



Chap. viii.

# “Appointed to Be Read in Churches”

*John S. Tanner*

**M**y focus in this chapter is on what virtually all English speakers recognize about the King James Bible, namely its aural authority as scripture. For English speakers, the KJV simply sounds scriptural. In the centuries since its publication four hundred years ago, the King James Bible came to establish its idiom as *the* language of the Bible for the English-speaking world. It became the canonical translation of the Bible in English.<sup>1</sup> As the old saw goes, “If King James’s English was good enough for Jesus and St. Paul, it’s good enough for me.” The text’s undisputed aural authority is not merely the result of a royal mandate nor even of adoption by the established church in a country that would imprint its language and culture on the world. It is a function of felicitous linguistic and rhetorical choices that had power to win their way into our collective cultural soul. I believe that the aural power of the text was intentional. To be sure, the translators wanted first and foremost to be accurate, and they produced the most accurate English translation of its day. Even so, although sense was paramount, sound was important too. The translators wanted their translation to sound scriptural. They succeeded beyond what any of them could have imagined in 1611.

## A BIBLE TO BE READ IN CHURCHES

The translators signaled their concern for the sound of the text on the title page. The phrase “Appointed to be read in Churches” announced a

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fundamental function of the King James Bible. It was intended to be read, meaning read *aloud*, in church. It was meant for the ear and not simply for the eye. The King James Bible was originally a lectern Bible. It was made for the pulpit, as a Bible to be read as part of public, communal worship. Tyndale’s New Testament, by contrast, was written for individuals reading to themselves “round the table, in the parlour, under the hedges, [or] in the fields,” not for congregations “obediently sitting in rows in stone churches” being read to by the parson or “squire at the lectern.”<sup>2</sup> The Tyndale New Testament was small enough to fit comfortably in the hand. Not so the first edition King James Version. It was a church Bible.

The ecclesiastical function of this new translation would have been immediately obvious from simply looking at a first edition. What strikes one first is the size of an original King James Bible. It is huge. It is heavy, weighing in at over twenty pounds. It is imposing. It is clearly a lectern Bible, designed to rest on the pulpit. Everything about its appearance signals its ecclesiastical function that it be read in churches.

The prefatory material also clearly announced this purpose. The front matter contains a calendar identifying church holy days, an almanac that allowed one to calculate the church holy days for thirty-nine years, directions for calculating Easter Sunday in perpetuity, and a lectionary laying out Bible readings for morning and evening prayer. This material regulating church services would later be dropped and included in the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>3</sup> Its inclusion in the 1611 King James Bible provides clear evidence of the intended liturgical use of the KJV in Anglican worship.

From the start, the translators understood that their assignment was to produce a translation suitable to be read aloud. Indeed, the whole notion of a new translation began with John Rainold’s petition to King James for an “authenticall” new translation “to be read in the church.” The king responded at the conclusion of the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 by having the Privy Council commission an official translation “to be used in all churches of England in the time of divine service.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the translators were aware from the outset that the new translation needed to read well aloud.

As Protestants, the translators had great respect for the power of speech to engender faith. Protestantism was deeply committed to the aural authority of the word. The Reformation effectively transposed the center of

gravity in worship from the eye to the ear, from the visual to the verbal, from spectacle to sermon. Preaching became ascendant among reformers. A favorite Protestant text in this respect was Romans 10:17: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." In worship as in architecture, the focus in England was shifting from the altar to the pulpit.

This Protestant shift rendered it essential for the English people to have a Bible serviceable not only for silent private study but also for reading aloud in churches. As George Herbert wrote in a charming book of advice to country parsons, the parson should seek out for his sermons "moving and ravishing texts, whereof the Scriptures are full" and then dip and season every word of the sermon in the heart, so that "the auditors may plainly perceive that every word is heart-deep."<sup>5</sup> The King James Bible supplied an abundance of such moving texts suited for preaching.

It is often noted that the translators lived during the golden era of English theater, as if the presence of Shakespeare explained the glories of their translation. More important, however, is the fact that they lived during a great age of English pulpit oratory—the age of such diverse and dazzling preachers as Lancelot Andrewes and John Donne. In an age that prized preaching, it would be highly unlikely that the King James translators did not think about how their new translation would sound when read aloud from the pulpit. Furthermore, we know that they listened to the text as they settled on the final revision. According to John Selden's famous description of the procedure followed to determine the final form of the translation, selected translators gathered together at Stationers' Hall while the text was read aloud: "One read the translation, the rest holding in their hands some Bible, either of the learned tongues, or French, Spanish, Italian, etc. If they found any fault, they spoke up; if not, he read on."<sup>6</sup>

This process ensured that the aural quality of the translation would be considered. Indeed, as Alister McGrath observed, it required that "the translation could be understood by those *to whom it was read* rather than just those who read it."<sup>7</sup> Another historian, with some exaggeration, remarked that the "entire procedure . . . was oral." He continued, "This is the kingdom of the spoken. The ear is the governing organ of the prose; if it sounds right it is right."<sup>8</sup> The King James Bible served to complement study Bibles, like the Geneva, with an aurally impressive church Bible: "In private, Geneva-style interrogation and explication of the text; in public,

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in church, the baroque music of the King James manner, large, full-bodied, consciously beautiful. The listening divines in Stationers’ Hall were, in one sense, the new book’s first audience, not its readers but its hearers, participating in, and shaping, the ceremony of the word.”<sup>9</sup>

I think the preceding quotation overstates the case for aural considerations by the translators. We know from notes made by one of the translators, John Bois, but not discovered until the mid-twentieth century that the translators engaged in minute, scholarly, linguistic, and theological discussion about their translation. I am not arguing that sound took precedence over substance for the translators, only that the translators assuredly were cognizant of producing an accurate text suitable to be read aloud. After all, they conceived of their role as revisers of existing English translations, not as translators of an entirely new translation from the original ancient languages. “We never thought from the beginning,” explains Miles Smith in the original preface to the King James Bible, entitled “The Translators to the Reader,” “that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one.”<sup>10</sup> As they attempted to make a “principal good” translation out of many previous translations, undoubtedly, as David Norton has argued, the translators’ overwhelming concern lay with “truth” (meaning accuracy) rather than with the rhetorical quality of the translation. However, I am not persuaded that “while the translators had a literary sense of their work, it was totally subordinated to their quest for accuracy.”<sup>11</sup> Not *totally*. Rather, I think it is more accurate to say that the quest for accuracy itself became the primary source of rhetorical power for a Bible suitable to be read in churches.

### SOURCES OF LITERARY EXCELLENCE

The justly admired literary power of the translation derives from the translators’ fidelity to two things: the nature of the ancient texts they translated and the quality of the existing English texts they revised. The underlying Hebrew and Greek texts are often quite compelling. This is especially true of the Hebrew text and of Semitic elements in the Greek. By providing literal translations of the original languages, the King James Version enriched the English language with memorable phrases. Likewise, the English translations from which the KJV is composed—most

especially Tyndale's—provided superb English prose ready at hand. Hence, by being as literal as possible in dealing with the original texts and by relying on the best previous English translations, the King James translators produced a Bible of remarkable literary power, even if this was not their primary aim.

Let me illustrate the literary legacy the King James Bible drew from both sources—ancient Greek and Hebrew texts and existing English translations. In a book entitled *Hebraisms in the Authorized Version of the Bible*, William Rosenau argues that “every page” of the KJV is “replete with Hebrew idioms.”<sup>12</sup> Examples of these are “lick the dust,” “fall flat on his face,” “pour out one’s heart,” “land of the living,” “sour grapes,” “the skin of my teeth,” “under the sun,” “stand in awe,” “put words in his mouth,” and “like a lamb to the slaughter”—all from the Hebrew Old Testament. Rosenau says that the King James translation also includes Semitic phrases from the Greek New Testament, such as “salt of the earth,” “thorn in the flesh,” “give up the ghost,” “and it came to pass,” “powers that be,” and so forth.<sup>13</sup> In introducing such language, the KJV came up with a translation that occupied “a new dimension of linguistic space, somewhere between English and Greek or . . . Hebrew.” This was not “the English they knew at home” but “English pushed towards the dimension of a foreign language.”<sup>14</sup> It has often been noted that the King James Bible was archaic from its birth, containing words like *verily* and the pronouns *thou* and *ye* and their associated verb forms. It is also true that the KJV was replete with domesticated Hebraisms and Greek phrases.

The Englishman who did the most to domesticate Greek and Hebrew into English of enduring power was, without doubt, William Tyndale. He was the first to coin many of the phrases quoted above, which people erroneously attribute to the invention of King James translators. Tyndale’s groundbreaking translation was decisive for the KJV we know and love. A Brigham Young University scholar has calculated that fully 83 percent of the King James New Testament comes from Tyndale.<sup>15</sup> David Daniell, Tyndale’s biographer, provides the following illustrative list of some of the contributions King James’s translators took directly from Tyndale, which subsequently became part of the much loved and admired linguistic legacy associated with the KJV. Daniell writes:

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Right through the sixty-six books of the Bible, from “And God said, Let there be light, and there was light” (Genesis 1) to “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7), phrases of lapidary beauty have been admired: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7); “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19); . . . “Be not weary in well doing” (2 Thessalonians 3); “Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6). . . . Indeed, phrases from the Authorised Version are so familiar that they are often thought to be proverbial: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4); “The salt of the earth” (Matthew 5); “The signs of the times” (Matthew 16); . . . “The burden and heat of the day” (Matthew 20); “They made light of it” (Matthew 22); “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26); “Eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12); . . . “Filthy lucre” (1 Timothy 3); . . . “The patience of Job” (James 5). . . .

All these phrases, and many, many more, were taken by the Authorised Version translators directly from Tyndale. Throughout the New Testament, where the Authorised Version is direct, simple and strong, what it prints is pure Tyndale.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, Daniell and scholars like him have helped us recognize Tyndale as the forgotten individual genius behind what we have always assumed to be extraordinary committee work by the King James translators. Tyndale, along with Miles Coverdale, who completed Tyndale’s work after his martyrdom and gave the KJV such phrases as “tender mercies,” “loving-kindness,” and “cast pearls before swine,”<sup>17</sup> stands as the genius behind the English of the KJV. The King James translators enjoyed the immense good fortune to be able to draw upon Tyndale and then the equally good judgment to leave most of his translations unchanged. Tyndale accounts in no small measure for the aural artistry of the KJV. His frequently felicitous phrasing would win its way into the hearts of preachers and plowboys alike. But he aimed especially at plowboys. In a famous altercation with an adversary who argued that Christians did not really need the scriptures because they had the pope and church to guide them, Tyndale boldly retorted, “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.”<sup>18</sup>

When I read these stirring words, I cannot help but think of Joseph Smith as that plowboy. Tyndale opened the way for the plowboy Joseph to be able to read an English Bible that would enter his mind and heart in such a way that it set in motion events leading to the Restoration and the dawning of a new day. What if there had been no English Bible? Or what if there had been a Bible bent on preserving stuffy Latinate features of the Vulgate and that was uninterested in language that speaks to plowboys? Joseph might have known the Twenty-third Psalm as it reads in the 1609–10 Douay-Rheims Bible:

Our Lord ruleth me, and nothing shal be wanting to me:  
in place of pasture there he hath placed me.  
Upon the water of refection he hath brought me up:  
he hath converted my soule.<sup>19</sup>

The translation lacks the music and concrete imagery of both the Hebrew and the KJV. There are no green pastures here, no still waters. There is not even a shepherd. Joseph needed a Bible that would speak to his mind and heart. The King James Bible supplied this need.

#### TRANSLATING JAMES 1:5

Of all the passages that touched Joseph Smith, none was more important for him, or for us, than James 1:5. He says, “Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again” (Joseph Smith—History 1:12). Let us look at how the King James translators came up with the precise words that entered with such feeling into young Joseph’s seeking heart. I offer this analysis knowing full well that the Holy Ghost could have inspired Joseph had the translators used different words but also believing that God led them to choose these words with foreknowledge of their effect two hundred years later on Joseph Smith. These are the words on which the Spirit took wing. A close analysis of the text reveals how the translators worked.

Here is Tyndale’s translation of James 1:5. Coverdale (1535), the Great Bible (1540), Matthew’s Bible (1549), and the Bishops’ Bible (1558, 1604) all follow Tyndale exactly: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God

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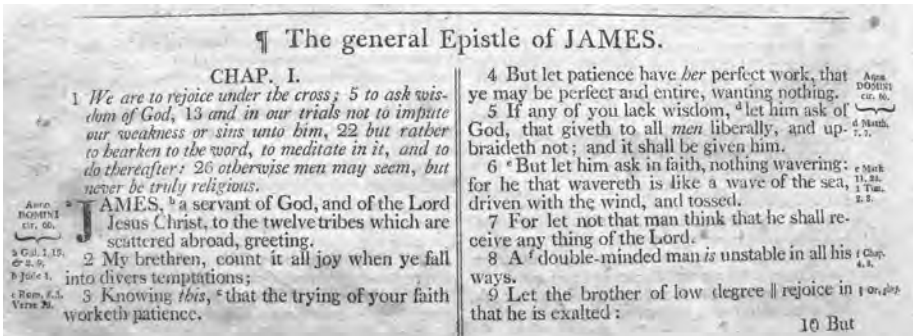
which giveth to all men indifferently, and casteth no man in the teeth: and it shall be given him.”<sup>20</sup> The passage is vintage Tyndale. The syntax delivers the main idea in a clear, direct way: “If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, which giveth to all men . . . and it shall be given him.” I can imagine Joseph Smith turning these phrases over and over in his mind. They contain the compelling, forward, logical progression of ideas in the verse. These are simple words. All but one are of Anglo-Saxon origin, and most words are single syllables.

There is only one polysyllabic Latinism: “indifferently.” I, along with the King James translators, think this is a misstep. But it is an important word for Tyndale, one freighted with theological significance for him. Why did Tyndale choose “indifferently”? He lets us know why in his marginal note on the passage, which reads: “In Christ we be all like good, and even servants each to other for Christ’s sake, every man in his office. And he that taketh more on him than that, of what soever degree he be of is a false Christian and an apostate from Christ.”<sup>21</sup> “Indifferently” underlines the notion of God’s impartiality, that he is no respecter of persons. This is a critical doctrine for a man like Tyndale, who chose to hazard his life so plowboys could have the Bible. His God was indifferent to class and rank.

I like the doctrine but not the diction, not here. For the Greek text contains the notion of God’s bounteous love, not just his impartiality. King James’s translators knew this and therefore looked at other English translations for a better word. Wycliffe said that God gives to all men “largely.” Douay said “abundantly.” Geneva said “liberally.” The KJV translators opted to follow Geneva, whose marginal note stresses the idea that God is “bountiful and liberal” to those who faithfully ask—adding, polemically, the Protestant point that we do not need a mediator (like Mary, a saint, or a priest) to approach God in prayer.<sup>22</sup> For its Protestant translators, the passage becomes an important affirmation about prayer—that individuals of any degree may approach God directly—and about God—that he will respond liberally, generously, abundantly to such prayers.

One may boldly approach such a God without fear, for, in Tyndale’s memorable phrase, God “casteth no man in the teeth.” Nowhere is Tyndale’s desire to speak to the plowboy more evident than in this vivid, homespun phrase. The image is deliberately colloquial. It is consistent with Tyndale’s project to render a plain, blunt, unvarnished translation.





*James 1:1–9, King James translation, printed by Mathew Carey, Philadelphia, c. 1810; Carey’s Bibles were the most common in America at time of Joseph Smith’s First Vision; King James translation of these verses has about one and one-half times amount of punctuation of corresponding passage in Tyndale’s New Testament; at James 1:5, note cross-reference to Matthew 7:7, another scripture that Joseph Smith said motivated him to seek an answer from God in prayer.*

But it also conjures the image of God’s hitting a person in the mouth for asking for wisdom, even if only to deny the idea.

Clearly the King James translators found Tyndale’s image indecorous, although it had survived in most English translations down to and including the Bishops’ Bible. Notes recorded by John Bois about the translators’ deliberations in Stationers’ Hall about the final form of the text reveal that other alternatives to the phrase were considered, including “without twitting or hitting in the teeth.”<sup>23</sup> (Imagine if either of these had survived!) Instead, the translators chose to reach back and use a translation of the Greek first employed by Wycliffe and then by the Douay: “upbraideth not.”<sup>24</sup> Their choice was a melodious one but not a particularly clear one, I should think, for plowboys. I doubt many would know what “upbraideth” meant. I wonder if Joseph did. Certainly few contemporary readers today do. It would have been clearer had the King James translators followed Geneva and translated the text as “reproacheth no man.” But they opted instead for the softer “upbraid.” Nevertheless, in context “upbraid” must have been sufficiently clear to young Joseph that the Spirit conveyed the sense of the verse with sufficient power to impel him to the grove to ask of God.

One wonders whether the Spirit could have broken through some later Bible translations had these fallen into Joseph Smith’s hands rather than the KJV. Consider, for example, this Enlightenment-era translation of

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James 1:5 by Daniel Mace in 1729: “If any of you is deficient in prudence, let him ask it of God, who liberally gives to all without upbraiding: and he will give it. But let him be fully persuaded of the lawfulness of what he asks: for he that is diffident about that, is like the waves that fluctuate with the wind. Such a man must not expect any answer from the Lord. A diffident man is inconstant in all his actions.”<sup>25</sup> This reveals the problem of bad translations. The translation has James address those who feel deficient in prudence, as if the problem were an abstract philosophical one rather than a religious one. There is no mention whatsoever of the need for faith, only the need to be “fully persuaded” that it is *lawful* to ask God a question—as if the legality of petitionary prayer was the issue, not the faithfulness of the petitioner. Likewise, note that the challenge to getting answers from God is not doubt but diffidence.<sup>26</sup>

One can discover similar problems in other modern translations. For example, the Twentieth Century New Testament (1904) says that people cannot expect to receive answers from the Lord if they are “vacillating [and] irresolute at every turn.” Once again, faith in God is never mentioned because the problem is, again, a lack of confidence and irresolution rather than lack of faith. Hence, the solution must be to approach God in a modern “can-do” spirit, with positive thinking.

Similarly, a chatty translation called *The Message* (1993) has James offer counsel to people who “worry their prayers” and want to keep “all [their] options open.” They should approach God “boldly, believingly, without a second thought,” confident that God “won’t be condescending”! This egregious translation not only ruins a theologically rich word—God is the one being who must always condescend when he graciously interacts with us—but it also turns James into the author of a New Age self-help manual. This James has a little prudent advice for modern neurotic spiritual seekers. In another translation, which came out in 2010, it is God who answers prayer “without a second thought” and “without keeping score” (Common English Bible).<sup>27</sup> Such a translation would have served as a poor prelude to one of the grandest theophanies of all time. I doubt God answered Joseph’s prayer casually, without a second thought.

Admittedly, these are not the most commonly used modern translations nor the best modern translations. Nonetheless, they reveal tendencies in modern Bible translation. They show how easy it is to botch both

the doctrine and the musical power of the Bible. They skew the sense and they feel flat. There is no music or majesty in them. The King James translation excels at both. It excels at balancing what Adam Nicolson calls simplicity and stateliness.<sup>28</sup>

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE KING JAMES TRANSLATION

This does not mean, however, that the King James Bible *always* excels in these, or even succeeds at all times in rendering the text clearly. There are many unnecessarily obscure, unclear passages in the KJV, some virtually unintelligible, even for me, and I am used to reading seventeenth-century English prose. Consider, for example, 2 Thessalonians 2:7: “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.” Unless you knew that *let* meant “hinder” or “obstruct” in Early Modern English, you wouldn’t be able to make heads or tails of this. And even if you did, the verse would still be somewhat opaque. Similarly, try reading 2 Corinthians 6:11–13 for family scripture study without provoking puzzled looks and sniggers: “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.”

Given the difficulty of the KJV in places like this, I keep other translations readily at hand for personal Bible study, including Greek and Hebrew interlinear texts, a New Testament with eight parallel translations, study Bibles of the New International Version, New English Bible, and New Revised Standard Version, and a modern-spelling Tyndale New Testament. Some Latter-day Saints seem unnecessarily reticent about consulting other translations. But to me, to do so is merely to follow in Joseph Smith’s footsteps. The Prophet used the King James Bible, to be sure, but he did not fetishize it. He recognized its limitations and even inscribed in an Article of Faith the fact that it and other translations were imperfect. He also tried to clarify and correct the KJV in what we now call the Joseph Smith Translation. And Joseph studied Hebrew and German in order to read the Bible in other languages. I find this truly remarkable—a seer, who had translated the Book of Mormon miraculously, was willing to engage in the hard work of foreign language study so he could understand the Bible better. Joseph provides an example of Bible study for us all.

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### THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Let me now do a rhetorical analysis of one other text from the King James Bible—the parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15. This is an incredibly touching story in virtually any translation that stays reasonably faithful to the Greek original. Nevertheless, the King James translation of this story, which closely follows that of Tyndale, is particularly moving in its simplicity and subtle artistry. I once spent the better part of a semester with a mentor, Arthur Henry King, studying the text word by word. King was a Cambridge-trained philologist. He taught us about such technical rhetorical terms as anaphora, pleonasm, litotes, and (my favorite) homoioteleuton. I shall not impose these on you nor indulge in a highly technical analysis of the text’s prosody. But let me present the parable from the KJV and comment on a few aspects of the quiet, moving artistry of its sounds, rhythms, and repetitions:

And he said, A certain man had two sons:

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. (Luke 15:11–16)

Note the alliteration of “f” words in phrases as “father,” “falleth to me,” “fields to feed swine,” and “fain have filled his belly,” as well as “fatted calf.” The assonance of the latter phrase, which has now become a proverbial phrase, also works well both when it is used to denote celebration and when it is spat out by a sulking older son: “Thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.”

Remarkable too is the punctuation. The King James translators provide readers with what is by modern standards an overly punctuated text. In part they do so mindful that the text is to be read aloud in churches. Punctuation

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in the KJV serves to mark pauses, like musical notations, as well as to mark syntactical units.<sup>29</sup> Two examples from the text above are the semicolons and colons before “and he began to be in want,” “and he sent him into his fields,” and “and no man gave unto him.” These full stops set off these phrases precisely as required for reading the text aloud.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. (Luke 15:17–19)

I will comment later on the phrase “And when he came unto himself.” For now, note the rhythm and spiritual connotation registered in the phrase, “I will arise and go.” “I will arise” underscores upward movement that is at once physical and spiritual. How much better it is than something more prosaic, like “I’ll get up and go to my dad.” I suspect that Yeats had King James phrasing in mind when he wrote the “I will arise and go, and go to Innisfree” in his lovely lyric “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.”

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:20–24)

Note the way repetition works here and throughout the story. I particularly like the rollicking, almost incantatory, rhythms in the father’s antithetical phrases: “was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.” This phrase is repeated to give closure to the first and second halves of the parable, which (I want to stress) is the story of not one but *two* lost sons—each lost in different ways.

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As such, the parable tells of two dramatic meetings between the father and an errant son. I can scarcely read the verse describing the first meeting aloud, it is so deeply affecting. Note the way the line slows down when describing the climactic reunion between the younger son and his father by separating each action with “and”—a literary style called “parataxis”<sup>30</sup>—a feature of Hebrew poetry commonly used in the KJV. “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” The effect is simple and strong. It renders with understated but moving power a moment that is full of great promise for all us prodigals who hope one day to be received again in the embrace of a loving Heavenly Father.

After this encounter, the parable turns to the second half of the story, which I believe is what drew out the parable from Christ in the first place. It is the story of a resentful elder son, who resembles the Pharisees who had complained that Jesus was welcoming and feasting with sinners (see Luke 15:1–2).

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:25–32)

Note how the text lets us feel the elder son’s deep anger and obstinacy, which the translators render in the stubborn, staccato spondees “and would not go in.”

"Therefore, came his father out"—this time not to a downcast, repentant son but to an angry, somewhat self-righteous son seething with resentment. The elder son's envy is evident in his bitter complaint: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." The words seem to spill out of the elder son—in a flow of emotion and perhaps hyperbole: Did he really never "at any time" disobey his father? How does he know his brother, whom he has refused to even talk to, has been with harlots? He is the only source of this detail.

The depth of the elder son's resentment is registered most tellingly in the way he refers to his younger brother: "But as soon as *this thy son* was come." *This thy son*! In his resentment, the elder son is beginning to deny his own fraternity with his younger brother—as if his younger brother is no brother to him at all.

The father must correct this sibling rivalry lest it ripen into something more sinful and sinister. This he does gently but firmly in these words: "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad [note the alliteration and dancing rhythm]: for *this thy brother* was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." The father reminds his jealous older son that the person he had called "this thy son" is in fact "this thy brother." The translators help us see the point by making the phrases perfectly parallel. "This thy brother" constitutes three simple words, but in context these words encompass the profound truth embedded in the Second Great Commandment.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the best qualities of the KJV are on full display. Let me now mention one other beauty in the translation, a treasured turn of phrase that means a lot to me: "And when he had come to himself."

The translation renders the Greek literally. Many modern translations, however, translate the text instead as "and when he had come to his senses." Such a translation lacks both the music and the meaning of the KJV, whose phrasing suggests a deep understanding of sin as betrayal of our true identity. The King James phrasing is consistent with Latter-day Saint theology, which recognizes that we, like the prodigal son, are children of a Father we once loved and lived with. For us, as for the prodigal son, to

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repent is to be called home; it is to return to our true selves. Sin is an aberration. It calls us away from our eternal identity. God calls us home. And in responding to this call by repentance, we become who we really are.

The phrase in the KJV “and when he came unto himself” contains in brief the archetypal story of Paul, of Alma the Younger, of Augustine, and of every sinner who has tried to find peace and happiness in wickedness—an impossibility, as the Book of Mormon reminds us (see Alma 41:10; Helaman 13:38). Pondering this simple but rich phrase led me to write the following poem.

And when he came unto himself he said  
... I will arise and go to my father.  
Thy gentle voice recalls me home  
However far I stray,  
It whispers in my mother tongue  
When I have lost the way.  
It bids my restless soul to rest  
That rests in thee alone,  
And calls me back unto myself  
When I begin to roam.  
Sin is a wandering and a mask,  
A hollow vanity.  
I am not made for such pretense  
Since I am made for thee.

I thank the King James translators for the gift of this simple phrase, “and when he came unto himself.” It is one of many gifts the KJV has given me and millions of other readers over the past four hundred years.

### A TRANSLATION “TO LET IN THE LIGHT”

The King James Bible is not a perfect translation. Joseph Smith knew this. Mormons recognize this explicitly in our eighth Article of Faith. Moreover, as a four-hundred-year-old translation, it is becoming ever more difficult to read. Yet it is a great translation, one that repays the difficulty of reading, especially reading aloud. As F. W. Faber observed of the KJV at the turn of the twentieth century, “It lives on the ear, like music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells, which the convert hardly knows how he can



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forego. Its felicities often seem almost things rather than words.”<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the best final word about the translation comes from the preface written by one of the translators, Miles Smith, about their then recently completed work, entitled “The Translators to the Reader.” Sadly, the preface is almost never included in modern editions. Smith says of the Bible:

It is not only an armor, but also a whole armory of weapons, both of-  
fensive and defensive; whereby we may save ourselves and put the enemy  
to flight. It is not an herb, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees  
of life, which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for  
meat, and the leaves for medicine. It is not a pot of Manna, or a cruse of  
oil, which were . . . for a meal’s meat or two, but as it were a shower of  
heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it never so great. . . . Happy  
is the man that delighteth in the Scripture, and thrice happy that medi-  
tateth in it day and night.<sup>32</sup>

“But,” Smith continues, “how shall men meditate in that which they  
cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close  
in an unknown tongue?” The answer, of course, is through translation.

Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that brea-  
keth the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain,  
that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of  
the well, that we may come by the water. . . . Indeed without translation  
into the vulgar tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob’s well  
(which is deep) without a bucket or something to draw with; or as that  
person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom when a sealed book was delivered,  
with this motion, “Read this, I pray thee,” he was fain to make this an-  
swer, “I cannot, for it is sealed.”<sup>33</sup>

The King James translation unsealed the Bible for Joseph Smith and  
for millions of other readers. It gave English-speaking men and women  
buckets to draw from the well of God’s word. It let in the light. For all of  
which, I can only say, “Thanks be to God.”

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# Prayers against

# Psalms.

# the wicked.

5 The proud have hid a snare for me and cords: they have spread a net by the wayes side: they have set grins for me. Selah.

6 I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD.

7 O GOD the LORD, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battell.

8 Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device, || lest they exalt themselves. Selah.

9 As for the head of those that compass me about: let the mischief of their own lips cover them.

10 Let burning coals fall upon them, let them be cast into the fire: into deep pits, that they rise not up again.

11 Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.

12 I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted: and the right of the poor.

13 Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy Name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.

## PSAL. CXLII.

1 David prayeth that his suit may be acceptable, 3 his conscience sincere, 7 and his life safe from snares.

### A psalm of David.

**L**ORD, I cry unto thee, make haste unto me: give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee.

2 Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense: and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

3 Set a watch (O LORD) before my mouth: keep the door of my lips.

4 Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.

5 Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

6 When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words, for they are sweet.

7 Our bones are scattered at the

graves mouth: as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.

8 But mine eyes are unto thee, O GOD the LORD: in thee is my trust, † leave not my soul desolate.

9 Keep me from the snare which they have laid for me, and the grins of the workers of iniquity.

10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets: whilst that I withall † escape.

## PSAL. CXLII.

David sheweth that in his trouble, all his comfort was in prayer unto God.

**C**atch of David: A prayer when he was in the cave.

**I** cried unto the LORD with my voice, with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.

2 I poured out my complaint before him: I shewed before him my trouble.

3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knevest my path: in the way wherein I walked, have they pitifully laid a snare for me.

4 I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me, refuge † failed me: † no man cared for my soul.

5 I cried unto thee, O LORD, I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living.

6 Attend unto my cry, for I am brought very low, deliver me from my persecutors: for they are stronger than I.

7 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy Name: the righteous shall compass me about: for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

## PSAL. CXLIII.

1 David prayeth for favour in judgement, 3 He complaineth of his griefs, 5 He strengtheneth his faith by meditation and prayer, 7 He prayeth for grace, 9 for deliverance, 10 for sanctification, 12 for destruction of his enemies.

### A psalm of David.

**H**ear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.

2 And enter not into judgement with

|| Or, let them not be exalted,

† Heb. aman of tongue: or an evil speaker, a wicked man of violence be established in the earth: let him be hunted to his overthrow.

† Heb. directed.

|| Or, let the righteous smite me kindly, & reprove me: let not their precious oil break my head, &c.

† Heb. make not my soul bare.

† Heb. pass over.

|| Or, A psalm of David giving instruction,

|| Or, look on the right hand, and see. † Heb. perished from me. † Heb. no man sought after my soul.

NOTES

1. See Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.
2. David Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament: Translated from the Greek by William Tyndale, 1534* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), xxvii.
3. Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), 211.
4. McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 164.
5. George Herbert, "A Priest to the Temple, Or the Country Parson, His Character, and Rule of Holy Life," in *George Herbert and Henry Vaughan*, ed. Louis L. Martz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 198.
6. Cited in McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 187.
7. McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 187.
8. Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 209.
9. Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*, 210.
10. [Miles Smith], "The Translators to the Reader," xiv, spelling modernized.
11. David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72; see 62–73 for the full argument. See also "Introduction" to Norton's edition of *The Bible: King James Version with the Apocrypha* (New York: Penguin, 2006), xiv.
12. Quoted in McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 263. See William Rosenau, *Hebraisms in the Authorized Version of the Bible* (Baltimore: Lord Baltimore, 1902).
13. See McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 264–65.
14. Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*, 211.
15. See John Nielsen and Royal Skousen, "How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale's?," *Reformation* 3 (1998): 49–74.
16. Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, ix–x.
17. Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 258.
18. Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, viii.
19. All early Bible texts, unless otherwise indicated, are referenced from the database "The Bible in English" (Version 97.1).
20. I have modernized the spelling in the original.
21. Marginal notes in Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, 363.
22. The marginal note on James 1:6 in the Geneva Bible reads, "Why then, what neede other Mediatour?" (1607 edition).
23. Ward Allen, *Translating for King James: Being the True Copy of the Only Notes Made by a Translator of King James's Bible, the Authorized Version, as the Final Committee of Review Revised the Translation of Romans through Revelation at Stationers' Hall in London in 1610–1611* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 87.
24. It is often the case that Wycliffe and Rheims-Douay share readings owing to the fact that the translations both draw from the Latin Vulgate and that the King James

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translators use readings common to Wycliffe and Douay. Allen notes that, though the Rheims-Douay translation was not listed in Rule 14 as one of the translations they should consult, the translators drew upon it for the Gospels and Epistles for “as many readings as any other single version.” See David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 440.

25. Daniel Mace (1729); in “Bible in English” database.
26. This translation calls to mind a satiric song from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Ruddigore* about the curse of a diffident nature:

My boy, you may take it from me,  
That of all the afflictions accurst  
With which a man’s saddled  
And hampered and addled,  
A diffident nature’s the worst.

27. See “Bible in English” database.
28. See Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*, 230–31.
29. As David Norton acknowledges in a chapter devoted to “Punctuation and other matters,” the KJV “sometimes marks the kind of pauses a reader should make rather than the grammatical or logical relationship of the parts of the writing. In short, it is sometimes rhetorical rather than grammatical.” David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 153.
30. For a discussion of the way American writers have been influenced by KJV parataxis, a feature drawn from the Hebrew Bible, see Alter, *Pen of Iron*, chapter 5, “The World through Parataxis,” 146–83.
31. Quoted by Norton in “Introduction,” *King James Bible*, xvi.
32. [Smith], “The Translators to the Reader,” viii, spelling modernized.
33. [Smith], “The Translators to the Reader,” viii–ix, spelling modernized. The two scripture references are to John 4:11 and Isaiah 29:11.