
INTRODUCTION

The 2006 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, *How the New Testament Came to Be*, celebrates the writing of the New Testament and the faithful service of those who brought that book of sacred scripture into existence. In the papers contained in this volume, presented on the Brigham Young University campus in Provo, Utah, on October 27–28, 2006, authors explore the New Testament’s origin and examine ancient and scriptural evidence on a variety of related topics.

The symposium, held annually and named in honor of pioneer Latter-day Saint scripture scholar Sidney B. Sperry, seeks each year to examine an aspect of the Church’s religious and scriptural heritage.

Recently there has been a great deal of interest worldwide in the origin, early history, and reliability of the documents that make up the New Testament. Through popular books, the publication of alternate Gospels, and the continuing popularity of novels and motion pictures that deal with New Testament themes and question biblical claims, readers and viewers have been exposed to many new ideas relating to New Testament studies. This volume, although not seeking to respond directly to any of those works, puts in print the research of faithful Latter-day Saint scholars who have explored the earliest evidence for the New Testament and have asked hard questions concerning it.

Indeed, the New Testament presents us with many questions. Unlike the Book of Mormon, which was written anciently but was preserved for centuries to come forth in its purity in the latter days, the New Testament's early history is in large part unknown. We do not know, for example, when, and under what circumstances, many of the documents were written. Nor do we know all the history of the texts from the time of their composition until many years later when the earliest-known manuscripts were copied. We know that "plain and precious things" were removed from the scriptural text (1 Nephi 13:28), but because the original manuscripts do not exist, is there any way to find out from the earliest preserved documents what those "plain and precious things" were and when they were lost? What does modern revelation contribute to answer questions like this?

Similarly, the New Testament presents us with questions concerning authorship that are unknown from the Book of Mormon. What do we know about the traditional attributions of the Gospels to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? What can we say about how those and other books were collected to form the New Testament? Do the ancient manuscripts provide answers? What does modern revelation teach us?

How the New Testament Came to Be does not deal with the life of Jesus Christ or how to become better disciples—topics which we believe are of the greatest worth. Our theme in the volume is the writing and compilation of the New Testament, with a focus on authors and manuscripts. Topics include writing in the ancient world, the work of scribes, the authorship of New Testament books, the occasions for and dating of individual New Testament books, the earliest ancient manuscripts, New Testament textual criticism, the development of the New Testament canon, and contributions of Joseph Smith to our understanding of the New Testament. Readers will see that the authors do not always interpret the evidence in the same way, and we as editors do not always agree with what the authors have written. But such is the nature of scholarly exploration in pursuit of truth, and the book is enhanced by the variety of its contents. What the authors have in common, however, is a commitment to the centrality of the sacred mission of Jesus Christ and a belief that modern revelation is an indispensable guide for reading and understanding the New Testament.

We are grateful to have among our contributors Elder Alexander B. Morrison, whose chapter poses questions and points out uncertainties while at the same time reaffirming the importance of faith and revelation. His chapter begins the book, and subsequent chapters build on the themes he introduces.

The 2006 Sperry Symposium committee consisted of Patty Smith and Professors Clyde J. Williams, Frank F. Judd Jr., and Kent P. Jackson. The editorial responsibilities were carried out by Professors Judd and Jackson. We thank the contributors to this volume and the contributors to the symposium for sharing the fruit of their research. And we thank colleagues at Brigham Young University and elsewhere who reviewed manuscripts and encouraged quality.

Kent P. Jackson

Frank F. Judd Jr.