenly burst on the scene in the 1940s. The initial enthusiasm about the value of these texts was not only well meaning but also raised some questions about previously held assumptions concerning first-century Judaism and early Christianity. After those early investigations, thoughtful and careful work built upon or beginning with these early explorations on the relationship between the restored gospel and ancient documents has provided a clearer picture and, as a result, a more mature and cautious context to the discussions of the importance of these texts.

11. Dana M. Pike, “Is the Plan of Salvation Attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?” in *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 74.

12. Parry and Pike, *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, vii. This volume is a helpful introduction to the entire subject in the context of the restored gospel.

13. Geza Vermes, trans., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1998).

14. See Wayment, “False Gospels,” 292–303.

15. See J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

16. I have come to believe that Moses 1:41 suggests that restoration of the “plain and precious” truths will come through anointed prophetic leaders, such as Joseph Smith in the case of the Book of Moses, not by purely scholarly activity. Certainly, academics have a place in the continuing pursuit of truth through their scholarly activities to provide nuanced interpretations of historical material as they

attempt to reconstruct the past. The word of the Lord, however, will mostly likely come through those appointed by God to bring forth new scripture to the world (see 1 Nephi 13:39–40).

17. Stephen E. Robinson, “Lying for God: The Uses of Apocrypha,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 148.

18. Robinson, “Lying for God,” 148–49; emphasis in original

19. This is particularly true of the Revised Standard Version, first published in 1962. However, other modern translations have not only accessed earlier manuscripts, thus getting us closer to the original autographs, but also have been completed by competent scholars who are dedicated disciples and who believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and God.

20. See James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1995), 1–4.

21. See Kent P. Jackson, “New Discoveries in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” *Religious Educator* 6, no. 3 (2005): 153.

22. See Kent P. Jackson, Frank Judd and David R. Seely, “Chapters, Verse, Punctuation, Spelling, and Italics in the King James Version,” *Religious Educator* 7, no. 2 (2005): 53.

23. See chapter 5, “Why the King James Version?” of Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford, 1991), 148–81.

24. Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), vii.

25. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 133.

26. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd. ed rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:238.

27. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004).

28. 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).

29. Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:396.

30. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 290.

31. Spencer W. Kimball, *Climbing the Hills Just Ahead: Three Addresses*, BYU Centennial Convocation, October 10, 1975.

32. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984).

33. For this doctrinal contribution, see Kent P. Jackson, ed. and comp., *Joseph Smith’s Commentary on the Bible* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).

34. Bible Dictionary, preface, 600; emphasis added.

35. “It is safe to say, based on current research, that every apocryphal text that claims to preserve the teachings of a New Testament figure was forged. The same cannot be said of the canonical texts, which indicates that the early Church was quite successful at separating the wheat from the chaff. At the same time, however, the apocryphal literature can inform us about the development of the Church in

the postapostolic era” (Wayment, “False Gospels,” 300).

36. The story of the translators and publishers of the English Bible is remarkable. The best book to date on the history of the English Bible is David Daniell’s masterful work, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

37. Additionally, Paul may have preserved for us in this pericope a pre-Pauline formula—something that existed in the early Church.

38. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), 168; as cited in Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 287.