Foreword

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Knowledge of high things is hard to gain;
and surely knowledge of names is no small matter.
— Socrates[1]

During his famous conversation with Kuki Shūzō, German philosopher Martin Heidegger playfully[2] connected the name of Hermes, the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology, to the etymology of "hermeneutics," the formal study of interpretation. In contrast to ancient oracles who acted as simple mouthpieces, announcing divine words verbatim, Hermes took upon himself the additional role of interpreter, commenting on the meaning of the messages in ways that would allow perceptive hearers to act productively.[3] Continuing Heidegger's wordplay,[4] Hans-Georg Gadamer elaborated the thinking of his mentor about the role of Hermes:[5]

> the business of the *hermeneus* [interpreter] was [not merely that of a transmitter, but] more precisely that of translating something foreign or unintelligible into the language everybody speaks and understands. The business of translating therefore … assumes a full understanding of the foreign language, but still more an understanding of the true sense of what is meant in the specific expression in the target language. An interpreter who wants to be intelligible must bring what is meant into clear linguistic expression again.[6] What hermeneutics accomplishes, then, is this bringing of something out of one world and into another, out of the world of the gods and into that of humans,[7] or out of the world of a foreign language into the world of one's own language.

In his engagement with ancient scripture, the Prophet Joseph Smith was not an oracle or translator in the conventional sense.[8] He was an interpreter par excellence. For example, in both his English-to-English

Bible "translation" and in his frequent commentaries on biblical passages within sermons, he rarely invoked the kinds of linguistic arguments that scholars use to ensure accurate transmission of sense. Although the Prophet's revisions to the Bible sometimes contain stunning echoes of ancient sources,[9] he understood that the primary intent of modern revelation is to give divine guidance to latter-day readers, not to provide precise matches to texts from other times.[10]

Joseph Smith's changes to the Bible were not confined to clarifications of vocabulary and phrasing. His modifications were novel and substantive. Yet he had little compunction about (and probably no awareness of) the fact that they often ran roughshod over generally accepted structural and source divisions within ancient texts. In him was the supreme confidence of an interpreter who knew that he possessed the same right to declare God's word as his prophetic predecessors.

In this sense, a prophet acting under divine inspiration "does not quote the Scriptures, but *gives* Scripture."[11] To build out needed doctrinal and historical context in Genesis, he drew unapologetically on his gifts as a seer to insert "long revealed additions that have little or no biblical parallel, such as the visions of Moses and Enoch." To increase the intelligibility of the sacred book, he made frequent "common-sense" changes, interpretive additions, "grammatical improvements, technical clarifications, and modernization of terms."[12] Moreover, it appears that he followed the counsel of his own revelations, sometimes adopting suggestions from a study of the "best books."[13] Seeking and receiving divine guidance, he modified or added to scripture in whatever way would advance his assignment to provide a "plainer translation."[14]

In significant respects, the Prophet's efforts to produce an English version of the Book of Mormon seems closer to the ordinary, narrow sense of "translation" than his work on the Bible. However, even in this earlier effort he was not entirely bound to a character-by-character, word-by-word[15] reproduction of the source text.

Instead, what evidence exists seems consistent with Brant Gardner's view that the English translation of the Book of Mormon more often than not exhibits functionalist rather than literalist equivalence with the original record. In other words, "unless a very specific, detailed textual analysis supports an argument that particular words or passages are either literalist or conceptual," Gardner favors the idea that Joseph Smith's translation "adheres to the organization and structures of the original [plate text] but is more flexible in the vocabulary."[16]

Importantly, even in those instances where the Prophet's Book of Mormon translation seems to have reproduced archaic literary features of the original plate text (which some scholars take as evidence that Joseph Smith was "reading" rather than composing his dictations[17]), the historical record suggests that ensuring a divinely adequate English expression of the Nephite source was an exhausting effort that is better described in terms of active, immersive spiritual engagement than as passive reception and recital.[18] In that light, it may be significant that the Book of Mormon itself refers to the process of rendering a text from one language to another under divine direction — whatever the exact nature of that process ultimately turns out to be[19] — more frequently as "interpretation" than as "translation."[20] As Kathleen Flake puts it, Joseph Smith did not see himself merely as "God's stenographer. Rather, he was an *interpreting* reader, and God the confirming authority."[21]

As with translation, the process of *reading* scripture requires a significant effort at interpretation.[22] As Richard Palmer observed:[23]

> Ancient texts are, for moderns, doubly alien: they are ancient and they are in *another language*. Their interpreter … is a bridge to somewhere else, he is a mediator between a mysterious other world and the clean, well-lighted, intelligible world in which "we live, and move, and have our being."[24]

Obviously, the more we can know about the ancient context of scripture for ourselves, the better prepared we are for a "meeting of minds"[25] with those who produced them.[26] Because it is difficult to translate the subtleties of expressions from foreign languages and times into English,[27] we would do well to "translate" *ourselves*, insofar as possible, into the language and world of scripture writers.[28] As Hugh Nibley observed, the value of knowing ancient languages is not merely to help us find better English translations of difficult passages, but also "to read, ponder, savor, and, if possible, sound the depths of those things which *cannot* be translated but only tentatively paraphrased."[29]

To "sound the depths" of scripture in the fashion that Nibley recommended, it is not enough to be able to grasp the basic sense of a passage in the original tongue word-by-word. Each word, each phrase, and each passage is laden with the history, culture, and worldviews of antiquity[30] — subjects that cannot be learned by rote but must be absorbed by frequent immersion in old books.[31] Once we begin to recognize and master the vocabulary, basic context, and the presence of allusions to previous texts within a given passage, we must then engage with the pervasive symbolism, typologies, and poetic imagery

of scripture. These are bolstered in turn by an impressive scaffolding of structures and rhetorical devices at various scales, both large and small, with which we must become acquainted.

In all this, we must never lose sight of the most rigorous requirement of all: namely, that we cannot "receive the word of truth" except "by the Spirit of truth."[32] Notably, Ben McGuire observes that sometimes, rather than leading us to interpret scripture by learning "all we can about the context in which it was written," the Spirit may direct us instead to "reinterpret it radically for a new context."[33]

For wanderers and merchants in ancient Greece who could scarcely hope for an apparition of Hermes himself, stone pillars called *hermae*, topped with a bust of the divine helper, were placed strategically at entrances, boundaries, and rural crossroads.[34] Like the stones that bore his name, Hermes rarely provided simple, unambiguous indications of the way forward to lost travelers.[35] However, his multivalent explanations could help reveal "the latent potential [for successful action] within one's world of involvement. For example, Hermes [provided] Odysseus with the ability to recognize previously unseen attributes of his surroundings and [suggested] how he might put them into effective use in new situations."[36]

As supplements to their own efforts, students of scripture can benefit from careful observations of other interpreters that serve as *hermae*, increasing their "ability to recognize previously unseen attributes" within scripture.[37] Like trails of breadcrumbs, these indications point our attention to features that invite further reflection. We cannot, of course, expect our study of such features to reduce the riches of scripture to a single, "correct" reading.[38] However, by considering the implications of these sorts of clues in conjunction with other, complementary approaches to inquiry, our ability to benefit from scripture increases.[39]

Besides general works aimed at improving our capacity as students of scripture,[40] more specialized publications focus on a variety of literary patterns that, when identified, can help us infer how authors and editors might have wanted us to read the text.[41] Remarkably, many patterns found in the Bible — and sometimes in Mesoamerica[42] — are also apparent in the Book of Mormon, buttressing the arguments of Latter-day Saint scholars that this modern production derives from a work of antiquity. However, as impressive as such arguments may be, the most significant and long-lasting impact of learning something about the literary features of the Book of Mormon will be personal rather than apologetic. Though defending church history and doctrine has its place

in cracking open by a hair the doors of faith for a skeptical world,[43] the authors of the Book of Mormon were not much concerned with kindling our curiosity, being more intent that we come to Christ.[44]

In the present book, Matthew Bowen nourishes both our intellects and our souls. Though other LDS scholars have performed impressive research on the origins of scripture names, particularly those found in the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham, Bowen's work in this regard has made a unique contribution.

Using an array of linguistic, literary, and historical arguments, the impressive online Book of Mormon onomasticon[45] discusses a wide range of possible etymologies for proper names. For instance, in the entry on Nephi, it evaluates parallels in the apocrypha, cognates with diverse meanings in Egyptian, Semitic, Akkadian, and Mesoamerican tongues, and even a connection (deemed improbable) with the Hebrew word for prophet, *nābī*ʾ. Bowen's careful analysis helps narrow these many possibilities to a plausible few.

However, unlike analyses of a purely linguistic nature that have little to do with the Book of Mormon itself, Bowen makes good use of internal evidence for his claims, beginning with Nephi's self-declaration that he was "born of goodly parents"[46] and continuing with repeated variations on the theme of "goodness" throughout Nephi's writings. As far as I'm concerned, Bowen's analysis clinches the case for the conclusion of the onomasticon, first suggested by John Gee,[47] that "the most likely derivation [of Nephi] … is ancient Egyptian *nfr* 'good, beautiful.'"[48]

Significantly, Bowen does more than simply establish the etymologies of names. In addition, his mode of analysis vividly demonstrates that recognizing the wordplay of names not only can help us hear what is being said within a given passage but also can allow us to sense significant, sympathetic reverberations among texts widely separated in their settings. Moreover, the resulting insights can help resolve misunderstandings of great consequence.

For instance, in chapter 4, Bowen discusses the apostle Paul's dramatic arguments that both Jews and Gentiles must exhibit evidence of an "inward" circumcision in order to please God. Bowen leads us through Paul's wordplay and what N. T. Wright calls his "dense Greek" that "almost defies translation." By this means, Bowen makes it clear how faulty interpretation of Paul's rhetoric became the seed for mistaken Gentile Christian beliefs: both that Jews were rejected by God and also that scripture justified their subsequent mistreatment. Bowen not only shows that these conclusions drawn from the New Testament are

unwarranted, he also demonstrates through his companion analysis of wordplay in the Nephite record that "the strongest scriptural warnings against anti-Semitism are to be found in the Book of Mormon." Such knowledge opens up the meaning of the scriptures to us. It allows us to unfold their meaning in their ancient context while also providing parallels that help us liken and apply the scriptures to ourselves.

If Bowen's impressive mastery of the languages of biblical sources were not enough, his gift for reading Hebrew and Egyptian idioms back into the Book of Mormon through the dark and sometimes refractory mirror of its English translation is both a tour de force and a delight. In Bowen's capable hands, names become keywords indeed, unlocking "great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures."[49]

The word "interpretation" in the LDS edition of the New Testament is usually translated from its general-purpose Greek equivalent *hermēneia* (ἑρμηνεία). However, an exception can be found in the farewell speech of 2 Peter, where readers are reminded "that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation."[50] In this verse, "interpretation" has been translated from the Greek term *epilusis* (ἐπίλυσις),[51] which has a basic meaning of "unfolding."[52] The implication seems to be that "hard knots of scripture"[53] cannot be unloosed simply by clever human investigation but must be interpreted through reliance on the same divine Spirit that inspired the prophet to speak in the first instance. Thus, both the prophet and later interpreters are charged to be faithful echoes of the Divine Voice,[54] even as they multiply their own words to explain the word of God to others. In this respect, it is apparent that Bowen, a man of deep-seated religious conviction, seeks to provide a faithful echo of the Divine Voice in his explanations.[55]

Taking issue with Hermogenes (i.e., son of Hermes), the interlocutor of Socrates who argued that the words of a language are no more than arbitrary conventions, Bowen makes us nod in agreement with the idea of Cratylus that there may be a "natural correctness of names."[56] More precisely, we might say that in scripture God seems to have sponsored abundant examples of the skillful use of the names of things, alongside other kinds of scriptural *hermae*, as helpful indications to readers. Significantly, Bowen's contribution "is not so much about proving things about the text as it is about coming to understand it, with the recognition that it is not a text that is easy to read."[57]

In contrast to the would-be Christian disciple Hermogenes who "turned away"[58] from Paul and therefore "unto fables,"[59] Bowen introduces us more fully to the intimate words of "the Word, even the

messenger of salvation"[60] who "speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be."[61]

Bowen's writings affirm that, unlike the merely mythical Hermes, our Redeemer is no trickster. He always means what He says, and bends His whole being to reveal His meaning to those who have "ears to hear."[62] Though Himself bursting with the brilliance of unencompassed Light and Truth, He is quick to adapt to the "capacity of the weakest of all saints,"[63] speaking simply and tenderly to His "little children,"[64] "after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding."[65] He is not a passive Savior who simply arches His gargantuan back to span the "great gulf"[66] separating us from God and then waits for us to do the crossing alone. Rather, He is an active Mediator,[67] one who passionately intervenes and intercedes,[68] "the just for the unjust,"[69] that He might bring "all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel"[70] safely to the other side.[71] In His condescension He comes down to us, that we may ascend to the Father.[72] He does this because He is filled with "pure love,"[73] and because He knows that "His menial services are needed in the dust of our human trails, [as much as] His dignity is needed in the empyrean."[74]

These articles by a modern-day, baptized Hermogenes (most having been published in a journal fittingly named *Interpreter*) not only showcase the sparkling literary jewels of scripture for the limelight of public display and admiration, but also — and more importantly — can help each one of us find our way "out of darkness into [God's] marvellous light."[75]

— Jeffrey M. Bradshaw
Kinshasa, DR Congo
December 23, 2017

Endnotes

1 Plato, *Cratylus*, translated by Harold M. Fowler. Perseus Digital Library, ed. Gregory R. Crane (Tufts University), 384a-384b. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext% 3A1999.01.0172%3Atext%3DCrat.%3Apage%3D384.

2 Heidegger, realizing the doubtful nature of this etymological connection [see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, translated by Richard E. Palmer. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 438n1; https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0810119889.], character-

ized his logic as a "Spiel des Denkens" (literally "game of thinking") [Martin Heidegger, "Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache: Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Frangenden," in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen, Germany: Neske, 1959), 121; http://www. mystiek.net/over-deze-site/wozu-lyrik-heute/3-2/.], a style of exposition that, in this case, seemed to him "more compelling than the rigor of science" [Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer," in *On the Way to Language* (New York City, NY: Harper and Row, 1971), 29.]. Socrates, of course, was presented by Plato as having played a similar game in his dialogue with Hermogenes long before: "I should imagine that the name Hermes has to do with speech, and signifies that he is the interpreter (*ermeneus*)" (Plato, *Cratylus*, 407e).

3   See Josef Bleicher, cited in Suzanne Ringler, "Sous le regard d'Hermès," *Hermēneus: Revista de Traducción e Interpretación* 1 (1999): 1. http://www5.uva.es/hermeneus/hermeneus/01/art7_01. pdf.

4   See Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader*, 438n1.

5   Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and philosophical hermeneutics," in *The Gadamer Reader*, 44. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Aesthetics and hermeneutics," in *The Gadamer Reader*, 127: "The art of conveying what is said in a foreign language to the understanding of another person, hermeneutics is not without reason named after Hermes, the interpreter of the divine message to mankind."

6   Note, however, that scripture translation poses particular problems in this respect. As Ben McGuire explains (personal e-mail, 15 August 2017):

> We run into a problem — particularly with scripture, in that the genre itself discourages translation "into clear linguistic expression." In a way, we start from a valuation schema of scripture translations that is very different from the valuation schema we would use for a novel or a scientific paper. If we took the biblical text and translated it by fully moving it "into clear linguistic expression" we might very well call it a paraphrase when we were done. We prefer biblical texts that *aren't* quite so clear in their linguistic expression — we like the idea of "translationese" at times in these texts because it lends towards understanding the

texts and reading them in certain ways. … And this tends to get in the way of easy reading (and even easy application). This is why (at least in part) reading scriptures in English requires a significant effort at interpretation because we are (speaking collectively) quite opposed to changing the text to create a more completely "clear linguistic expression."

As one example of a pragmatic objective that seems to have trumped the criterion of "clear linguistic expression" in Joseph Smith's scripture translations, consider the abundant use of King James English. When the Prophet uses this familiar but more challenging style in modern scripture, it is a direct signal to readers about interconnections with the Bible that otherwise might have been difficult to detect, fulfilling the Book of Mormon prediction that old and new revelations would "grow together" as one (2 Nephi 3:12).

King James phrasing may have been a deliberate part of what McGuire calls "the rhetorical strategy of the text in translation" [Benjamin L. McGuire, "The Book of Mormon as a communicative act: Translation in context," presentation at the 2016 FairMormon Conference (Provo, UT). http://www.fairmormon.org/ perspectives/fair-conferences/2016-fairmormon-conference/ book-mormon-communicative-act#_ftnref11.] See also Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), Kindle Location 1521-1647, 1900-2481. This refers, among other things, to the idea that the use of archaic phrasing familiar to Joseph Smith's Bible-reading contemporaries, perhaps a wholly unconscious part of the translation process (ibid., Kindle Location 4349), might have helped facilitate the acceptance of modern revelation as authentic scripture on a par with the Old and New Testaments. Considering this and other elements of what may have been part of the "rhetorical strategy" of the Book of Mormon, McGuire invites us to ask ourselves questions such as the following (McGuire, "Book of Mormon as a communicative act"):

When we see places where the text engages New Testament ideas and values, is this potentially the way that a translator understood the text in the modern context? Is this the way the translator believed that the original author would have expressed himself, if he had written it in English, and in a

modern time frame? And when we see text that is nearly identical to the King James, [is it] perhaps … there as a way of helping its first readers identify the biblical passages being referred to, instead of suggesting that they are completely literal translations from the gold plates that just happen to validate the King James translation[?]

Capturing the sense in which the purpose of the work of scripture as a whole may be embodied competently in translation by means of parts that differ greatly in the derivative work from those in the original, Walter Benjamin gives the following illustration [Walter Benjamin, "The task of the translator," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1923–1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, translated by Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 260.]:

> Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.

For separate considerations on the special nature of scripture translation as opposed to translation of other kinds of works, see ibid., pp. 262–263.

7 Rebecca Diggs, "Under-Standing: The divine messenger Hermes and the character of hermeneutics," *Mythological Studies Journal* (2010) 1, no. 1, http://journals.sfu.ca/pgi/index.php/pacificamyth/article/viewArticle/16/50, describes how the liminal qualities of Hermes (see, e.g., Richard E. Palmer, "The liminality of Hermes and the meaning of hermeneutics," in *MacMurray College Faculty Writings.* https://www.mac.edu/faculty/richardpalmer/liminality.html.), his ability to dwell simultaneously in more than one world, was anticipated at his birth:

> In the shadowy hours of dawn, deep in an underground cave, the precocious babe Hermes is born. From this moment, nothing remains untouchable, no realm unreachable. The son of mighty Zeus and the lowly earth nymph Maia, Hermes is the very essence of in-between-ness. Half god,

half nymph, his foundation lies with a foot in two very different worlds, to which neither does he quite belong. An inventor from his first breath, however, Hermes realizes this misfit status as a windfall and eventually uses it to become a double agent, discreetly permeating the boundaries at which the heavens, earth, and underworld meet.

8 Louis Zucker takes a similar perspective in his insightful and sympathetic description of Joseph Smith as a student of Hebrew:

> It has not been my intention to imply that Joseph Smith's free-handling of Hebrew grammar and the language of the Hebrew Bible shows ineptitude. Professor Seixas[, his teacher in Kirtland,] was undoubtedly well pleased with him as a Hebrew student. I simply do not think he cared to appear before the world as a meticulous Hebraist. He used the Hebrew as he chose, as an artist, inside his frame of reference, in accordance with his taste, according to the effect he wanted to produce, as a foundation for theological innovations. [Louis C. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a student of Hebrew," *Dialogue* 3, no. 2 (1968), 53.]

In this respect, Joseph Smith's approach resembled, in its degree, not only the aesthetic hermeneutics of Gadamer and Balthasar [Jason Paul Bourgeois, "The aesthetic hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Urs von Balthasar (Paper 7)," in *Marian Library/IMRI Faculty Publications* (University of Dayton eCommons, 2007). http://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=imri_faculty_publications. Cf. discussion of dialogic revelation in Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002), 209–39 and Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).], but also — and more importantly — that of scholars in the long tradition of Jewish scripture exegesis who played freely with nuances in Hebrew to search for hidden meanings and intended rhetorical effect. James Kugel laments the lack of respect for these ancient modes of biblical interpretation in our day:

> What [modern exegetes] generally share (although there are, of course, exceptions) is a profound discomfort with the actual interpretations that the ancients came up with

— these have little or no place in the way scripture is to be expounded today. Midrash, allegory, typology — what for? But the style of interpretation thus being rejected is precisely the one that characterizes the numerous interpretations of Old Testament texts by Jesus, Paul, and others in the New Testament, as well as by the succeeding generations of the founders of Christianity. …

Ancient interpretive methods may sometimes appear artificial, but this hardly means that abandoning them guarantees unbiased interpretation. … At times, [modern] interpretations are scarcely less forced than those of ancient midrashists (and usually far less clever). [James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York City, NY: Free Press, 2007), 674, 676.]

Though it would be wrong to minimize the genius evident in Joseph Smith's translations and revelations, it was not his personal gifts but the fact that he spoke with authority that made him a prophet. He was through and through an "apostle," in Kierkegaard's sense of the word [Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, translated by Douglas V. Steere (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1956), 21. For a similar point of view, see Hugh W. Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987). See also John S. Tanner, "Of men and mantles: Kierkegaard and the difference between a genius and an apostle," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (2001), 159–60 and Kugel, *How to Read*, 679–89.].

Of course, any strict dichotomy between translation and interpretation is artificial. As Marcel Kahne writes:

Indeed, I think that a translator must be an interpreter, even when his task obliges him to stick closely to the original text. The choice of a word (due to its particular connotation) and the way one decides to turn a phrase (which can make all the difference between a positive, negative, polemical, or doubtful tone) are interpretations by their very nature. Translators cannot help but inject themselves into their work. For example, two translators, both members of the Church but varying in their spiritual maturity, will produce different kinds of translations. The translator with a deeper understanding and testimony of the Gospel will bring out essential nuances in the original that are imperceptible

to the other translator. (Marcel Kahne, personal e-mail, translation mine.)

9 For instance, see detailed comparisons of the heavenly ascent of Moses (Moses 1) with the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Publishing, 2014), 23–50; and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve: In God's Image and Likeness 1* (Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014), 36–39, 42–70, 694. See also Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, et al., *Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel: In God's Image and Likeness 2* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 32–85, 102–164, 459–464; David J. Larsen, "Enoch and the City of Zion: Can an entire community ascend to heaven?" *BYU Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014), 25–37; and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "The LDS book of Enoch as the culminating story of a temple text," *BYU Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014), 39–73 for comparisons of Joseph Smith's Enoch chapters (Moses 6–7) with other ancient sources.

Kathleen Flake has argued convincingly that Joseph Smith understood his lengthy revelatory additions to the early chapters of Genesis as narratives based on historical figures and events, and not merely as flights of religious fiction invented for pragmatic ends: "Smith's use of 'translate,' for all its discursive weaknesses, conveyed his experience of creative agency before a text and, simultaneously, his sense of being bound by the text as an account of events or as history. Taking the most obvious example, it can be said that, notwithstanding its English source, the JST asks to be understood as a translation, because it does not arise out of the infinite variations available to fiction but, rather, within the limits of an existing narrative of past events" (Kathleen Flake, "Translating time: The nature and function of Joseph Smith's narrative canon," *Journal of Religion* 87, no. 3 (October 2007), 507-508. http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/facultynews/Flake Translating Time.pdf (accessed December 2, 2017).

10 Kathleen Flake observes insightfully that Joseph Smith's scriptural narratives, as with biblical narrative, make "more than a claim to history": they effect a change in believers' perceptions of the past and anticipations of the future so as to change the way they "act in the present" (Flake, "Translating time," 525). By this means, divine

revelation about the past and the future acquires the "power to shape reality, not merely describe it" (ibid., 526).

Concurring with the idea that suiting the contents of scripture to the needs and capacities of the people was more important than strict conformity to fixed source text, on more than one occasion Brigham Young asserted that the Bible and the Book of Mormon would "materially differ" if they were to be re-translated:

> When God speaks to the people, he does it in a manner to suit their circumstances and capacities. He spoke to the children of Jacob through Moses, as a blind, stiff-necked people, and when Jesus and his Apostles came they talked with the Jews as a benighted, wicked, selfish people. They would not receive the Gospel, though presented to them by the Son of God in all its righteousness, beauty and glory. Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation. According as people are willing to receive the things of God, so the heavens send forth their blessings. If the people are stiff-necked, the Lord can tell them but little. [Brigham Young, "The Kingdom of God (Remarks made in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, 13 July 1862)," *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool and London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1853–1886), 9:311. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Journal_of_Discourses/Volume_9/The_Kingdom_of_God (accessed July 25, 2017).]

> "He supposed there has not yet been a perfect revelation given, because we cannot understand it, yet we receive a little here and a little there. He should not be stumbled if the prophet should translate the Bible forty thousand times over and yet it should be different in some places every time, because when God speaks, he always speaks according to the capacity of the people." Furthermore, God had much yet to reveal to the Latter-day Saints. Brigham commented, "He does not know how much more there is in the bosom of the Almighty. When God sees that his people have enlarged upon what he has given us he will give us more." [R. Eric Smith and Matthew J. Grow, "Council of Fifty in Nauvoo,

Illinois," in *Church History: Perspectives on Church History*. https://history.lds.org/article/council-of-fifty-minutes-joseph-smith-papers?lang=eng. This cites Brigham Young in Joseph Smith, Jr., et al., *Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846. The Joseph Smith Papers, Administrative Records 1*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), 119.]

"We have heard President Brigham Young state that the Prophet before his death had spoken to him about going through the translation of the scriptures again and perfecting it upon points of doctrine which the Lord had restrained him from giving in plainness and fulness at the time of which we write." [George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Deseret News, 1907), 129n.]

In trying to imagine what kinds of changes might be made to the current text of the Book of Mormon should it someday be prophetically retranslated for a people of greater spiritual capacity, one need not envisage a wholesale reversal of major elements of the basic story, nor even the elimination of awkward Hebraisms and King James English. Instead, we might look to Joseph Smith's new translation of the Bible as a plausible model of what one might expect from a new translation of the Book of Mormon.

In the case of the Bible, the most substantial changes the Prophet made were large additions illuminating the lives, revelations, and teachings of biblical characters (e.g., Adam and Eve, Enoch, Melchizedek, Moses), including whole chapters that were not to be shown "unto any except them that believe" (Moses 1:42). Moreover, it was not uncommon for him to have added and reworded verses in order to associate disparate passages, allowing separate books of scripture to "grow together" as one (2 Nephi 3:19. See, e.g., JST Genesis 14:25–40 and Hebrews 11:33–34; JST Genesis 48:5–11 and 2 Nephi 3:5ff.; JST Exodus 34:1–2 and D&C 84:19–25). Finally, numerous small clarifications and corrections — some doctrinally significant, others simply making the existing meaning more plain — appear throughout the Bible translation manuscripts. Arguably, these same sorts of changes would recur were the Book of Mormon to be re-translated prophetically.

The usual explanation for why important stories and teachings were deliberately abridged or left out of the scriptural records as we now have them is that readers are not yet spiritually ready to receive them because of their especially sacred nature (e.g., Ether 3:17ff.; 4:7–16; D&C 93:18–19). For this reason, Brigham Young understood that the Lord "restrained [Joseph Smith] from giving [them] in plainness and fulness." (Cannon, *Life*, 129n.) Additional confirmation for this conclusion comes from the limited evidence of secondhand remembrances of material purportedly among the lost pages of Lehi's account in the Book of Mormon. For example, drawing on a retrospective interview of Joseph Smith, Sr., by Fayette Lapham {[La]Fayette Lapham, "Joseph Smith, Sr., Interview with Fayette Lapham," in *Early Mormon Documents*, edited by Dan Vogel [Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1996], 1:466. http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Historical_Magazine_%28second_series%29/Volume_7/May_1870/Interview_with_the_Father_of_Joseph_Smith&oldid=314358.}, Don Bradley has explored a brief statement that speaks of receiving revelation through an exchange of human and divine voices inside a Nephite "Tabernacle." [Don Bradley, "Piercing the veil: Temple worship in the lost 116 pages," presented at the 2012 FAIR Conference (Salt Lake City, UT, August 2–3, 2012). http://www.fairlds.org/fair-conferences/2012-fair-conference/2012-piercing-the-veil-temple-worship-in-the-lost-116-pages.]

11 Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1979), 350, emphasis added.

With a generous openness to Joseph Smith's claim of the exercise of seeric gifts, Samuel Zinner suggests that "it might prove fruitful to apply to Joseph Smith's modern-era Enoch writings Michael Stone's model whereby he posits that at least some ancient post-canonical literature … may have been created under the impact of visionary experiences rather than having been authored exclusively by imitating previous literary works" (Samuel Zinner, "'Zion' and 'Jerusalem' as Lady Wisdom in Moses 7 and Nephi's Tree of Life Vision: Reverberations of Enoch and Asherah in Nineteenth Century America," in *Textual and Comparative Explorations in 1 & 2 Enoch*, edited by Samuel Zinner, *Ancient Scripture and Texts 1* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 268-69; reprint, *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*

12 (2014): 281-323. http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/zion-and-jerusalem-as-lady-wisdom-in-moses-7-and-nephis-tree-of-life-vision/ (accessed December 2, 2017).

For a discussion and examples of visionary experiences relating to Joseph Smith's translation projects, see Flake, "Translating time," 506-507.

12 Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55–57.

13 D&C 88:118; 109:7, 14. Richard L. Bushman observed: "Judging by his actions, Joseph believed in the revelations more than anyone. From the beginning, he was his own best follower. Having the word of God at his back gave him enormous confidence" [Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling. A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 173].

With respect to Joseph Smith's use of the "best books," not only did he incorporate concepts and wording from his own revelations and his Book of Mormon translation into his Bible revision, but also, in an estimated 200–300 cases, he seems to have adopted suggestions from a copy of Adam Clarke's Bible commentary that he had received as a gift from his brother-in-law Nathaniel Lewis. See Thomas A. Wayment, "Joseph Smith's Use of Adam Clarke's Commentary in the JST," interview by Laura Harris Hales in *LDS Perspectives Podcast*, Episode 55: Joseph Smith's Use of Adam Clarke's Commentary. http://www.ldsperspectives.com/2017/09/27/jst-adam-clarke-commentary/ (accessed October 1, 2017).

Significantly, none of the parallels with Clarke's commentary occur in his translation of Genesis 1–24. These chapters, which were written out in full rather than as notations within the printed Bible that was used for translation purposes, contain the highest proportion of long, revealed additions to the Bible. See Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*, 13–14.

14 D&C 128:18.

15 David Whitmer gave the following description of the translation process: "One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read

off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear." [David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ by a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Richmond, MO, 1887), 12. https://ia601406.us.archive.org/8/items/addresstoallbeli00whit/addresstoallbeli00whit.pdf.]

However, Stephen Ricks points out difficulties in Whitmer's description:

> This statement is somewhat problematical from a linguistic point of view. It suggests a simple one-for-one equivalency of words in the original language of the Book of Mormon and in English. This is scarcely likely in two closely related modern languages, much less in an ancient and modern language from two different language families. An examination of any page of an interlinear text (a text with a source language, such as Greek, Latin, or Hebrew, with a translation into a target language such as English below the line) will reveal a multitude of divergences from a word-for-word translation: some words are left untranslated, some are translated with more than one word, and often the order of words in the source language does not parallel (sometimes not even closely) the word order of the target language. A word-for-word rendering, as David Whitmer's statement seems to imply, would have resulted in a syntactic and semantic puree. [Stephen D. Ricks, "Notes and communications: Translation of the Book of Mormon: Interpreting the evidence," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993), 203. http://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/2/2/S00014-50aa6550e386814Ricks.pdf.]

For more on this issue, see McGuire, "Book of Mormon as a communicative act."

16   Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 247, 156. With respect to the Book of Mormon, scholars differ in their understanding about the degree to which the vocabulary and phrasing of Joseph Smith's translation was tightly controlled. However, there is a consensus among most believing scholars that at least some features of the plate text of the Book of Mormon survived translation (ibid., 150–52, 197–204).

For instance, Gardner considers, among other types of examples, the proper names of the Book of Mormon as specific instances of literal translation. He also finds examples of structural elements (e.g., chiasms and other literary features) in the Book of Mormon that are neither random nor "part of the common repertoire available to a writer in upstate New York in the 1830s. They represent features of the plate text that have survived the translation process" (ibid., 204). For summary discussions of Gardner's detailed analyses provided throughout the book, see ibid., especially 227–47, 279–83.

17   Though the English translation of the Book of Mormon seems to have involved an important visual component, it was not a merely mechanical process of "reading" in the ordinary sense. Brant Gardner has discussed possible explanations for how pre-linguistic inspiration and the mental/physiological processes of using a seer stone might have come together during translation (ibid., Kindle Edition, Locations 3277–3545). Although Gardner's proposal cannot tell us anything about the process of inspiration itself, it suggests how revelation about the contents of the Nephite record could have been mediated by mental processes that were involved in the choice of specific English words in translation.

Apart from cognitive considerations, one's fitness to translate by the gift of divine seership is inescapably a religious and moral matter. Whatever help one's native gifts, cultural milieu, personal experience, educational opportunities, or even divinely prepared "technology" might provide to a translator devoid of scholarly method and critical apparatus, it would be insufficient compensation for the essential prerequisites that enable the Holy Ghost to be a "constant companion" (D&C 121:46) to the translator. As Greg Smith observed (G. L. Smith, personal e-mail), the necessary virtue to access God's power:

is not something that can be granted simply by more [mental or technologically-assisted] processing speed — as if I would be kinder and wiser if I could access a thousand articles in an hour instead of ten. … We do not become like God through achieving technological mastery, or through any other exercise of power over nature. The challenge is not finding individuals who can master and carry out a scientific or technical program. Instead, the difficulty lies in

finding or developing those who will not abuse power when they have it [see D&C 121:39].

18 See, e.g., D&C 9:7–9.

19 Note that Joseph Smith declined to relate the specifics of the translation process himself even in response to direct questioning in private company from believing friends. For example, in response to a request in 1831 by his brother Hyrum to explain the translation process more fully, Joseph Smith said that "it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and … it was not expedient for him to relate these things" [Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Documentary History)* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1978), 1:220].

20 Within the Book of Mormon, "translate" and "translation" are mentioned in Mosiah 8:11, 12 (twice), 13; Alma 9:21; and Ether 5:1. By way of contrast, we find the following terms used to describe the process of rendering a text in an unknown language into a familiar tongue: "interpret" (Omni 1:20; Mosiah 8:6, 11; Mosiah 21:28; and Ether 3:22), "interpretation" (Introduction (twice), Mormon 9:34 and Ether 2:3, 4:5, 15:8), "interpreters" (Mosiah 8:13, 19; Mosiah 28:20; Alma 37:21, 24; and Ether 4:5). In addition, there is a reference to the "interpretation" of the symbolism of the tree of life (1 Nephi 11:11), and to the gift of "interpretation" of tongues (Mormon 9:7).

21 Flake, "Translating time," 507–508, emphasis added. http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/facultynews/Flake Translating Time.pdf. Cf. Grant Underwood, "Revelation, text, and revision: Insight from the Book of Commandments and Revelations," *BYU Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009), 76–81, 83–84.

22 For a description and in-depth example of the difficulties that modern students encounter even in their efforts to understand Joseph Smith, a prophet from relatively recent times, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "Now that we *have* the words of Joseph Smith, how shall we begin to *understand* them? Illustrations of selected challenges within the 21 May 1843 Discourse on 2 Peter 1." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 47–150.

23 Palmer, "Liminality."

24 Acts 17:28.

25 Hugh Nibley observed that a "translation must … be not a matching of dictionaries but a meeting of minds" [Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005), 52.]. Ideally, with respect to scripture, this meeting of minds must include the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

26 William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10–13.

27 The insufficiency of a language to contain the fulness of revelation is not due merely to linguistic defects narrowly defined, but also in that language itself is inextricably bound up in culture. Basic orientations toward time, space, and movement varied widely in the ancient world [Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York City, NY: W. W. Norton, 1970); Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001)] and differences of this sort between languages and cultures continue to our day. Even concrete, seemingly universal nouns like bread or cheese cannot be understood adequately without some understanding of their cultural connotations (Benjamin, "The task of the translator," 257; S. T. Whitlock, personal e-mail). The clear implication for heavenly communication, which must bridge the infinitely greater gap that President Spencer W. Kimball described as reaching "from the worm to the god" (Spencer W. Kimball, "Be Ye Therefore Perfect," BYU Devotional address given September 17, 1974, *BYU Speeches*. http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=6057. See Psalms 22:6; 8:4–6), is that divine things cannot be fully fathomed through ordinary language unillumined by the light of revelation (1 Corinthians 2:6–16).

When Joseph Smith complained of having to write in a "crooked, broken, scattered and imperfect language" [Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 287] he was not saying that any particular language, ancient or modern, was necessarily worse than the others. True it is that mapping the multiple senses of the smaller, more homogeneous vocabulary of biblical languages (about 8000 unique Hebrew and 5000 Greek terms in the Bible) into the large, lumpy melting pot of English presents singular challenges, especially if one accepts the

conclusions of some that English usage has suffered deterioration in modern times [see, e.g., Arthur Henry King, "Religion, art, and morality," in *Arm the Children: Faith's Response to a Violent World*, edited by Daryl Hague (Provo, UT: *BYU Studies*, 1998)]. However, the "real context of Joseph's struggle" had little to do with such things. Instead it was that the *experience* of "revelation (which is represented by the scriptural text) cannot ever be fully translated into … language. … Joseph's struggle was not in reading the text, but in writing of his own experiences" (McGuire, personal e-mail).

Our most pressing problem in understanding divine communication without divine help is not one of language, but more importantly in the fact that we do not yet "see as [we] are seen, [nor] know as [we] are known" (D&C 76:94). As Hugh Nibley characterized this problem, "You comprehend others only to the degree you are like them" [Hugh W. Nibley, "Unrolling the scrolls — some forgotten witnesses," in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, edited by John W. Welch, et al. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 165].

Making a similar point, Ludwig Wittgenstein famously observed: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (*Wenn ein Löwe sprechen könnte, wir könnten ihn nicht verstehen*) [Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), II:xi, 190c, 190]. This does not mean that a lion cannot have a language that in principle could be "translated" to our own, but rather that its whole experience of life is so different from ours that the result would be meaningless for us. In Wittgenstein's terms, this is due to the fact that we cannot enter into the lion's "form of life" (*Lebensform*). Similarly, "when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language[, we] do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them" (ibid., 190c).

Likewise, summarizing his struggles with the many difficulties in translating Joseph Smith's works into languages other than English, John Alleman concluded that an understanding of his words requires "a range of experience equal to that which the Prophet himself had, almost" [John C. Alleman, "Problems in translating the language of Joseph Smith," in *Conference on the*

Language of the Mormons (May 31, 1973), edited by Harold S. Madsen and John L. Sorenson (Provo, UT: Language Research Center, Brigham Young University, 1973), 22]. Considering that this was a man whose mind "stretch[ed] as high as the utmost heavens, and search[ed] into and contemplate[d] the deepest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity" to "commune with God" (Smith, Jr., *Writings*, 436), this is a humbling prospect!

28 Note that the first four senses of "translate" in Webster's 1828 dictionary had to do with the transfer of people or things, not with the process of expressing words in a different language [Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language in Two Volumes* (New York City, NY: S. Converse, 1828), s. v., Translate. https://archive.org/details/americandictiona02websrich.]:

> TRANSLA'TE, *verb transitive* [Latin *translatus*, from *transfero*; *trans*, over, and *fero*, to bear.]
>
> 1. To bear, carry or remove from one place to another. It is applied to the removal of a bishop from one see to another.
>
> The bishop of Rochester, when the king would have translated him to a better bishoprick, refused.
>
> 2. To remove or convey to heaven, as a human being, without death.
>
> By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death. Hebrews 11:15.
>
> 3. To transfer; to convey from one to another. 2 Samuel 3:10.
>
> 4. To cause to remove from one part of the body to another; as, to translate a disease.
>
> 5. To change.
>
> "Happy is your grace,
> "That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
> "Into so quiet and so sweet a style." [W. Shakespeare, "As You Like It," 2:1:18–20, 376.]
>
> 6. To interpret; to render into another language; to express the sense of one language in the words of another. The Old Testament was translated into the Greek language more than two hundred years before Christ. The Scriptures are now translated into most of the languages of Europe and Asia.

7. To explain.

29 Hugh W. Nibley, "Foreword to *Learn Greek through the New Testament*," in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008), 112, emphasis added.

30 Hugh Nibley illustrated this point with respect to the interpretation of Egyptian texts [Nibley, *Message*, 51–52. Cf. Susan Brind Morrow, *The Dawning Moon of the Mind: Unlocking the Pyramid Texts* (New York City, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015), 271–74]:

> The hardest question of all for the Egyptologist, according to Gundlach and Schenkel, is whether Egyptian writings can really be understood by anyone but an Egyptian. Go up to the man in the car (it used to be the man in the street) when he stops at a red light and deliver this sober message to him: "Osiris shall be towed toward the interior of the great pool of Khonsu," which is the first line of Joseph Smith Papyrus XI. If the man gives you a blank look or starts an ominous muttering, explain to him that the great lake of Khonsu is "probably a liturgical designation of the portion of the Nile that has to be crossed in order to reach the Theban cemetery on the west bank" and that Khonsu, or Khons, is a youthful moon-god. When the light changes, your new friend may proceed on his way knowing as much about the first line of our Book of Breathings as anybody else does — namely, nothing at all. Though as correct and literal as we can make it, the translation … is not a translation. It is nonsense.

31 As C. S. Lewis advised:

> It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to three new ones.

> Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. … None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books. Where they are true they will give us truths

which we half knew already. Where they are false they will aggravate the error with which we are already dangerously ill. The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can only be done by reading old books. … Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction. [C. S. Lewis, "On the reading of old books," in *God in the Dock*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 202. http://www.pacificaoc.org/wp-content/uploads/On-the-Reading-of-Old-Books.pdf.]

Elsewhere, Lewis elaborated:

Most of all, perhaps we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion.

A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age. [C. S. Lewis, "Learning in war-time," in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, edited by Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 58–59.]

Describing one of many differences between the modern age and the ancient past, Charles Taylor has discussed the process and consequences of the loss of "immediate certainty" of the moral/spiritual in Western culture. [Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 11ff. See also Talal Asad, "The construction of religion as an anthropological category," in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 47–52.]

32 D&C 50:19. "To put it bluntly," writes Nibley, "short of revelation, no real translation of [scripture — or, for that matter, any inspired interpretation or teaching —] is possible" (Nibley, *Message*, 55). The Prophet taught: "Could we read and comprehend all that

has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. … Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject." [Joseph Smith, Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1969), 324. Cf. Moroni 7:31–32 and Elder Willard Richards' original notes of the sermon published in Joseph Smith, Jr., et al., *Journals: May 1843–June 1844, The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals 3*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church Historian's Press, 2015), 109.]

Joseph Smith was democratic in his desire that every Saint receive the privilege of personal communion with the heavens and a revelatory unfolding of the meaning of scripture, decrying those who supposed that the plain truths of scripture were "mystery … and, therefore, are not to be understood" (Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 96). He taught that it "is the privilege of every Elder to speak the things of God" [Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 20, spelling and capitalization modernized] and that every Saint could come to a personal knowledge of the Father Himself (see, e.g., D&C 67:10; 88:68; 93:1). On one occasion, Joseph Smith said: "God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them, for the day must come when no man need say to his neighbor, Know ye the Lord; for all shall know Him … from the least to the greatest [see Jeremiah 31:34]" (Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 149. Cf. Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, edited by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1980), 4. https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/words-joseph-smith-contemporary-accounts-nauvoo-discourses-prophet-joseph/1843/21-may-1843.).

33   McGuire, personal e-mail. Joseph Smith set an example of flexibility in this regard. He taught not only that scripture should be interpreted by "enquiring" about the particulars of the situation that "drew out the answer" [Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 276. Cf. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 161, and Joseph Smith, Jr., et al., *Journals: December 1841–April 1843, The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals 2*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, et al. (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church Historian's Press,

2011), 252] for a given teaching in its ancient context, but also, like Nephi, radically reshaped some of his interpretations in order to "liken them" (1 Nephi 19:24. Cf. 1 Nephi 19:23; 2 Nephi 11:2, 8) to the situation of those living in the latter days. Indeed, on many occasions, the specifics of Joseph Smith's interpretations of scripture and doctrinal pronouncements can be understood only with reference to current events.

Thus, McGuire has argued that in contrast to the traditional view that our job in reading scripture is simply to uncover an absolute, "true" meaning that was meant to be grasped by the original audience, Joseph Smith frequently "ignores the increasing gap between the cultural and societal contexts of the past and present, and re-inscribes scripture within the context of the present" (McGuire, personal e-mail). McGuire has observed that Nephi's reading strategy, like that of Joseph Smith, is quite foreign to the traditional way of thinking about scripture interpretation: "He is consistently re-fashioning his interpretation of past scripture through the lens of his present revelations, and the outcome is something that [might have been] … unrecognizable to the earlier, original audience" [ibid., Cf. Benjamin L. McGuire, "Nephi: A postmodernist reading," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12 (2013), 58–59, n21, 68–71, 77. http://www. mormoninterpreter.com/nephi-a-postmodernist-reading/].

McGuire concludes that Nephi, who refrained from teaching his own people "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:1. Cf. v. 2), might have countered Nibley's suggestion that we need to study ancient languages and cultures with the suggestion that one should ultimately "desire to behold the things" that the prophets have seen and recorded for oneself (see 1 Nephi 11:3):

> The solution for Nephi isn't to learn the language, and the history, and to become immersed in everything relevant to the message as given to its original audience. It is instead to receive the revelation anew. Only in this way does the message of the revelation (as opposed to the scripture) become "clear linguistic expression." The goal is not for us to become interpreters of the word, but those who experience it for ourselves.

34 For a sampling of classic sources that refer to *hermae*, see, e.g., Aaron Atsma, "Hermes Cult 1," in *Theoi.* http://www.theoi.com/

Cult/HermesCult.html. So revered were these "customary square figures so common in the doorways of private houses and temples" that a particularly serious incident of intentional defacing was said by Thucydides to have required the immediate execution of the supposed perpetrators of this impiety [see Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (New York City, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1910), 6:27:1, 6:60:4. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0200.].

35   What complicated the character of Hermes was his ability to play the clever trickster in his words and actions. Often he shared his gifts with ambivalent intent, taking delight in the resulting consternation of his clients:

> Though Hermes is the epitome of one who facilitates trade and acts as a beacon for journeys, at the same time he is also an unsettling figure in these enterprises, the one who at all times threatens to jeopardize their successful outcome. A man of his word, he perjures himself and lies before the tribunal of Zeus. … Using all his artifices, he upsets situations, reverses their order, and confuses his opponents. … [I]n Olympus Hermes will represent orderly disorder, allowed and recognized by Zeus. [Yves Bonnefoy, *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 185–86. https://books.google.cd/books?id=ANC8Cwuk46sC&dq.]

36   Randall Teal, "Putting the 'Hermes' back in hermeneutics: Designing with the help of Heidegger's gods," presented at the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) National Conference, Washington, DC, 2011, 411. http://apps.acsa-arch.org/resources/proceedings/uploads/streamfile.aspx?path=ACSA.AM.99&name=ACSA.AM.99.51.pdf.

Gadamer had once suggested: "If one acknowledges hermeneutics to exist wherever a genuine art of understanding manifests itself, one must begin if not with Nestor in Iliad, then at least with Odysseus" [Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the scope and function of hermeneutical reflection," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, edited by David E. Linge, translated by G. B. Hess and Richard E. Palmer, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 22. http://www.westminster.edu/staff/nak/courses/documents/Gadamer Philosophical Hermeneutics.pdf.].

37 In a message to seminary and institute educators, Elder M. Russell Ballard commented as follows: "For you to understand the doctrinal and historical content and context of the scriptures and our history, you will need to study from the 'best books,' as the Lord directed [D&C 88:118; 109:7, 14]. The 'best books' include the scriptures, the teachings of modern prophets and apostles, and the best LDS scholarship available" [M. Russell Ballard, "The opportunities and responsibilities of CES teachers in the 21st century," in *CES Evening with a General Authority* (26 February 2016). https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/evening-with-a-general-authority/2016/02/the-opportunities-and-responsibilities-of-ces-teachers-in-the-21st-century?lang=eng&_r=1].

A list of supplemental resources from the Church and third-parties that can "enhance gospel learning and help provide answers to doctrinal, historical, and social questions" can be found in Chad H. Webb, "Answering difficult questions with supplemental resources," in *Seminary (26 July 2017).* https://www.lds.org/si/seminary/july-admin-message?lang=eng. See also "Gospel topics, essays, and other resources," in *Seminary Doctrinal Mastery.* https://www.lds.org/si/objective/doctrinal-mastery/gospel-sources?lang=eng.

38 Indeed, Gadamer argues that there cannot be "any single interpretation that is correct 'in itself,' [because e]very interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs." That does not mean "that the claim to correctness that every interpretation must make is dissolved into the subjective. … Interpretation is the act of understanding itself, which is realized — not just for the one whom one is interpreting but also for the interpreter himself" [Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 398–99. https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/truth-and-method-gadamer-2004.pdf.]. In short, meaning does not arise independently, but only within "conversation."

39 Ben McGuire has emphasized that every text, even simple ones, can be approached, understood, and used in multiple ways. For example, when studying a particular passage of scripture, we might approach it with the objective of understanding what we think the author is trying to say. At another time — say, in a teaching context — we might use the same passage to illustrate or

argue for a particular way of understanding a doctrine, a principle, or a historical tidbit. What we think about and emphasize about that passage will be different when we are thinking about teaching than when we are simply seeking understanding. Then again, I may begin to think about how the same passage could be applied to my personal situation, whether or not my circumstances are anything like what the scripture writer may have had in mind.

Happily, the understanding we gain by considering each perspective sheds light on all the others. For instance, a personal experience might help us understand the situation of the early Saints who were given a revelation found in the Doctrine and Covenants, just as learning something about the historical context of that revelation might help open up new ways for us to liken the scripture to ourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23–24). From a wider perspective, our individual experiences as we serve within the institutional Church today (especially as we observe the Church's ongoing expansion to new places in the world) might help us understand the institutional, doctrinal, and practical challenges faced in the early years of the Restoration. Likewise, our study of the Doctrine and Covenants through the lens of Church history (a point-of-view that would have been impossible for those to whom the revelations were originally directed) might help us recognize and understand changes and continuities over time in a modern Church led through continuing revelation. Each perspective can be helpful in its own way, so long as our search for understanding is not purely intellectual but also personally engaging — encouraging and enriching our service to God and our neighbor.

40 One of the finest and most accessible works by LDS authors in that genre is *Feasting Upon the Word* [Dennis Packard and Sandra Packard, *Feasting Upon the Word* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1981)], which will give the reader a good sense of Arthur Henry King's approach to the reading of English scripture. For another notable contribution to this genre, see James E. Faulconer, *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 1999). Both of these books are available in Amazon Kindle formats. In addition, Robert Alter's well-known works on literary features of the Hebrew Bible [Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985); and Robert

Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997)] remain classics on this subject. Alter's subsequent works that offer sensitive translations of selected books from the Hebrew Bible provide valuable exemplars of his method.

41 In addition to the brief introduction to rhetorical patterns in scripture given in Faulconer's *Scripture Study*, he points the reader to two excellent in-depth resources, Camille Williams' unpublished *Rhetoric Workbook* (available from Faulconer) and Donald Parry's specially formatted edition of the Book of Mormon, with its excellent general introduction to the subject [Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007). https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/bookchapters/ Poetic_Parallelisms_in_the_Book_of_Mormon_The_Complete_ Text_/Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon.pdf.]. Resources assembled by John W. Welch, a pioneer in chiasmus research, can be found at https://chiasmusresources.org/ (accessed October 1, 2017).

42 See, e.g., Brant A. Gardner, "Mormon's editorial method and meta-message," *FARMS Review* 21, no. 1 (2009), 92–94. https:// publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/review/21/1/S00010-5176a33305fca10Gardner.pdf.

43 Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has said: "Our testimonies aren't dependent on evidence — we still need that spiritual confirmation in the heart … — but not to seek for and not to acknowledge intellectual, documentable support for our belief when it is available is to needlessly limit an otherwise incomparably strong theological position and deny us a unique, persuasive vocabulary in the latter-day arena of religious investigation and sectarian debate" [Jeffrey R. Holland, "The greatness of the evidence" (Talk given at the Chiasmus Jubilee, Joseph Smith Building, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 16 August 2017), in *Mormon Newsroom*. http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/transcript-elder-holland-speaks-book-of-mormon-chiasmus-conference-2017].

44 See, e.g., Omni 1:26.

45 See, e.g., Book of Mormon Onomasticon (https://onoma.lib.byu. edu/index.php/Main_Page). Matt's studies have informed several of the entries in this valuable resource.

46   1 Nephi 1:1.

47   John Gee, "Four suggestions on the origin of the name Nephi," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, edited by John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies at Brigham Young University, 1999).

48   Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s. v. Nephi.

49   D&C 89:19.

50   2 Peter 1:20.

51   Although *epilusis* is a biblical *hapax legomenon* (i.e., a term used only once in the Bible), cognate verbs appear in two other places: "expounded" (Mark 4:34) and "determined" (Acts 19:39).

     Samuel Zinner also points out rabbinic parallels in Matthew 16:19, where Peter is given keys that allow him to authoritatively "loose [λύσῃς] on earth" and have it be "loosed in heaven." Among the several applications of this power to the later ministry of Peter, Zinner recognizes his authority to "make decisions regarding *halakhah*, that is, to pronounce various matters as permitted or prohibited. This pertains to scriptural exegesis [interpretation], but with an emphasis on the domain of *halakhah*" (Samuel Zinner, personal e-mail).

52   NET Bible, 2 Peter 1, NET Notes 68. *The NET Bible*, Biblical Studies Foundation. https://net.bible.org/.

53   M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York City, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 1:688.

54   In the view of the Jewish scholar Philo, a near contemporary of Christ, "For a prophet (being a spokesman) has no utterance of his own, but all his utterance came from elsewhere, the echoes of another's voice" [Philo, "Who is the Heir (*Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres*)," in *Philo*, edited and translated by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 259:417]. For more on this idea, see James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), s. v. 2 Peter 1:19–21.

     See also Benjamin, "The task of the translator," 258–59:

          The task of the translator consists in finding the particular intention toward the target language which produces in

that language the echo of the original. … Unlike a work of literature, translation finds itself not in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.

55 To be fit to interpret scripture "by the Spirit of truth" (D&C 50:19) requires ongoing experience no less than careful analysis. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said: "revelation comes most often when we are on the move" [Dallin H. Oaks, "Sharing the Gospel," *Ensign* 31 (November 2001), 7] — exercising faith, not merely studying it.

Soren Kierkegaard compares narrow scholarship that is concerned only with the preliminary, technical aspects of the process of interpretation of scripture and not with wholehearted reading and personal implementation of its message to a lover who meticulously reconstructs the meaning of a letter from his beloved in a foreign language with a dictionary at his side and then, once the meaning is clear, casts the letter aside without regard to what his beloved has asked him to do [see Soren Kierkegaard, "For Self-Examination," in *For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!*, edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 25–29]. Thus, for every scripture reader, there is both encouragement and a warning (ibid., 12:318, 28–29):

When you read God's word eruditely — we do not disparage erudition, far from it — but remember that when you read God's word eruditely, with a dictionary, etc., you are not reading God's Word. … If you are a learned man, then take care lest with all your erudite reading (which is not reading God's Word) you forget perchance to read God's Word. If you are not learned — ah, envy the other man not, rejoice that you can at once get to the point of reading God's Word! And if there is a desire, a commandment, an order [that you read], … then be off at once to do accordingly. "But," you perhaps would say, "there are so many obscure passages in the Holy Scriptures, whole books which are almost riddles." To this I would reply, "I see no need of considering this objection unless it comes from one whose life gives expression to the fact that he has punctually complied with all the passages which are easy to understand." Is this the

case with you? [Thus a godly man must act:] if there were obscure passages, but also clearly expressed desires, he would say, "I must at once comply with the desire, then I will see what can be made of the obscure passages. Oh, but how could I sit down to puzzle over the obscure passages and leave the desire unfulfilled, the desire which I clearly understood?" That is to say: When you read God's Word, it is not the obscure passages which impose a duty upon you, but that which you understand and with that you must instantly comply. If there were only a single passage you did understand in Holy Scripture — well, the first thing is to do that; but you do not first have to sit down and puzzle over the obscure passages. God's Word is given in order that you shall act in accordance with it, not in order that you shall practice the art of interpreting obscure passages.

56   Plato, *Cratylus*, 391a.

57   B. L. McGuire, personal e-mail.

58   2 Timothy 1:15.

59   2 Timothy 4:4.

60   D&C 93:8.

61   Jacob 4:13.

62   Matthew 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35. The universality and imperative force of Jesus's exhortation to every person (kjv: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear") is better captured for the modern reader as "The one who has ears had better listen!" (NET Bible, Matthew 13:9. Cf. ibid., Matthew 13n12).

Of course, "listening" in this sense is not meant to be a passive exercise but rather an ongoing quest. D&C 88:118 exhorts the Saints to "*seek* learning, even by study and also by faith." The implication of scripture, however, is that learning spiritual matters from book study is ultimately a poor cousin to learning by faith — i.e., study "out of the best books" is only necessary because "all have not faith." Though himself a great advocate of schools for the teaching of practical subjects in Kirtland and Nauvoo, on matters of learning for the eternities Joseph Smith wanted the Saints to gain knowledge by direct revelation — to come to the point where they could throw away their crutches, take up their beds, and walk: "The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not

to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching" (Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 191). Note that the original source reads "the *only* way" (Smith, Jr., *Words*, 77, emphasis added). Cf. Ben McGuire's discussion of 1 Nephi 15:8–9 (McGuire, "Nephi: A postmodernist reading," 61–64).

63 D&C 89:3. Rodney Stark describes this process in terms of "divine accommodation," which "holds that God's revelations are always limited to the current capacity of humans to comprehend — that in order to communicate with humans, God is forced to accommodate their incomprehension by resorting to the equivalent of 'baby talk'" [Rodney Stark, *Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief* (New York City, NY: HarperOne, 2007), 6].

64 D&C 50:41.

65 D&C 1:24.

66 Luke 16:26. Cf. 1 Nephi 12:18; Alma 26:20; Helaman 3:29–30.

67 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24; 2 Nephi 2:27–28; D&C 76:69; 107:19.

68 See Isaiah 53:12; Jeremiah 7:16; 27:18; 36:25; Romans 8:26–27, 34; 11:2–5; Hebrews 7:25.

69 1 Peter 3:18.

70 D&C 138:31.

71 "The Lord thy God … doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

72 Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 134, and Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 97: "God became man in order that man might become god." Lossky, a theologian of Orthodox Christianity, asserts that this teaching was "echoed by the Fathers and theologians of every age," citing as examples Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa. See also 2 Nephi 4:25–26. Cf. 1 Nephi 11:16, 26.

73 Moroni 7:47. Cf. Ether 12:33.

74 William James, "What pragmatism means," in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, Popular Lectures on*

Philosophy by William James (New York City, NY: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1907), 72. http://books.google.com/books?id=1S62J9uY_x4C.

75 1 Peter 2:9. Mercy Fielding Thompson recalls the Prophet having specifically applied these words in his instructions to her when she received her temple endowments, saying "This will bring you out of darkness into marvelous light" [Mercy Fielding Thompson, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *The Juvenile Instructor* 27, no. 13 (1 July 1892), 400. https://archive.org/stream/juvenileinstruct2713geor#page/398/mode/2up].