

Christology in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Gospels

David A. LeFevre

Christology is fundamentally how scripture portrays Jesus: “A coherent conceptual and theological explanation of Jesus’s person, in harmony with the scriptural testimony, which is able to account for his role in its worship and faith.”¹ In the case of the four Gospels, there are several common themes in how they portray Jesus but also individual and unique approaches in each book. This study aims to examine the changes in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible made by the Prophet between June 1830 and July 1833 and their impact on the christological story told by each author.

In general, the changes to the Gospels in Joseph Smith’s New Translation—commonly referred to as the Joseph Smith Translation, or JST²—tend to make the Christology higher. That is, they elevate language that in the King James Version (KJV) might be perceived as emphasizing Jesus’s mortality, or they add new text that portrays Jesus as divine in nature or acts that are best explained as divinely

accomplished. This aligns with the largely high Christology of Joseph Smith's other translations and revelations, as found in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the chapters of the Bible translation in Genesis 1–24, which were translated before he turned to the New Testament in March 1831 (see D&C 45:60–61). But the Joseph Smith Translation does not change each Gospel in the same way.³ Rather, the Prophet engaged with each book in a manner that respected the original christological approach of the individual writer, enhancing and adding to it in ways that align with each book's character.

These changes potentially speak to Joseph Smith's personal Christology as well. The JST contains a range of textual changes, from highly revelatory passages (such as those in the early chapters of Genesis that end up in the Book of Moses) to purely pedantic grammar and word choice changes.⁴ It is impossible to be certain for any passage whether a change was made by revelation, intellect, or both: Joseph Smith called it all a translation, and he seems to have been quite comfortable relying on the inspiration of the Spirit *and* his own intellectual efforts to produce a new biblical text.⁵ But knowing that at least some of the JST changes come from Joseph Smith's own learning and understanding of Jesus's identity and eternal role can give insight into his personal understanding of Jesus in the earliest years of the Church.

Mark

Mark's is the shortest of the four Gospels but has many unique characteristics of structure and style. His Christology is the foundation for both Matthew's and Luke's and received the most attention from Joseph Smith as he worked through the Gospels. Examining some of these, especially as they relate to Jesus's own declarations and where the JST raises the Christology of Marcan stories that could be perceived as lower,⁶ reveals Joseph Smith's efforts to both harmonize the Christologies of the Gospels and maintain a more consistently high Christology.

Jesus's Indirect Declarations of His Identity

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus does not openly indicate his own identity until the very end of the text. The first verses let us, the readers, view some scenes that portray Jesus's identity: The opening verse declares him to be the Christ or Messiah; the voice from heaven at his baptism declares to Jesus that he is the beloved Son; and angels minister to him in the wilderness (Mark 1:1–13). But after that Jesus only speaks of his own mission and role in the third person, using "Son of man" references, until he stands before the high priest, who pointedly asks him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus answers, "I am; and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61–62). This statement leads to a charge of blasphemy, which is followed by his crucifixion.⁷

It would have been an easy thing for Joseph Smith to portray Jesus in JST Mark openly declaring his own divinity and power, such as in his other translations and revelations, including 3 Nephi 11:10–14 and Doctrine and Covenants 19:1–4. But that never happens. Instead, Jesus maintains his third-person declarations instead of giving more direct statements about his own identity, and JST Mark even adds several new ones.

For example, in Mark 2:28, which concludes a discussion on the Sabbath, there is a significant JST change that retains the third-person tone of the verse while adding to the point Jesus made in the previous verse about the Sabbath being made for man and not the reverse.

Wherefore the sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; & also that man should gloryfy God, & not that man should not eat; for the Son of man made the Sabath day, therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabath. (JST Mark 2:28)

While declaring the enigmatic Son of man as the creator of the Sabbath, thus equating that title with divinity, the JST maintains

the third-person nature of the pronouncement, just as in other KJV Mark passages.

In another verse, responding to the Pharisees seeking a sign from him, KJV Mark 8:12 has Jesus declare that no sign shall be given. The JST harmonizes his answer with similar passages in Matthew and Luke (Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29, adding a comment about the sign of Jonah) and then applies the sign to the “son of man.”

And he sighed deeply in his spirit, & saith said, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation, **save the sign of the Prophet Jonah; for as Jonah was three days & three nights in the Whales belly, so likewise shall the son of man be buried in the bowels of the Earth.** (JST Mark 8:12)

It would have been reasonable to have Jesus apply this added statement directly to himself, since Jesus was already speaking in the first person. But the JST maintains the Marcan pattern of attributing his declarations to the third-person son of man.

A third example from the same chapter is where Jesus declared that if any were ashamed of him and his words, the Son of man would also be ashamed of them when he came in glory (Mark 8:38). The abrupt shift from first person in the first sentence to third person in the rest of the verse is a bit jarring; it’s easy to see from this how the disciples might not have fully understood that the Son of man was referring to Jesus himself. The JST adds substantially to the end of the verse, extending the notion of punishment on those who are ashamed of him but promising great blessings to those who sacrifice for Jesus and the gospel.

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. **And they shall not have part in that resurrection when he cometh. For verily I say unto**

you, that he shall come; and he that layeth down his life for my sake and the gospel's, shall come with him, and shall be clothed with his glory, in the cloud, on the right hand of the Son of man. (JST Mark 8:38)

JST Mark here emphasizes switching between first and third person—in fact, adding a new first person right in the middle of the sentence—with Jesus speaking of the disciples taking action directly in Jesus's behalf but promising blessings with the future and unidentified Son of man when he comes in glory.

In a JST change in Mark 3:28, a potential exception to the more veiled references in Mark might be seen, but a careful examination indicates otherwise. Here, a JST addition gives background to Jesus's statement about which sins can be forgiven. **“And then came certain men unto him, accusing him, saying, Why do ye receive sinners, seeing thou makest thyself the Son of God? But he answered them, & said . . .”** In this passage, “certain men,” who are clearly confronting Jesus, claim that he is making himself the Son of God. This could imply that he said as much. But there is no record of Jesus saying that, so it cannot necessarily be concluded from this change that he made a direct statement about being the Son of God. Rather, as previous events in Mark are examined, the likely incident from which they would have derived their claim that he made himself a Son of God is found in Mark 2:5–7, where Jesus forgave a paralyzed man his sins. His declaration of forgiveness provoked a strong reaction from the scribes: “Who can forgive sins but God only?” That could naturally lead to a later charge that he was thus making himself the Son of God.

Looking at the other Gospels, the title “Son of man” is only added once each in JST Matthew (25:1) and JST Luke (21:28), even though both accounts also use the title for Jesus (Matthew thirty times and Luke twenty-five times).⁸ KJV Mark uses Son of man only fourteen times, so the three additions in the JST are even more significant as

a percentage, increasing Jesus's veiled self-declarative statements by 21 percent.

Higher Christology Examples

Mark's christological depiction of Jesus is typically considered the lowest of the four Gospels. That does not mean that Jesus is portrayed without divine characteristics or language that speaks to his divine identity; that is certainly present in Mark's writing. But there are elements in his narrative that can suggest he is more mortal, such as fatigue or hunger, expressions of surprise or wonder, a lack of knowledge, or even depression and insanity,⁹ which Matthew and Luke generally edit out when they recount the same stories.

Though most of Mark's low Christology passages are left intact in the JST, a dramatic increase is found in JST Mark 14:32–33, which could be considered one of the top two mortal representations of Jesus, as he commences his experience in the Garden of Gethsemane.

KJV Mark 14:32–33	JST
And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.	And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane, which was a garden; and the disciples began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and to complain in their hearts, wondering if this be the Messiah. And Jesus knowing their hearts he said to his disciples, Sit you here while I shall pray.
And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;	And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and rebuked them,

This significant christological change shifts the amazement and heaviness—which can be translated as “distressed”¹⁰ and “troubled or in anxiety”¹¹—from Jesus to the disciples. This takes one of the major Marcan low Christology passages and changes it to high, because Jesus not only avoids those emotions, but he knows their hearts. In the JST, Jesus perceived their emotions and questions about him supernaturally, then rebuked Peter, James, and John for their doubts while he went off to pray.¹²

Another change to a low Christology passage (Mark 7:24) takes a different approach, but still portrays Jesus with a divine characteristic.

KJV Mark 7:24	JST
And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.	And from thence he arose, & went into the borders of Tyre & Sidon, & entered into a house, & would that no man should come unto him . But he could not deny them, for he had compassion upon all men .

KJV Mark describes Jesus as ready for some downtime and needing a break from the incessant crowds that surrounded him. But his attempt to get away is thwarted, and the crowds somehow find him. In JST Mark, Jesus is still desiring a break and wanting to be alone for a time, but instead as the crowds come, he is motivated by love and compassion to minister to them, even as it greatly inconveniences him physically. This selfless act raises the Christology of the passage, showing Jesus as making his physical needs subservient to the demands of his calling. It also enhances the transition to the next story about the Syrophenician woman petitioning a blessing from Jesus for her daughter by putting her request in the context of a tired Jesus who nevertheless has compassion and expends what energy he has left on others, including a gentile woman.

A less dramatic but still interesting elevation of Christology that doesn't stem from a low starting point is found in a JST change in Jesus's teaching about humility and surrendering one's will to God, in Mark 9:37.

KJV Mark 9:37	JST
Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name , receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.	Whosoever shall humble himself like one of these children, and receiveth me, ye shall receive them in my name . And whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me only , but him that sent me, even the father .

Two changes in the verse elevate the Christology. First, the Greek verb translated “receive” is *dechomai*, which has the meaning of showing hospitality and welcoming.¹³ Thus the children are to be welcomed in Jesus's name, which applies authority to the action. Second, the KJV says that this action is equivalent to receiving Jesus and “him that sent [him],” but who sent him is not specified. JST Mark makes explicit who sent Jesus—“the father”—ascribing divine authority to Jesus's actions.

Low Christology

Only one passage seems to have the potential to add to a low Christology in JST Mark, and it is not a strong case. In Mark 8:17, as the disciples were sailing on the lake with Jesus, they discussed something Jesus had said about “the leaven of the Pharisees.” In typical Marcan fashion, the disciples misunderstood Jesus's words and believed he said this “because we have no bread” in the ship. In the KJV, Jesus responded after he “knew it,” though the text doesn't state how he knew the topic of their conversation; the implication could be that he knew it by divine means. The JST language leans more toward

Jesus merely overhearing them, a more mortal result: “And when **they said this among themselves**, Jesus knew it.” Still, either passage could be interpreted as either divinely perceiving or merely overhearing, so it’s difficult to assign a christological impact either way.

In summary, Joseph Smith’s work on Mark shows a sensitivity to two of the mortal portrayals of Jesus in the book. In Mark 14:32–33, mortal weakness is shifted from Jesus to the disciples, and Jesus’s ability to perceive their thoughts and feelings is added. In Mark 7:24, the Prophet changed the passage to portray divine attributes even while retaining the display of Jesus’s physical needs. The overall changes still maintain Mark’s style, rather than harmonizing it with John or even the other Synoptics, which have higher Christology. One significant enhancement to Mark’s stylistic approach is to add three new Son of man passages, which Mark has Jesus use when speaking of his own mission and purpose in a third-person voice.

Matthew

No JST changes in Matthew lower the Christology of the book, but many of them augment it in ways that consistently align with Matthew’s pattern and presentation. This section examines two categories of JST changes that enrich the Christology of Matthew while maintaining his tone and approach.

Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

Matthew quotes extensively from the Old Testament (often using the Greek Septuagint version instead of the Hebrew text) to demonstrate that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophetic writings, with fourteen fulfillment, or formula, citations (e.g., “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet,” Matthew 1:22) and dozens of other scriptures quoted or paraphrased without direct attribution.¹⁴ It’s significant, then, that in JST Matthew, there are nine additional or enhanced formula citations,¹⁵ enlarging this aspect of Matthew’s Christology.¹⁶

- ✦ 1:16 “Of whom was born Jesus, **As the Prophets have written**, who is called Christ”
- ✦ 1:18 “Now, **as it is written**, the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise”
- ✦ 1:22 “Now all this ~~was done~~ **took place**, that it **all things** might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord, by the Prophets”
- ✦ 4:19 “And he saith ~~said~~ unto them, **I am he of whom it is written by the Prophets**; follow me”
- ✦ 11:3 “Art thou he **of whom it is written in the prophets** that should come, or do we look for an other?”
- ✦ 11:13 “For all the Prophets & the law prophecied, **that it should be thus** untill John. **Yea, as many as have prophecied, have foretold of these days.**”
- ✦ 13:35 “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the **people prophets**”
- ✦ 23:39 “**You** shall not see me hence forth, & **know that I am he of whom it is written by the Prophets**, until **you** shall say, Blessed is he **who** cometh in the name of the Lord”
- ✦ 27:11 “And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest **truly, for thus it is written of me.**”

Mark, Luke, and John also use similar formula citations but not nearly as frequently as Matthew. In the JST, there are two additional such citations in Mark (7:9, 10), three in Luke (3:4; 14:35; 16:16), and only one in John (3:18). Thus, this type of JST change aligns with the original authors’ patterns of the use of formula citations.

Divine Authority

Matthew portrays Jesus as having divine authority, using titles such as the Son of God (eight times) and Lord (thirty-nine times applying to Jesus). But he also portrays Jesus’s authority from God in other ways. As God did with Moses, Jesus brought people up to the mount and

gave them a new law. He is “God with us” when he is born (Matthew 1:23) and until the end of time (Matthew 28:20), who will save his people from their sins. Jesus is the recipient of worship that is only due to God, and he is the one to whom all power is given and who will judge, both in heaven and on earth.¹⁷ This concept of divine authority is substantially enhanced by JST changes, including those below.

Preparation for ministry. At the end of the infancy narrative of Matthew 2 and before the appearance of John the Baptist in chapter 3 is a remarkable addition about Jesus growing up.

And it came to pass, that Jesus grew up with his brethren, & waxed strong, & waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, & he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh.

Jesus patiently “waited upon the Lord” for the right time to start his ministry. The phrase, “he served under his father” is intriguing, as from the text it cannot be determined if the person referenced is his (step)father, Joseph, or his Father in heaven. If the former, it demonstrates patient preparation for an inevitable ministry under the direction of a mortal mentor; if the latter, it is an additional witness of Jesus acting fully under the authority of God. Given the other content of the addition, the latter interpretation seems likely.

One of the most powerful christological changes in the JST is also in this verse: “He spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.” Throughout the Old Testament, there are records of God teaching his people and people seeking to be taught by the Lord. Moses was promised that he would be taught what to do (Exodus 4:15) and then given the Lord’s commandments to teach to Israel (Exodus 18:10; 24:12). Those teachings were passed on to future generations because they came from God (Deuteronomy 4:10; 6:7; 11:19). Numerous psalms implore the Lord to “teach me thy paths” (Psalm 25:4) and “teach me thy way,

O Lord” (Psalm 27:11; 86:11). And Isaiah and Micah proclaim the great day when people will go to the mountain of the Lord, “and he will teach us of his ways” (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). God himself could not be taught by man (Job 21:22), nor could the power of God’s teaching be exceeded (Job 36:22).

In Jesus’s ministry, he was consistently a teacher, instructing large crowds, synagogue attendees, and smaller, private groups of disciples. On multiple occasions, the power, authority, and uniqueness of his teaching was noted (Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22, 27; 6:2; Luke 4:36; 20:2; John 3:2), and his enemies questioned his authority to teach such things (Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:28; John 9:34). But when interrogated by Jewish leaders as to the source of his teaching and authority, Jesus declined to answer (Matthew 21:24; Mark 11:33; Luke 20:8).

In the addition cited above, JST Matthew proclaims that Jesus could not be taught by other men, nor was it needed. Instead, the source of his wisdom and knowledge and later his teaching was divine, as he served under his Father. This matches the language of a promise in 1 John 2:27 that those who follow Christ have an “anointing” received of God, and when that abides in them, “ye need not that any man teach you,” because “the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth.” The anointing referred to is likely the gift of the Holy Ghost,¹⁸ which Joseph Smith had learned not long before working on his translation of Matthew was “the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom” (D&C 39:6; see also John 14:26). Thus this JST addition can be interpreted to say that Jesus was fully taught and tutored by the Holy Spirit and thus did not need any human teaching, for he had full access to knowledge from above (John 8:23). It does not mean that he did not learn and progress in his mortal experience (as described in D&C 93:10–14), but rather that his progression was not based on mortal understanding or learning. This is a significant addition to Matthew’s Christology.

Showing his divine authority. Once Jesus began his ministry, he quickly exhibited divine authority, such as when he got news about

John being imprisoned (Matthew 4:12): “**And** now Jesus **knew** that John was cast into prison, **and he sent angels, and behold, they came & ministered unto him.**” This is the only mention of Jesus sending angels during his mortal ministry, demonstrating both his personal concern for John and his authority to command messengers from heaven. It is worth noting that in Matthew 4:11, the angels were sent to minister to Jesus at the end of his temptations in the wilderness, but the JST deletes that reference to angels and essentially moves it to the next verse, where Jesus instead sends them to John. In other words, in the JST, Jesus forgoes the blessings of the angels and instead commands that blessing to be given to his forerunner.

Concerning the sending of angels, throughout the scriptures, only God commands and sends angels to teach and bless and sometimes destroy (Genesis 24:7; Exodus 23:20; 32:34; Numbers 20:16; 1 Chronicles 21:27; 2 Chronicles 32:21; Daniel 6:22; Luke 1:19, 26; D&C 38:12). Once sent with authority from above, angels then command men in God’s behalf (Judges 2:4; 1 Kings 13:18; Acts 8:26; 1 Nephi 3:29; Helaman 14:9; Alma 9:21). Jesus taught that he had authority to send angels and would do so at a future time (Matthew 13:41; 24:31; Mark 13:27), thus attributing to himself a distinctive divine privilege to command these heavenly beings, which this unique JST change demonstrates was a power he also exercised in his mortal life.

Several other JST Matthew changes declare that Jesus’s authority was from God.

- ✦ 7:28–29 “the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority **from God**, & not as **having authority from** the Scribes.”
- ✦ 23:10 “Neither be ye called, **Master**; for one is your master, even **him he whom your Heavenly father sent, which is Christ; for he hath sent him among you, that ye might have life.**”

- ✦ 12:50 **“I go my way for my father hath sent me, and whosoever shall do the will of my father . . .”**

On other occasions, JST Matthew brings out Jesus’s authority by expressing his sanction to judge by virtue of his position in the eternal heavens.

- ✦ 7:22 **“For the day soon cometh, that men shall come before me to Judge ment, to be Judged according to their works.”**
- ✦ 25:34 **“And he shall sit upon his throne, & the twelve apostles with him.”**

In responding to a question from the Pharisees in Matthew 9, Jesus used the metaphor of putting a piece of new cloth on an old garment. However, JST Matthew 9:16 precedes that answer with a substantial addition that has the Pharisees asking Jesus about baptism and obedience to the law of Moses, and Jesus using their question to declare premortal divine authority for himself and to identify himself with the great Jehovah, who spoke to Moses and gave him the law.

Then said the Pharicees unto him, Why will ye not receive us with our baptism, seing we keep the whole law? But Jesus said unto them, Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me; for I am he that gave the law. I receive not you with your baptism, because it profiteth you nothing.

Finally, Jesus spent his life doing the will of the Father, who gave him that authority. In JST Matthew, that effort culminates on the cross in a final expression of total submission, with an added saying not in KJV Matthew 27:50.

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, saying, Father, it is finished; thy will is done, yielded up the ghost.

KJV John 19:30 also records that Jesus said, “It is finished,” but the statement on the cross of God’s will being done is unique in all four Gospels. It reflects back to Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane that he would do the Father’s will (Matthew 26:42). Thus the passion narrative in Matthew is bracketed at both ends by Jesus committing to do the Father’s will and then stating that he had indeed done it; Jesus’s absolute obedience to the Father was ultimately the source of his authority (Mosiah 3:18–19).

Luke

The majority of JST changes in Luke could be described as Joseph Smith working like a traditional translator or at least an expert editor; he is updating archaic language, reworking phrases for clarity, adjusting grammar, clarifying pronouns, and providing alternate word choices. There are very few changes that impact Christology, but those made are significant to Luke’s presentation of Jesus.¹⁹

Servant Songs and John the Baptist

One of the characteristics of Luke’s Christology is an emphasis on several chapters in Isaiah, often called the “servant songs,” including verses from Isaiah 42, 50, and 53.²⁰ While no JST changes quote from additional servant song passages, there is an addition in John the Baptist’s teaching where he speaks of his own mission using Isaiah 40:3–5. Isaiah 40 is the introductory chapter for the entire section that includes all of the servant songs, and Luke uses this passage to declare a number of themes in his Gospel and Acts, including the ministry of the apostles, taking the gospel to the gentiles, the restoration of Israel, and the power of God.

In the JST, an extensive quotation is added in the middle of the Isaiah passage, which quotes “the book of the prophets” and builds on many of Luke’s themes of Jesus’s ministry.

As it is written in the book of the prophet Esais; and these are the words saying the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight. For behold, and lo, he shall come as it is written in the book of the prophets, to take away the the [sic] sins of the world, and to bring salvation unto the heathen nations; together together those who are lost, which are of the sheep fold of Israel; yea, even her dispersed and afflicted; and also to prepare the way, and make possible the preaching of the Gospel unto the gentiles. and to be a light unto all who sit in darkness, unto the uttermost parts of the earth; to bring to pass the resurrection from the dead, and to ascend upon high, to dwell on the right hand of the Father, until the fulness of time, and the law and the testimony shall be sealed, and the keys of the kingdom shall be delivered up again unto the Father; to administer justice unto all; to come down in judgement upon all, and to convince all the ungodly of their ungodly deeds, which they have committed; and all this in the day that he shall come, for it is a day of power. (JST Luke 3:4)

The scripture quoted is not found in the Old Testament (KJV or JST) but does have similar language to many existing Old Testament passages.²¹ This inspired addition picks up on several of the themes in KJV Luke 3:4–6 (quoting Isaiah 40:3–5) and some additional Lucan themes, especially considering the extension of his Gospel in the book of Acts, including revealing Jesus as

- ✦ bringing salvation to all, including the “heathen nations” and “the gentiles”;
- ✦ gathering “those who are lost” of the house of Israel, who are “dispersed and afflicted”;
- ✦ being a light unto those in darkness;
- ✦ bringing to pass the resurrection;

- ✦ ascending on high and taking his place on the right hand of the Father;
- ✦ being the one who will “administer justice unto all”; and
- ✦ coming in “a day of power” at the Second Coming.

This broad declaration by John the Baptist of Jesus’s mission and purpose is a high christological addition that launches Luke’s story of Jesus in a powerful way, for both Luke and Acts.

Jesus’s Nature

Noted above was the addition of information about Jesus’s preparation at the end of Matthew 2. Luke likewise has a less lengthy but informative JST change related to Jesus’s preparation period that adds to our understanding of this time in his life. The story of Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve is well known (Luke 2:41–52). In the KJV, Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple hearing the “doctors” there and asking questions. The JST change is subtle but significant in its description of Jesus as one who has divine knowledge.

and it came to pass, after three days they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the Doctors, ~~both hearing them and asking them questions~~ **and they were hearing him, and asking him** questions. (JST Luke 2:46)

As the JST manuscript demonstrates, the scribe first wrote the verse exactly as in the KJV and nothing else, then immediately crossed out the last phrase of the verse and wrote the change,²² which is a reversal of the KJV: the doctors were hearing Jesus and querying him. Their reaction in the next verse is unchanged in the JST: “All who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47). While the change in verse 46 does serve to bring the two verses into better alignment,²³ the more profound impact on Luke’s Christology is that Jesus at twelve was exhibiting what Matthew said, that “he needed not that any man should teach him” (JST Matthew 2:23) but that he instead was the teacher.

A second passage that speaks to Jesus's godliness is Luke 12:9–10, which in the KJV is a general statement that those who deny Jesus shall likewise be denied before angels. The JST change gives the reason Jesus made the statement and applies it very specifically to his disciples.

~~but he that who~~ denyeth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God. ~~and whosoever shall speak~~ Now his disciples knew that he said this, because they had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were affraid to confess him before men. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ~~he~~ He knoweth our hearts, and he speaketh to our condemnation, and we shall not be forgiven. (JST Luke 12:9)

The words struck through in the JST are the first words of verse 10; the scribe started to write that verse as is but was interrupted before the phrase was even finished and immediately wrote new text that was inserted between the verses. In the addition, the disciples had “spoken evil” against Jesus, which is then qualified as “they were affraid to confess him before men.” They had evidently done this out of earshot of Jesus, so they took his preceding words about denying him as a divine recognition of what was in their hearts and feared not only that he was condemning them but that forgiveness might not be possible. Their reasoning is an interesting conflict of high (Jesus knows their hearts) and low Christology (Jesus may not forgive them, a potentially mortal reaction on his part, if true). However, verse 10 resolves their concern and ends up making the whole passage high.

But he answered them, and said unto them, Whosoever shall speak a word against the son of man, **and repenteth,** it shall be forgiven him; but unto him ~~that who~~ blasphemeth against the holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven **him.** (JST Luke 12:10)

Jesus assured his fearful disciples that their sin was forgivable upon repentance.²⁴ Though not stated here, two passages in Luke point to Jesus's ability to forgive sins, including the second unique to Luke, emphasizing that divine ability (Luke 5:20–24; 7:47–49). This passage thus provides a third example of Jesus demonstrating the power and authority to forgive sins, and only in JST Luke.

John

John has the highest Christology of the four Gospels, taking the christological themes in the other three and greatly developing them in length and depth. Since the JST work results in higher Christology in the Synoptic Gospels, the already high Christology of John may have required fewer changes. Indeed, JST John includes very few christological changes, and not many of significance.²⁵ One is discussed here because the KJV passages are very well known while the JST modifications are not.

John 1 is a beautiful, lyrical opening to the book that takes the reader back to “the beginning,” a clear reference to Genesis 1:1 and the creation of the world. John's premise is that “the Word” was there from the beginning, both with God and as God himself. He created everything, life is in him, and he is the light of men that shines in darkness. The same Word—of whom John testified—came to earth but was not known by the world, though he was its creator.

The JST makes several changes in this chapter; the theme of the changes is making the identification of “the Word” unambiguous: he is “the Son of God.”

KJV John 1:1, 7, 10, 15, 16	JST
<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.</p>	<p>In the begining was the gospel preached through the son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the son was with God, and the Son was of God.</p>
<p>The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all <i>men</i> through him might believe.</p>	<p>The same came into the world for a witness, to bear witness of the light, to bear record of the gospel through the son, unto all, that through him men might believe.</p>
<p>He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.</p>	<p>Even the Son of God. He who was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.</p>
<p>John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.</p>	<p>John bear witness of him, and cried, saying; This is he of whom I spake; he who cometh after me, is preferred before me; for he was before me. For in the begining was the word, even the son, who is made flesh, and sent unto us by the will of the Father.</p>
<p>And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.</p>	<p>And as many as beleive on his name shall receive of his fullness. And of his fullness have all we received, even imortality and eternal life, through his grace.</p>

JST John 1 raises the Christology of this already high passage through its multiple and unambiguous designations of Jesus as Son of God, declaring that he is “sent unto us by the will of the Father” and that his promised “fullness” is “immortality and eternal life” to mankind, which can only come “through his grace.”

In the Gospel of John, the phrase “the Word” is only found in John 1, and verses 14–18 transition that title to Jesus, but the changes in JST John 1 draw out that transition across the entire section, intermingling “the Word” and “the Son” in a beautiful, expressive work that confirms that Jesus was there from the beginning and came to earth by the will of the Father so all people might have immortality and eternal life through his grace, which is wrought by his selfless atoning sacrifice. There may perhaps be no high Christology passage in all the Gospels that more thoroughly describes Jesus’s entire mission.

Conclusion

Each of the four Gospels displays unique information about Jesus Christ and his purpose. Their individual characteristics, stories, and language represent their christological approach. Joseph Smith made a number of changes in the JST of these books that impact Christology. He showed sensitivity to low Christology passages, giving them close attention and often elevating Jesus’s portrayal in them. He modified other verses to speak of Christ’s nature, though such a topic wasn’t initially in the verse in the KJV. This type of high Christology approach would be natural to him, given that it is the tone of the Book of Mormon and many of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, as well as the early chapters of Genesis, which he translated before starting his work on the New Testament.

However, tempering his general raising of Christology, the changes the Prophet made are in line with the approach and style of each author in telling the story of Jesus and teaching about his nature. The individual voice and characteristics of each Gospel author are

maintained, rather than all being raised to a uniform, single, high Christology voice. Such an effort speaks to both the inspiration and careful study of Joseph Smith in much of the work he did on the Bible, especially when it came to the identity of Jesus Christ.

DAVID A. LEFEVRE *is an independent scholar in the Seattle, Washington, area.*

Appendix: A Sample of Additional JST Changes That Impact Christology by Topic

Power over the Devils, Sickness, and Sin

- ✦ **Matthew 4:5** not only is his purpose to “be with” and commune with God (JST Matthew 4:1–2), but Spirit carries him around, not the devil (also Matthew 4:8)
- ✦ **Matthew 4:23** people are healed because they believed on his name
- ✦ **Matthew 5:2** those who believe on Jesus will receive a remission of their sins
- ✦ **Matthew 12:31** forgiveness to those who receive him and repent

Commissions Others to Preach His Message

- ✦ **Matthew 5:2** “Blessed are they who believe on your words”
- ✦ **Matthew 6:25** “Go ye into the world teaching”
- ✦ **Matthew 7:1** the words Jesus taught his disciples to teach others

- ✦ **Matthew 7:4** “Go thou and say unto them, you are children of corruption”
- ✦ **Matthew 7:6** “Go ye into the world, saying repent”

Priesthood

- ✦ **Luke 8:1** the twelve were ordained by Jesus (a physical act not mentioned elsewhere, showing Jesus’s authority in the priesthood)
- ✦ **Luke 9:25** to be saved, we must receive him “whom God hath ordained,” both clarifying Jesus’s role in our salvation and the source of his authority (ties back to 8:1)

Salvation

- ✦ **Matthew 19:13** Jesus said children will be saved (disciples quoting Jesus)
- ✦ **Luke 9:34** not just lose your life to save it, but lose it for Jesus’s sake
- ✦ **Luke 11:41** keep Jesus’s commandments and “your inward parts” will be clean
- ✦ **John 1:18** no man can be saved except through Jesus
- ✦ **John 3:36** those who believe on Jesus will receive of his fullness
- ✦ **John 5:29** all will be judged by the Son of man

Jesus’s Identity

- ✦ **Matthew 21:46** “I am the stone,” “the head of the corner”
- ✦ **Mark 14:8** woman’s anointing will be remembered in generations to come
- ✦ **Luke 9:31** speaks not just of his death, but “also his resurrection.”

- ✦ **Luke 14:33** Moses and prophets testified of Christ, which was their purpose; Jesus is sent to give life
- ✦ **Luke 16:17** Jesus was sent by the Father to fulfill the law
- ✦ **Luke 21:25, 28, 36** makes clear that the signs Jesus is discussing relate to the Second Coming
- ✦ **John 3:34** Jesus has a fullness of the Spirit given him by God
- ✦ **John 5:30** Jesus does the will of the Father only, unable to anything of his own will
- ✦ **John 6:44** the Father bears record of Jesus, and who does the Father's will will be raised up by Jesus in the resurrection of the just

Notes

1. Alan J. Spence, *Christology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), chap. 1, Kindle.
2. For simplicity, this paper consistently refers to the work as the Joseph Smith Translation, or JST, though it can also rightly be called the New Translation (e.g., D&C 124:89). All JST quotations herein are from New Testament Manuscript 2 on the Joseph Smith Papers website (JosephSmithPapers.org/paper-summary/new-testament-revision-2), unless otherwise noted. Original spelling and punctuation are retained, though later insertions, marked in the manuscripts with brackets, are included without indication. JST changes when compared to the KJV are highlighted in bold text, whether in side-by-side comparisons (when there are KJV deletions) or singly (when the JST change is a pure addition or there are no KJV deletions). The interested reader is encouraged to also consult transcriptions of the manuscripts, available in printed form, in Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious

Studies Center, 2004). See also Thomas A. Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), which presents the KJV and JST side by side with changes indicated in bold, though Wayment has additionally edited the JST text to standardize spelling and grammar.

3. The maintenance of separate Gospel personalities in JST changes has been discussed in Robert L. Millet, "The JST and the Synoptic Gospels: Literary Style," in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Truths*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1985), 147–62.
4. Various classifications of JST changes have been proposed. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews proposed five types: (1) restoration of original text, (2) restoration of original words or actions never recorded, (3) editing to improve modern understanding, (4) editing to harmonize with other scriptures or revelations, and (5) changes to teach modern readers. They acknowledge that "it is difficult to know with certainty the nature or origin of any particular change" (Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 8–10). In an interesting study, one scholar analyzed several examples of biblical variants and JST changes, concluding that the restoration element could not generally be supported textually but that "assimilation to better known wording, harmonization of contradictions, and doctrinal clarification of problematic texts" were the best explanations for most JST changes. Kevin L Barney, "The Joseph Smith Translation and Ancient Texts of the Bible," *Dialogue* 19, no. 3 (1987): 100. I have argued that the most significant reason for the JST effort was as a doctrinal and leadership tutorial for Joseph Smith. David A. LeFevre, "The Education of a Prophet: The Role of the New Translation of the Bible in the Life of Joseph Smith," in *Foundations of the Restoration: The 45th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Craig James Ostler, Michael Hubbard MacKay, and Barbara Morgan Gardner (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2016), 99–120, which Robert Matthews also wrote of as the ultimate purpose of the work. Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 53–54.

5. This is the thrust of Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9—that to “study it out in your mind” is to exert personal, intellectual effort on an issue and to “ask if it be right” through prayer and revelation. It was perhaps the combination of the two that produced the translation of the Book of Mormon, which D&C 9 may reference, but especially Joseph’s other translations and revelations, including the JST.
6. Though not addressed in the text of her commentary, see an excellent study on JST changes in Mark enhancing that Gospel’s unique style in appendix 9, “The Joseph Smith Translation,” in Julie M. Smith, *The Gospel of Mark* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming). This book also explores in great detail the relationship between the Synoptics, especially the influence of Mark on Matthew and Luke.
7. For a valuable discussion on Son of man references in Mark and the other Gospels, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 283–306.
8. There is another addition of Son of man in Matthew 26:50, but only in the first New Testament manuscript; the phrase was not retained in the second translation of that chapter in New Testament 2; see Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament*, 84; Kent P. Jackson and Peter M. Jasinski, “The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” *BYU Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003): 35–64.
9. Examples include Mark 3:5 and 10:14, where Jesus is angry; 3:21, where his family believes he is insane; 11:12, where he is hungry; 13:32, where he doesn’t know the day or hour of his own future coming; and 14:33–34, where he is amazed and depressed.
10. Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “ekthambeō.”
11. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “adēmoneō.”
12. Julie Smith identifies ten instances where the disciples are portrayed more negatively in JST Mark than in KJV Mark; see Smith, *Gospel of Mark*, appendix 9.

13. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 221; Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2005), 6107; “dechomai” in *Bibleworks* 10.
14. Robert L. Millet, “The Testimony of Matthew,” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Five: The Gospels*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 55–57; for a full list, see Craig Blomberg, “Matthew,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1–109.
15. With potentially a tenth one, though the formula isn’t quite the same. When Herod heard of the child who the wise men said was the new king, he asked his scribes in the JST, “Where is the place that is written of by the Prophets in which christ should be born?” The king sought an answer from the scriptures.
16. None of these JST additions quote scriptures directly but affirm that prophets have spoken of the event being presented. Two merely add emphasis to the citation by changing the singular “prophet” to the plural “prophets.”
17. Joel B. Green, ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), s.v. “Christology,” Kindle.
18. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 483; also Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 386.
19. See S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015). This in-depth study of the Gospel incorporates insight about JST changes throughout the commentary.
20. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 107–9; Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, Proverbs—Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 456–58.
21. Compare Psalm 98:2; Isaiah 9:2; Psalm 68:18; Isaiah 41:13; Isaiah 8:16; Psalm 110:3.

22. This is similar to the Prophet's experience with John 5:29, where they wrote the verse just as it is in the KJV, and then had it "given" unto them to change, which "caused [them] to marvel, for it was given unto us of the Spirit" (D&C 76:15–18). This change follows the same pattern of writing the KJV and then immediately changing it, which potentially means it was a similar experience of inspiration to change just a few words with significant impact.
23. Kent Brown notes that the JST "changes the scene to accord with the next verse [v. 47] so that it is Jesus who is the teacher, becoming a Rabbi of sorts" (Brown, *Testimony of Luke*, 165).
24. As Brown wrote, "This expressed fear [of not being forgiven], that underlies their response to Jesus's words about denying him, opens the occasion for Jesus then to affirm" forgiveness (Brown, *Testimony of Luke*, 609).
25. It's also significant to the number of changes in John that the first five chapters have dramatically more JST changes than the rest of the book. This is because starting at John 6, Joseph Smith changed the way his scribes recorded the Bible translation results. Instead of writing out every word of every verse as they had been doing since the start of the effort in June 1830, even if there was no change from the KJV, from John 6 forward they only wrote changes in the manuscript and indicated the placement of the changes with marks in Joseph's Bible. (Though the exact date of the method change is not known, Doctrine and Covenants 76 was recorded on 16 February 1832, tied to the translation of John 5:29, near the end of that chapter. John 6 was likely done very shortly after that date, as Joseph and his scribe for this part of the text, Sidney Rigdon, were heavily engaged in the work at this time.) The result is that there are far fewer changes of a more pedantic nature—grammar, word choice or order, modernization, and the like. The changes captured going forward are generally more significant doctrinally or textually, which is why the number decreases so dramatically not only for John but for the rest of the New Testament and the Old Testament when they return to that work in July 1832. See the letter to William W. Phelps dated 31 July 1832, wherein the Prophet wrote, "We have finished the translation of the New testament great and marvellous glorious things are revealed, we are making rapid strides in the old

book”; Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 267. The “old book” is the Old Testament, showing that by the end of July they had completed the work through the end of the New Testament and were back in Genesis 24 working on the Old Testament, where they had left off in March 1831; see D&C 45:60–62.