



Latter-day Saints can benefit from combining the strengths of the King James translation with the strengths of modern translations and from combining the strengths of the study aids in the official Latter-day Saint editions of the Bible with the strengths of the study aids in academic study Bibles.

Courtesy of Josh Sears.

Study Bibles: An Introduction for Latter-day Saints

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Behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, . . . [was] sitting in his chariot . . . And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?

—King James Version, Acts 8:27–28, 30–31

The word Ethiopian, in Luke’s day, referred to anyone with dark or black skin. A eunuch is a castrated male who serves the queen in some ancient societies. . . . Candace is a title and not the specific name of an Ethiopian queen. . . . [The] quotation [is] from Isaiah 53:7–8.

—The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints—A Study Bible¹

Latter-day Saints revere the Bible as “the bedrock of all Christianity” and are instructed to feast upon its teachings regularly.² Although Latter-day Saints appreciate so much about the Bible, many struggle with some of its language and its deeply contextual messages. Fortunately, special editions known as study Bibles can help make the Old and New Testaments much

clearer. There are many kinds of study Bibles, but for present purposes we will define them as an edition of the Bible featuring a modern English translation and sophisticated, context-focused study aids—including book introductions, footnotes, and appendixes—that provide textual, historical, cultural, literary, linguistic, and theological insights about the biblical text.³ Because many Latter-day Saints may not be familiar with these kinds of Bibles, in this article I will describe what study Bibles are and the benefits they offer readers. I will also give suggestions for choosing a study Bible and discuss how these Bibles might be used to supplement one’s study of the official Bible editions published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Latter-day revelation instructs that we utilize the “best books” to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118), and I recommend study Bibles as among the “best” resources available to help us study the scriptures.

The Development of Study Bibles

The idea of adding explanatory notes or commentary to accompany biblical texts has a long history. Scribes since ancient times have added clarifications to the margins or in between the lines of the handwritten biblical texts they were copying. They would also add background information to the beginning or end of a text, such as in the case of the subtitles that appear at the end of Paul’s epistles, which provide information about the place of composition and the person who helped Paul write or deliver the letter.⁴

Over time, manuscripts and books that combined biblical text with later commentary became more sophisticated. In 1517 Venetian printer Daniel Bomberg published the first Rabbinic Bible (*Mikra’ot Gedolot*), which was prepared by Jacob ben Hayyim. It functions in many ways like a modern study Bible: on any given page, several verses from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) are presented, along with a parallel Aramaic translation called the Targum, textual notes known as the Masorah, and two running commentaries from notable medieval Jewish interpreters Rashi and Ibn Ezra.⁵ This presentation allowed Jewish readers to study their scriptures with the added richness of their extensive interpretive traditions.

For Christians, the Geneva Bible of 1560 is often considered the ancestor of modern study Bibles. This Bible—used by Shakespeare and carried by the Pilgrims aboard the *Mayflower*—contains book introductions, chapter summaries, maps, illustrations, cross-references, and marginal notes that



This page from the 1538 edition of the Rabbinic Bible surrounds Isaiah 1:12–23a with notes and commentary.

provide alternative translations or explain the meaning of the biblical text. The strengths of the translation and the helpfulness of the study aids made the Geneva Bible enormously popular, although in the heated religious climate of the late sixteenth century, some did not appreciate the theological and political messages that the marginal notes promoted.⁶ To avoid any potential controversy, the translators assigned to work on the King James Version (KJV) a half century later were explicitly instructed to include “no marginal notes at all . . . [except] for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek.”⁷

Despite the popularity of the commentary-free King James Version, study aids proved too helpful to leave out forever. In 1919 the runaway success of

the *Scofield Reference Bible* demonstrated how well the right kind of study Bible could sell in the modern age—and how much its theological interpretations could influence readers.⁸

The study aids in modern study Bibles, which have increased in sophistication over time, are designed to meet a diversity of needs. Some study Bibles interpret the text from the point of view of a specific religion, such as *The Catholic Study Bible*⁹ or *The Jewish Study Bible*,¹⁰ which draw upon centuries of interpretive history from their respective faith traditions. Other study Bibles, such as *The HarperCollins Study Bible*¹¹ or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*,¹² aim to be ecumenical; they explain biblical texts in their original context without favoring one modern theological system over another.

In addition to varying in religious orientation, study Bibles differ in whether their notes emphasize contextual interpretation or personal application. At the first end of the spectrum, an edition like the *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* focuses on “background—the missing pieces of information that the biblical writers did not need to state explicitly because their original audiences intuitively knew them.”¹³ The notes are full of comparisons between Israelite culture and that of Babylon, Ugarit, and Egypt, and color pictures and maps help establish historical context. As another example, the online NET (New English Translation) Bible (<https://netbible.org/>) contains over 58,000 notes that focus on linguistic and textual information.¹⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, editions like the *Starting Point Study Bible*¹⁵ or the *Christian Basics Bible*¹⁶ are light on the verse-by-verse context but instead use sidebar comments to orient new believers in their life of faith.¹⁷ Bibles in the middle of the spectrum, such as the *Life Application Study Bible*, include a great amount of contextual detail mixed with modern application.¹⁸

Features in Study Bibles

Study Bibles often share some common features, especially if they focus on explaining original context. Instead of using older translations such as the King James Version, most study Bibles favor newer versions, which use contemporary language, take advantage of more recent textual evidence and biblical scholarship, and in some cases are translated more accurately (more on this below).¹⁹ Because these insights are incorporated directly into modern translations, study Bibles using these translations have more room in the footnotes to dedicate to other subjects.²⁰



The 1560 Geneva Bible is supplemented with chapter summaries, cross-references, alternative word meanings, and short commentaries.

JOB 26

no treader turns toward their vineyards.
¹⁹ Drought and heat snatch away the snow waters;

so does Sheol those who have sinned.
²⁰ The womb forgets them;
 the worm finds them sweet;
 they are no longer remembered;
 so wickedness is broken like a tree.

²¹ “They harm^a the childless woman,
 and do no good to the widow.

²² Yet God^b prolongs the life of the mighty
 by his power;
 they rise up when they despair of life.

²³ He gives them security, and they are supported;
 his eyes are upon their ways.

²⁴ They are exalted a little while, and then
 are gone;
 they wither and fade like the mallow;^c
 they are cut off like the heads of grain.

²⁵ If it is not so, who will prove me a liar,
 and show that there is nothing in what
 I say?”

25 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:
² “Dominion and fear are with God;^d
 he makes peace in his high heaven.

³ Is there any number to his armies?
 Upon whom does his light not arise?

⁴ How then can a mortal be righteous
 before God?

How can one born of woman be pure?

⁵ If even the moon is not bright
 and the stars are not pure in his
 sight,

⁶ how much less a mortal, who is a maggot,
 and a human being, who is a worm!”

26 Then Job answered:
² “How you have helped one who has
 no power!

How you have assisted the arm that has
 no strength!

³ How you have counseled one who has no
 wisdom,
 and given much good advice!

⁴ With whose help have you uttered words,
 and whose spirit has come forth from
 you?

⁵ The shades below tremble,
 the waters and their inhabitants.

⁶ Sheol is naked before God,
 and Abaddon has no covering.

⁷ He stretches out Zaphon^e over the void,
 and hangs the earth upon nothing.

⁸ He binds up the waters in his thick
 clouds,
 and the cloud is not torn open by them.

⁹ He covers the face of the full moon,
 and spreads over it his cloud.

¹⁰ He has described a circle on the face of
 the waters,

^a Gk Tg: Heb *feed on or associate with*

^b Heb *he*

^c Gk: Heb *like all others*

^d Heb *him*

^e Or *the North*

should by rights be with them in the underworld. 18–25: These verses about the early death of the wicked are so unlike Job's views that they must be either a quotation by Job of the friends (RSV adds “You say” at the beginning of v. 16), or, possibly part of the missing third speech of Zophar. See also 27:7–10n.

25.1–26.14: Bildad's third speech. As it stands, Bildad's speech is uncommonly short (25.2–6) but although 26.1–14 is now assigned to Job, it was probably originally part of Bildad's speech. Such a rearrangement would help remove the problem of having three speeches of Job in a row (chaps. 26, 27–28, 29–31) without any intervening words from the friends. The theme of Bildad's speech would then be the power of God, in three spheres: in the heavens (25.2–6), in the underworld (26.5–6), and in creation (26.7–13). The speech is an address to Job (cf. 25.4, 6; 26.14), belittling him (26.2–4), denying his claim to innocence (25.2–6), and putting him in his place by focusing exclusively on God's untrammelled power (26.5–14). 25.2–3: *He makes peace in his high heaven*, probably an allusion to God's defeat at creation of the powers of chaos (cf. 9.13; 26.11–13; Isa 51.9). Peace through terror is God's style, according to Bildad. 26.5: *Shades*, i.e., the inhabitants of the underworld. 6: *Abaddon* (meaning “destruction”), another name for Sheol, the abode of the dead. 7: At creation, God stretched out the heavens (here called *Zaphon*, “the north”) like a tent without a center pole and suspended the earth from *nothing*. 8: The *clouds* are conceived as waterskins (cf. 38.37). 10: The *circle on the face of the waters* appears to be both the

After the translation itself, the most prominent feature of study Bibles is the footnotes, which are often copious. At the discretion of the scholar(s) assigned to annotate any particular section of the biblical text, these notes may provide historical background, cultural context, and textual variants; point out literary features such as narrative structures, poetic forms, and rhetorical devices; or provide such basic services as cross-references or explanations of difficult passages. Most study Bibles are very careful about distinguishing between the ancient scriptural text and the modern scholarly additions. For example, the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*²¹ prints notes in a different font and with a pale green background. Other Bibles use simpler methods, such as printing the footnotes in smaller type.

As an example of these notes and the value they can provide, consider the narrative in Isaiah chapter 7. While this chapter is well-known because of the Immanuel prophecy in verse 14 (“a virgin shall conceive”), it is difficult to understand as a whole because in this chapter Isaiah also describes so many contemporary individuals, nations, and events—including Ahaz, Jotham, Judah, Rezin, Syria, Pekah, Ephraim, and Assyria. Without some background, reading this chapter today is akin to reading a story about World War II without knowing the identifications of France, Hitler, America, Stalin, Roosevelt, or Japan; they're all just names. But this is where study Bibles can come to the rescue. For example, the *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* contains this information immediately below the text of Isaiah 7:

Rezin . . . was an Aramean (Syrian) King who was dethroned when his nation was incorporated into the Assyrian Empire in 732 BC. He had been paying tribute to Assyria for some time. . . . In order to forestall incorporation, Rezin joined Pekah, son of Remaliah (Is. 7:4–5; 8:6) and king of Israel from c. 737–732 BC, to oppose Assyria. Rezin, Pekah and Hoshea (Pekah's son and successor after Pekah was killed by the Assyrians), pressured Jotham, king of Judah (c. 750–732 BC), to join their anti-Assyrian coalition (2 Kin. 15:29, 37), but Jotham refused. To present a united front against their common enemy, Aram/Syria and Israel (called “Ephraim,” the name of its major tribe, in Is. 7:2, 4) united against Judah, now led by Ahaz (732–715 BC), to force their cooperation. This attack by Aram/Syria and Israel against Judah is called the Syro-Ephraimite War.²²

In very little space, this note helps readers get a basic sense of what is going on; they may then return to the biblical text with a much greater comprehension of what Isaiah is saying.

Other common aids in study Bibles include maps, tables, and illustrations, which may appear on a page where they are most relevant or might be

collected together in an appendix. Introductory essays at the beginning of each book of the Bible provide some basic information regarding that book's subject matter, literary organization, genre(s), historical and theological significance, and interpretive difficulties.

How to Choose a Study Bible

The study Bible industry is extensive, and dozens of options are currently on the market.²³ I have two recommendations for Latter-day Saints.

First, choose a study Bible prepared by recognized scholars with appropriate academic credentials. The counsel of former Church historian Steven E. Snow applies to biblical scholarship as much as it does to the study of Church history: "Look for sources by recognized and respected historians, whether they're members of the Church or not."²⁴ Such scholars have spent many years immersed in the history, culture, and literature of the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. While that experience does not always guarantee accuracy, their expertise usually helps filter reasonable conclusions from the occasionally quirky proposals of armchair Bible enthusiasts.

How does one identify good scholars? No set characteristics apply in every case, but a few apply in many cases. Most legitimate biblical scholars have earned PhDs from accredited universities. Most have degrees in biblical studies or related fields like Egyptology, Northwest Semitics, Assyriology, classics, early Christianity, or Near Eastern archaeology. Most publish original research in academic journals and books that are peer reviewed by experts in the field. However, these are only rules of thumb: excellent work has been published by writers who do not match all of these descriptions. In a world where so much is published that is outdated or idiosyncratic, we simply need to be mindful of whom we are reading and to pay attention to what their training and experience qualifies them to say authoritatively.

Second, choose a study Bible that is aligned with, or at least respectful of, your faith in the Savior and your commitment to the restored gospel. Study aids prepared by Latter-day Saints should of course qualify, and scholarship written from other perspectives should at least be respectful of our beliefs and broadly aligned with our desire to seek out truth. A personal story illustrates the potential pitfalls of an antagonistic source. Some years ago I was gifted the *ESV Study Bible*, which I had eagerly anticipated after reading many excellent reviews.²⁵ This is a truly comprehensive and beautiful book (of over 2,700 pages) with helpful notes, ample use of color, and a user-friendly format.



Carefully studying the Holy Bible brings great spiritual rewards.

As I began to use it, I started coming across scattered instances in which the notes unnecessarily criticized Latter-day Saints, but I was most shocked when I arrived at an appendix with a multipage exposé of "Mormonism" as a "cult." For obvious reasons, I do not recommend this study Bible to fellow Saints.

Given that some study Bibles are disrespectful of our beliefs, one good option is to choose a study Bible that is ecumenical in its scholarship. Editions such as *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* or *The HarperCollins Study Bible* fit this description; they are written by best-in-their-field scholars who are trying

to help readers of any religious background better understand biblical texts in their original context.

A second option is to deliberately choose a study Bible that incorporates insights from another religious tradition—one that is not antagonistic towards others. I particularly enjoy *The Jewish Study Bible* (for the Old Testament) and its companion volume, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, because few people have better insight into Jewish history, culture, and literature than Jews themselves (see 2 Nephi 25:5). Even though the restored gospel gives me a different point of view than secular scholarship or than Jewish/Catholic/Protestant scholarship, I have found that my own understanding is often enriched by reading what others have noticed.

A third option is to use a study Bible expressly prepared by and for Latter-day Saints. This option has historically been limited because, despite the number of helpful commentaries written by Latter-day Saints, few could be categorized as a fully functioning, academic study Bible as I have been using the term. The recent release of Thomas Wayment's *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints—A Study Bible* has now provided that option, at least for the New Testament.²⁶ This edition includes a fresh translation of the entire New Testament, and the notes combine the historical and cultural background available in other study Bibles with selections from the Joseph Smith Translation and comprehensive cross-references linking the New Testament with Restoration scripture.

My Personal Study Bible Recommendations

There are several good study Bibles, and different people will have their own preferences. These are my favorites in no particular order—check to see if newer editions are available.

Title	Publisher	Features
<i>The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints—A Study Bible</i> , by Thomas A. Wayment	Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University; Deseret Book	New Testament only; Latter-day Saint perspective
<i>The Jewish Study Bible</i> , 2nd edition	Oxford University Press	Old Testament only; Jewish perspective
<i>The New Oxford Annotated Bible</i> , 5th edition	Oxford University Press	Theologically neutral; often used in college courses
<i>The HarperCollins Study Bible</i> , 2006 update	HarperOne and the Society of Biblical Literature	Theologically neutral; often used in college courses

Title	Publisher	Features
<i>The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary</i> by Robert Alter	Norton	Old Testament only; divided into three substantial volumes
The New English Translation at https://netbible.org/	Biblical Studies Press	58,000+ translators' notes help explain linguistic complexities

Using a Study Bible as a Supplement to the Official Latter-day Saint Editions

While I encourage using study Bibles, I do not recommend that Latter-day Saints set aside the official editions of the Bible published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which currently include the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version (published in 1979, updated in 2013), the Spanish *Santa Biblia: Reina-Valera 2009*, and the Portuguese *Bíblia Sagrada—Almeida 2015*.²⁷ Church leaders have instructed that “members should use” these editions.²⁸ At the same time, using other editions *in addition* to the Church's has never been prohibited.²⁹ Indeed, several modern apostles have set an inclusive example by quoting other editions of the Bible in their general conference addresses.³⁰

I first experienced the value of reading two different editions side by side when I was a missionary in Chile. In those days the Church had not yet produced its own Spanish Bible, and when I arrived at the missionary training center I was handed the 1960 edition of the Reina-Valera Bible published by the American Bible Society. During the course of my mission, the constant comparison of that Bible with my Latter-day Saint Bible helped me learn things I never would have noticed using just one translation or one set of study aids. In more recent years, I have continued to use the Latter-day Saint editions as my primary Bible for devotional reading while keeping one or two good study Bibles close at hand as supplementary study aids.

As I have read through the Bible multiple times using different editions simultaneously, I have found great benefit in combining the strengths of the King James translation with the strengths of modern translations and in combining the strengths of the study aids in the official Latter-day Saint editions with the strengths of the study aids in academic study Bibles.³¹

Strengths and Weaknesses of the King James Version and Modern Translations

The influence of the King James Version “on the English-speaking world is unparalleled. . . . It has a fair claim to be the most pivotal book ever written, a claim made by poets and statesmen and supported by tens of millions of readers and congregations.”³² As *the Bible* of nineteenth-century America, the language and text of the KJV had a profound influence on Joseph Smith and other early leaders of the Restoration.³³ Especially noteworthy is the use of King James language in the English translation of the Book of Mormon,³⁴ as the revelatory idiom of the Doctrine and Covenants,³⁵ and as the basis for the Prophet’s own translation of the Bible.³⁶

The influential role of the King James Version in the production of latter-day scripture means that using the KJV gives readers several advantages. When the English translation of the Book of Mormon and other revelations of the Restoration quote phrases from the KJV, attentive readers can spot the connections and see how modern scripture interprets and adapts biblical scripture. Certain doctrinal ideas are more easily identified in the KJV because that version provided the phrases Joseph Smith used to articulate those doctrines for a latter-day audience.³⁷ And finally, because the archaic and heightened language of the KJV has been the traditional register for scriptures, hymns, prayers, and sermons for so long, English-speaking Saints tend to instinctively view such language as more “spiritual” than everyday language.

As an example of a scripture block where the King James Version gives Latter-day Saint readers an advantage, consider Jesus’s famous Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24–25 (compare Mark 13 and Luke 21). While reading Matthew 24–25 in a modern translation does clarify vocabulary and syntax, using the KJV is crucial for Latter-day Saints because Joseph Smith received two revelatory texts that are based on Matthew 24 as rendered in the King James Bible. A 7 March 1831 revelation (now Doctrine and Covenants 45) draws upon the language of KJV Matthew 24 to teach about the signs of the times, beginning with Doctrine and Covenants 45:16 (“I shall come in my glory in the clouds of heaven”), which adapts KJV Matthew 24:30 (“the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with . . . glory”). These allusions continue with great frequency³⁸ until the Lord stops and says more will be revealed “concerning this chapter” (meaning Matthew 24) when Joseph gets to it as part of his new translation of the Bible (Doctrine and Covenants

45:60–61). When Joseph reached Matthew 24 a few months later, he was given a revelatory reworking of the biblical text (now canonized as Joseph Smith—Matthew in the Pearl of Great Price) that both clarifies and adds to the original discourse.³⁹ However, while these latter-day revelations in Doctrine and Covenants 45 and Joseph Smith—Matthew can be fruitfully studied on their own, their meaning is significantly enhanced when they are compared with the biblical chapter on which they build, and when making those comparisons one must use the King James rendering or many of the connections will be obscured. Thus, while modern translations are useful for studying the Olivet Discourse in its *biblical* context, the KJV is essential for seeing how the themes of Matthew 24 have been adapted for a *latter-day* context.

Despite the advantages of the King James Version for Latter-day Saints, there are other ways in which the KJV puts readers at a disadvantage. Brigham Young University scholars Lincoln Blumell and Jan Martin explain:

There are essentially two fundamental challenges with the English of the KJV: accessibility and accuracy.

An accessible text uses language that its readers easily understand. Unfortunately, the sixteenth-century English of the KJV can make comprehension difficult in places.

An accurate translation of a text uses a second language to carefully represent the original language as closely as possible. Since the publication of the KJV in 1611, there have been important advances in understanding Biblical Hebrew and Greek and numerous discoveries of additional biblical manuscripts that have provided important textual variations and clarifications. . . . Unfortunately, the KJV text does not reflect these advances and in places is simply an inaccurate translation.⁴⁰

The problem of accessibility has increased over time as the English language moves further from the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the KJV. The narrative portions of the KJV (such as Genesis and Acts) are still relatively accessible, but the poetic books (such as Job) or the prophetic books of the Old Testament (such as Isaiah), as well as many of Paul’s epistles in the New Testament, can be extremely difficult to follow.

The problem of accuracy has also grown more pronounced since scholars know much more about biblical languages than they did four centuries ago. This is particularly problematic in the Old Testament because the KJV translators struggled with several aspects of the Hebrew language, such as how its poetry worked or what some of the rare vocabulary words meant (sometimes the translators simply guessed).⁴¹ In addition, the discovery of many

additional ancient biblical manuscripts has allowed scholars to render some passages more accurately than the KJV translators could. This is particularly problematic in the New Testament because the KJV translators had access to only a few late (medieval) Greek manuscripts, which contain more errors than manuscripts from earlier centuries.⁴²

As an example of a passage in which the King James Version falls short, consider Hosea 11:1–4:

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

3 I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them.

4 I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

Passages like this can be very challenging to understand, even for experienced, college-educated readers. When I come to such passages, I follow a simple three-step procedure:

1. read the passage in the KJV,
2. read the passage in a modern translation, and
3. reread the passage in the KJV and see if the modern translation helps make sense of it.

In this case, after reading Hosea 11:1–4 in the KJV, I might glance at my *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, which uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) as its translation:

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 The more I called them,
the more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.

3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.

4 I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.

Reading the NRSV does not eliminate all challenges, but because the NRSV is more clearly written, fixes certain words based on ancient manuscript evidence, and presents the text of Hosea in a poetic format, the meaning pops out with greater clarity. In the NRSV, as Latter-day Saint scholar Grant Hardy has observed, “The entire passage takes on a striking poignancy as God compares his love for Israel to the tender care of a father for a toddler.”⁴³ Once I get a better sense of Hosea’s meaning, I can then return to the KJV and reread it with greater comprehension.

This compare-and-contrast approach allows the best of both worlds: the traditional text and beautiful cadence of the King James Version combined with the accessibility and accuracy of newer translations. Using either the KJV or a modern translation in isolation comes with certain advantages and disadvantages, but using both in tandem allows them to productively complement one another.

Strengths of KJV translation	Weaknesses of KJV translation
Traditional language and uniformity with latter-day scripture	Sometimes difficult to understand and sometimes inaccurate
Strengths of modern translations	Weaknesses of modern translations
Accessible English using the latest scholarship and textual evidence	Plain language may feel “unscriptural” and Restoration connections less apparent

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study Aids in the Latter-day Saint Editions of the Bible and Academic Study Bibles

Editions of the Bible published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints include study aids designed to help Church members appreciate the teachings of ancient prophets and apostles in light of the truths of the restored gospel. These study aids include

- cross-references that tie biblical texts to Restoration scripture,
- a subject concordance (the Topical Guide, or the Guide to the Scriptures in foreign-language editions) that displays how doctrinal ideas are expressed across dispensations and scriptural texts,
- interpretive chapter headings that steer readers toward key doctrinal matters,

- extensive quotations from the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, and
- a dictionary (the Bible Dictionary, or the Guide to the Scriptures in foreign-language editions) that addresses Latter-day Saint concerns and viewpoints.

These unique study aids make the Latter-day Saint editions an indispensable tool for Church members.⁴⁴

Academic study Bibles also aim to help readers understand the Bible, but they focus on elucidating the ancient, contextual meaning of the text. These aids, which might be found at the bottom of the page, in essays preceding an individual book, or in appendixes, can include

- variant readings for a particular passage as found in ancient manuscripts;
- alternate translations, or notifications of when the Hebrew or Greek is particularly difficult;
- explanations of historical, cultural, or linguistic information necessary to properly understand the meaning of the text;
- identifications for the origin of quotations; and
- a synopsis of how famous or controversial passages have been interpreted by different faith traditions over history.

In sum, the study aids in the official Church editions excel at bringing restored doctrinal insights to the text. They are weaker at helping with the verse-by-verse details and at providing historical and cultural context.⁴⁵ Even the Bible Dictionary, which provides the most help with that context, has become increasingly out of date.⁴⁶ In contrast, the study aids in academic study Bibles excel at illuminating the contextual worlds of the text. Many provide nearly verse-by-verse insight. But with the exception of resources prepared by Latter-day Saints, study Bibles do not incorporate the teachings of modern prophets or help Latter-day Saint readers connect biblical and Restoration scripture, and some may even offer doctrinally incorrect interpretations.

Personally, if I had to choose between the Restoration insights available in the Church's Bible editions or the historical context available in academic publications, my clear choice would be the Church's editions. But there is no reason to choose—we can take advantage of both! Their respective strengths

and weaknesses complement one another so that when one falls short, the other can help. Let us examine two illustrative examples, John 21:20–23 and Jeremiah 1:11–12.

John 21:20–23 contains a rather enigmatic statement regarding the fate of “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” the apostle John. It raises the possibility that this disciple “should not die,” and yet the text itself hints at some uncertainty regarding what Jesus meant. With little else to go by, the *HarperCollins Study Bible* states, “According to legend, the apostle John . . . lived to a great age.”⁴⁷ The *Jewish Annotated New Testament* says that “the Beloved Disciple has apparently died. This verse corrects the rumor that Jesus had promised him eternal life.”⁴⁸ The *MacArthur Study Bible* interprets Jesus's saying as a mere “hypothetical statement for emphasis.”⁴⁹

In contrast, the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible is able to speak more conclusively about John's fate. The chapter heading states unequivocally that “John will not die.”⁵⁰ A footnote points readers to Doctrine and Covenants 7, which contains a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in April or May of 1829 regarding this very issue: John the Beloved asks Christ for “power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee,” and Christ explains that he will make John “as flaming fire and a ministering angel.”⁵¹ Another footnote directs readers to the Topical Guide entry for “Translated Beings,” which expounds on this topic with three references from the Old Testament, six from the New Testament, six from the Book of Mormon, six from the Doctrine and Covenants, and two from the Pearl of Great Price. The benefits of the Church's official scriptures are very clear in this case: where academic study Bibles are lacking or misleading, the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible fills in the interpretive hole.⁵²

On the other hand, Jeremiah 1:11–12 highlights a weakness in the Latter-day Saint editions. While studying the Old Testament in Sunday School, I once observed an interesting interaction as the Gospel Doctrine teacher called on class members to read and interpret this passage:

- 11 Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree.
12 Then said the Lord unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it.

Try as they might, the members of the class were at a loss to explain how “a rod of an almond tree” connects with “hasten[ing] my word to perform it.” It just made no sense. Furthermore, the only footnote in the Latter-day Saint

Bible was attached to the word *seest* and pointed readers to the Topical Guide entry for “Vision,” which offered no help in interpreting Jeremiah’s words.

This is a case in which the Latter-day Saint edition falls short because its weakness is in providing historical, cultural, and literary context—precisely what is needed to understand Jeremiah 1:11–12. In contrast, any good study Bible will provide the needed information:

- *The HarperCollins Study Bible*: “In the first vision a wordplay, *branch of an almond tree* (Hebrew *shaqed*) and *watching* (*shoqed*), stresses that God will enact the content of the prophetic word.”
- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*: “Jeremiah sees *an almond tree* (Heb ‘*shaqed*’) and is assured that God is *watching over* (Heb ‘*shoqed*’) the prophetic word to fulfill it. For similar vision/puns see Am 7.7–9; 8:1–3.”
- *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*: “The Hebrew for ‘watching’ sounds like the Hebrew for ‘almond tree.’ Just as the almond tree blooms first in the year (and therefore ‘wakes up’ early—the Hebrew word for ‘watching’ means to be wakeful), so the Lord is ever watchful to make sure that His word is fulfilled.”⁵³
- Robert Alter’s *The Hebrew Bible*: “The question about the riddling vision . . . hinge[s] on a pun. . . . ‘Almond-tree’ is *shaqed*; ‘vigilant’ is *shoqed*.”⁵⁴

The Church’s edition of the Bible is simply not designed to explain every verse in this kind of detail. In cases like this, however, a study Bible used as a supplementary study aid can be enormously helpful and ultimately enriches one’s experience with the Latter-day Saint edition.

Strengths of Church edition study aids

Connections to latter-day scripture and correct doctrinal interpretations

Weaknesses of Church edition study aids

Very little historical/cultural context, some of which is outdated

Strengths of academic study aids

Detailed and up-to-date historical/cultural context

Weaknesses of academic study aids

May not benefit from revealed doctrinal insights

Challenges and Opportunities

As I have introduced fellow Saints to study Bibles, I have heard a few common questions and concerns, which I will briefly respond to below. They highlight some of the challenges involved in supplementing the official Latter-day Saint Bibles with academic resources, but also some of the great opportunities for spiritual learning.

“*A new translation is just someone’s interpretation of the scriptures.*” It is true that translation always involves interpretation; translators must make myriad choices, from which ancient manuscript to use to which meaning of a word to pick.⁵⁵ However, for many English-speaking Saints, our default familiarity with the King James Version leads us to assume that the KJV represents “the scriptures” while modern translations are simply an “interpretation” of the scriptures. In so doing, we forget that the KJV itself is a translation from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts and that the translators commissioned by King James I were real people with their own biases—they were white, male, British, Protestant (mostly bishops or priests of the Church of England), early-seventeenth-century scholars, whose theological views reflect the turbulent years following the Reformation.⁵⁶ This is not a criticism, simply a recognition that reading a new translation of the Bible is not to *introduce* human interpretation, but to move from one set of interpretations to another. In some cases the KJV translators’ interpretive choices may be better, and in other cases, those of modern translators. Supplementing the KJV with a modern translation allows readers to compare those interpretations under the guidance of the Spirit.

“*Why would I want to read what scholars have to say about the scriptures? Interpreting scripture is the responsibility of prophets and apostles.*” In recommending the academic expertise of biblical scholars, I am in no way discounting the crucial role of modern prophets. In doctrinal matters, interpretive authority accompanies priesthood keys. President M. Russell Ballard has reminded us, however, that apostolic authority and academic training are not the same thing and that different *kinds* of questions require looking for answers from different *kinds* of sources. “The Lord called the apostles and prophets to invite others to come unto Christ,” President Ballard said, “not to obtain advanced degrees in ancient history, biblical studies, and other fields that may be useful in answering *all* the questions we may have about [the] scriptures.” While apostles can readily “respond to certain types of questions,” he continued, “there are other types of questions that require an expert in

a specific subject matter. . . . If you have a question that requires an expert, please take the time to find a thoughtful and qualified expert to help you.”⁵⁷ Elder Quentin L. Cook demonstrated this distinction in his 9 September 2018 Face to Face devotional: while answering questions from young adults, Elder Cook responded to *doctrinal* questions while deferring *historical* questions to the two professionally trained historians, Kate Holbrook and Matt Grow, who shared the stage with him.⁵⁸ In light of President Ballard’s counsel and the examples of other apostles like Elder Cook, I recommend that study Bibles prepared by experts in the field are a responsible way of answering our historical, cultural, linguistic, and textual questions about the scriptures.

“*Modern English translations make the scriptures too easy. The King James Version may be difficult to read, but mentally engaging with the words encourages pondering and invites revelation.*” Based on my own experience, I agree that the KJV’s heightened language can promote a more active mental and spiritual engagement with the biblical text, sometimes precisely *because* of its difficulty.⁵⁹ However, this virtue can be pushed too far: there is a fine line between difficulty that encourages a productive struggle to understand and difficulty that leads readers to frustration or misunderstanding. For example, many Latter-day Saints suffer from what one writer calls an “Isaiah complex”—that feeling of guilt that follows frustrating attempts to make sense of Isaiah.⁶⁰ However, as someone who has read the book of Isaiah in the original Hebrew and in various translations, I would estimate that the difficulty of reading Isaiah in the KJV is reduced by *half* when one simply follows along in a modern translation. Reading two translations side by side preserves the productive spiritual engagement that comes with the KJV’s archaic/heightened language while also giving readers linguistic help as needed. This in turn gives us a greater opportunity to “seek inspiration concerning the *message* of scripture rather than relying on the Holy Ghost to parse convoluted syntax and obsolete vocabulary.”⁶¹

It is also worth observing that almost none of the biblical authors wrote in a “fancy” register; they generally wrote Hebrew and Greek in a straightforward way that was meant to be understood by common people.⁶² While there is value in what modern English speakers perceive to be the special, even spiritual, register of the KJV, we should recognize that this is not how native Hebrew and Greek speakers would have heard their scriptures. Thus, a translation using straightforward, contemporary language does not by its nature

betray the intent of the biblical authors and in some cases may in fact more closely approximate what they were aiming for.

“*Aren’t the scholars who are writing all these notes just overcomplicating the scriptures? Why would God make the scriptures so obscure that you need a PhD to understand them?*” Certainly much of scripture—particularly central messages such as the love of God, the saving power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the need for repentance—is so straightforward that even children can understand. And certainly the Lord wants to be understood, which is why he reveals his word “unto [his] servants . . . after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:24). The problem is that many messages that were once easily understood by their original audience can be difficult for a later audience when “the manner of their language” changes—when assumed knowledge about historical context, linguistic rules, or cultural expectations is no longer assumed but has changed for new audiences living in different times, speaking different languages, and seeing the world through different cultural lenses. When scholars write notes for a study Bible, much of what they are trying to do is simply get twenty-first-century, Western, English-speaking readers caught up with the historical, linguistic, and cultural background that the biblical authors assumed their audience *already* possessed. Without that background, misinterpretation is often inevitable.⁶³

“*I have always looked at this passage in a certain way that has great meaning to me, but this study Bible is saying that it means something different.*” One reason the scriptures are so spiritually stimulating is that they are multilayered and can address different needs. It is perfectly possible that a passage of the Bible might have one meaning in its original context, additional meanings as used in the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants, and any number of other meanings for readers who receive personalized direction from the Holy Ghost. Be open to new meanings. Whether an interpretation comes from the Topical Guide’s use of a scripture or from a scholar’s historical analysis, we do not want to limit any scripture passage by assuming that with one explanation we have exhausted its rich interpretive possibilities. As President Dallin H. Oaks has taught, while “scholarship and historical methods” may be especially helpful in illuminating “what was meant at the time the scriptural words were [originally] spoken or written,” we must remember that “a scripture is not limited to what it meant when it was written but may also include what that scripture means to a reader today.” Because of this,

“commentaries, if not used with great care, may illuminate the author’s chosen and correct meaning but close our eyes and restrict our horizons to other possible meanings.”⁶⁴

“I don’t read the scriptures to learn about history; I just want to get some personal revelation.” If someone needs inspiration and simply reading the scriptures is doing that for her, I commend that effort and am pleased the scriptures are helping. For long-term spiritual growth, however, more serious engagement with the word of God yields rich rewards. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught that “this restored gospel brings not only spiritual strength, but also intellectual curiosity and growth. Truth is truth. There is no clearly defined line of demarcation between the spiritual and the intellectual. . . . The Lord Almighty, through revelation, has laid a mandate upon this people in these words: ‘Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith’ [Doctrine and Covenants 88:118].”⁶⁵

Latter-day Saints have a wonderful example of this kind of inclusive learning in the Prophet Joseph Smith. This was a man who could take his King James Bible, read the opening words of Genesis, and see a vision of Moses beholding creation (Moses 1). He could ponder John 5:29 and see through those words the three kingdoms of glory (Doctrine and Covenants 76). He could declare that the enigmatic book of Revelation “is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written.”⁶⁶ But despite all that he was able to learn through the Spirit, Joseph did *not* believe that this discounted the value of learning “by study” out of the “best books.” He saw revelation and academic study as not only complementary, but also mutually reinforcing. For example, Joseph went through great effort in the winter of 1835–36 to hire a Jewish scholar to teach Hebrew to the members of the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio.⁶⁷ Even though he had already translated the Book of Mormon without any formal language training, he wrote of how much “my soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original [Hebrew], and I am determined to persue [*sic*] the study of languages untill [*sic*] I shall become master of them.”⁶⁸

While working on his new translation of the Bible, the Prophet also drew upon both spiritual insight and the “best books”—in this case, a kind of study Bible. Some scholars have suggested that while reading out of his copy of the King James Version, Joseph would occasionally consult a six-volume commentary series written by Methodist scholar Adam Clarke.⁶⁹ Clarke’s commentary, though lengthier than the single-volume study Bibles we typically use today,

was set up much like a modern study Bible, with the biblical text occupying the top half of the page and detailed historical, cultural, literary, and linguistic notes filling the bottom half. It appears that Joseph occasionally drew upon these academic insights as he worked on his translation. For him, truth was truth whether it came through revelation or out of the best books, and he happily gathered together all the truth he could find.

As we pursue our own study of the scriptures, Joseph’s enthusiasm for learning, his sensitivity to the Holy Ghost, and his careful use of the best available biblical scholarship provide a model we would do well to emulate. **RE**

Notes

1. Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints—A Study Bible* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 223.
2. M. Russell Ballard, “The Miracle of the Holy Bible,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 82. For a detailed treatment of Latter-day Saint engagement with the Bible, see Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
3. While the examples used herein are written in English, I hope that my suggestions will also prove helpful to readers who wish to find reliable study Bibles in other languages.
4. These subtitles are reproduced in the King James Version, but most modern Bible editions omit them because they were composed centuries after Paul and are often incorrect. See Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 40–41.
5. See B. Barry Levy, “Rabbinic Bibles, *Mikra’ot Gedolot*, and Other Great Books,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 25, no. 4 (1991): 65–81.
6. Although some notes are anti-Catholic or otherwise extreme in their views, the polemical nature of the Geneva Bible has often been exaggerated. See David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 275–319.
7. Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611–2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 37.
8. See R. Todd Mangum and Mark S. Sweetnam, *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009). On pages 210–17 they discuss the impact that this particular edition had on subsequent study Bibles.
9. Donald Senior, John H. Collins, and Mary Ann Getty, eds., *The Catholic Study Bible*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). This study Bible uses the New American Bible Revised Edition, a 2011 update of a 1970 translation created and used by members of the Roman Catholic Church.
10. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). This study Bible uses the New Jewish Publication Society (Tanakh) translation, first published in 1985 by Jewish scholars. See also Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

11. Harold Attridge, ed., *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006). The study aids in this edition, which were produced by the Society of Biblical Literature, accompany the New Revised Standard Version, a 1989 translation that was produced by an ecumenical group of scholars and is often used in academic writing.

12. Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). This study edition uses the New Revised Standard Version.

13. Craig S. Keener and John H. Walton, eds., *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), viii. This edition uses the New King James Version, a translation published in 1982. This same study Bible has an alternate edition, published in 2016, that uses the New International Version, an evangelical Protestant translation first published in 1978 and updated in 1984 and 2011. Another study Bible published by Zondervan with a similar focus is the *Archaeological Study Bible*, which also comes in either the NIV (2005) or the KJV (2010).

14. The New English Translation (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), now in its second edition (2017), is available to purchase in physical form, but the notes are so extensive that it is easiest to use on the web. Although the NET is a fresh translation of the entire Bible, when I use the website, netbible.org, I am usually not as interested in the translation itself as in the tens of thousands of translators' notes that allow someone to peek behind the scenes at the different problems and possibilities in the translation. Other websites showing the words operating behind English translations include biblehub.com and www.blueletterbible.org.

15. Luis Palau, ed., *Starting Point Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002). This edition uses the New International Version.

16. Martin H. Manser and Michael H. Beaumont, eds., *Christian Basics Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017). This edition uses the New Living Translation, first published in 1996 and updated in 2004 and 2007.

17. In addition to study Bibles that focus on personal application, there are also niche editions that single out some other theme. For example, *The Green Bible* (New York: HarperOne, 2008) supplements the New Revised Standard Version with essays and sidebars discussing our responsibility to care for the environment, as well as God's relationship with nature. Verses that have something to do with the earth, animals, stewardship, or related issues are printed in green. Another example is Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, eds., *The Women's Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). This edition uses the New Living Translation, and the study aids are particularly sensitive to women's perspectives, both ancient and modern.

18. *Life Application Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011). This edition uses the New International Version.

19. See Gaye Strathearn, "Modern English Bible Translations," in *The King James Bible and the Restoration*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 234–59; and Ben Spackman, "Why Bible Translations Differ: A Guide for the Perplexed," *Religious Educator* 15, no. 1 (2014): 30–65.

20. One study Bible using the King James Version is the three-volume *Footnotes to the New Testament for Latter-day Saints*, edited by Kevin Barney and freely available to download as PDF files at feastupontheword.org/Site:NTFootnotes. While the notes on each page do offer some insights regarding historical, cultural, literary, or doctrinal issues, these kinds of notes are outnumbered by those interpreting the four-hundred-year-old vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the KJV. Barney observes, "Much of the need for this book would be obviated

if one were simply to read the [New Testament] in a good, modern translation" (Barney, *Footnotes*, 1:iii).

21. D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015). This edition uses the New International Version.

22. *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, 1161.

23. See Daniel Silliman, "The Most Popular Bible of the Year Is Probably Not What You Think It Is," *Washington Post*, 28 August 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/08/28/the-most-popular-bible-of-the-year-is-probably-not-what-you-think-it-is.

24. Steven E. Snow, "Balancing Church History," *New Era*, June 2013, 22.

25. *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). This edition uses the English Standard Version, an evangelical Protestant translation published in 2001 and revised most recently in 2016.

26. See Wayment, *New Testament*. For reviews of this work, see Nicholas J. Frederick, "The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints," *BYU Religious Education Review*, Fall 2018, 26–29; and Daniel O. McClellan, "As Far as It Is Translated Correctly: Bible Translation and the Church," *Religious Educator* 20, no. 2 (2019): 64–74.

27. Regarding the original English edition, see Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Church Publishes First LDS Edition of the Bible," *Ensign*, October 1979, 8–18. For subsequent editions and updates, see "Church Publishes LDS Edition of the Holy Bible in Spanish," *Ensign*, September 2009, 77–78; "Church Releases New Edition of English Scriptures in Digital Formats," *Ensign*, April 2013, 77; and "LDS Edition of Bible in Portuguese," *Ensign*, November 2015, 141. It is worth noting that the Church does not use the original 1611 text of the King James Version, but rather an update of a revision prepared by Benjamin Blayney in 1769. See Kent P. Jackson, "The English Bible: A Very Short History," in Jackson, *King James Bible*, 21.

28. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2019), 21.1.7.

29. For example, in an address at Brigham Young University, Elder John K. Carmack said, "We clearly prefer the King James Version . . . , but we are not adamant about that. Any responsibly prepared version could be used and might be helpful to us." John K. Carmack, "The New Testament and the Latter-day Saints," in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The New Testament*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 9.

30. For some examples, see Neal A. Maxwell, "'Lest Ye Be Wearied and Faint in Your Minds,'" *Ensign*, May 1991, 90 (quoting the Revised Standard Version); Jeffrey R. Holland, "Miracles of the Restoration," *Ensign*, November 1994, 34 (quoting the New English Bible); Robert D. Hales, "In Remembrance of Jesus," *Ensign*, November 1997, 26 (quoting the New International Version); Jeffrey R. Holland, "Abide in Me," *Ensign*, May 2004, 32 (quoting the Reina-Valera 1960); Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "In Praise of Those Who Save," *Ensign*, May 2016, 80 (quoting the English Standard Version); Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Fourth Floor, Last Door," *Ensign*, November 2016, 16, 18 (quoting the New International Version); Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Greatest among You," *Ensign*, May 2017, 79, 81 (quoting the New International Version and the New English Translation); Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Perfect Love Casteth Out Fear," *Ensign*, May 2017, 106–7 (quoting the New King James Version); and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Missionary Work: Sharing What Is in Your Heart," *Ensign*, May 2019, 18 (quoting the English Standard Version).

31. For a detailed treatment of the merits of comparing different translations, see Grant Hardy, “The King James Bible and the Future of Missionary Work,” *Dialogue* 45, no. 2 (2012): 1–44.

32. Melvyn Bragg, *The Book of Books: The Radical Impact of the King James Bible, 1611–2011* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2011), 5–6.

33. See Grant Underwood, “Joseph Smith and the King James Bible,” in Jackson, *King James Bible*, 215–33; and Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 10–79.

34. See Daniel L. Belnap, “The King James Bible and the Book of Mormon,” in Jackson, *King James Bible*, 162–81. Regarding the presence of King James language in the Book of Mormon, Jan J. Martin, “The Theological Value of the King James Language in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 27 (2018): 91–92, points out that the Book of Mormon self-identifies its purpose as both establishing truths in the Bible and restoring truths lost from the Bible. “At the time the Book of Mormon was translated into English,” Martin writes, “the King James translation was *the* authoritative version of the Bible, making it *the* Bible that the Book of Mormon had to clarify. Furthermore, because theological concepts are inseparable from the language used to express them, . . . the Book of Mormon could not convincingly establish truths articulated in the KJV unless it employed seveneenth-century terminology.”

35. See Eric D. Huntsman, “The King James Bible and the Doctrine and Covenants,” in Jackson, *King James Bible*, 182–96; and Nicholas J. Frederick, “The New Testament in the Doctrine and Covenants,” in *New Testament History, Culture, and Society: A Background to the Texts of the New Testament*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 719–50.

36. See Kent P. Jackson, “The King James Bible and the Joseph Smith Translation,” in Jackson, *King James Bible*, 197–214.

37. Examples of Latter-day Saint doctrines that are articulated using phrases from the King James Version include the “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Ephesians 1:10; compare Doctrine and Covenants 112:30; 121:31; 124:41; 128:18, 20; 138:48), the “celestial” kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:40; compare Doctrine and Covenants 76:70, 78, 87, 92, 96; 78:7, 14; 88:2, 4, 18, 20, 22, 25, 28–29; 101:65; 105:4–5; 130:11; 131:1; 137:1, 7, 10; “A Facsimile from the Book of Abraham, No. 2”), and premortal life as a “first estate” (Jude 1:6; compare Abraham 3:26, 28). Because newer Bibles often translate these phrases differently, their biblical origin is only apparent when consulting the KJV.

38. KJV Matthew 24:2→Doctrine and Covenants 45:20; KJV Matthew 24:34→Doctrine and Covenants 45:21; KJV Matthew 24:6, 48→Doctrine and Covenants 45:26; KJV Matthew 24:12→Doctrine and Covenants 45:27; KJV Matthew 24:7→Doctrine and Covenants 45:33; KJV Matthew 24:6→Doctrine and Covenants 45:35; KJV Matthew 24:32→Doctrine and Covenants 45:37; KJV Matthew 24:30→Doctrine and Covenants 45:44; KJV Matthew 24:33→Doctrine and Covenants 45:63.

39. See Kent P. Jackson, “The Olivet Discourse,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 318–43.

40. Lincoln H. Blumell and Jan J. Martin, “The King James Translation of the New Testament,” in Blumell, *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, 673; paragraph breaks have been added. For a similar evaluation, see Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 50–51.

41. Because of the significant influence of the King James Version, Christians have built up a great deal of mythos regarding the knowledge and skill of its translators, and Latter-day Saints have sometimes repeated these exaggerations. For example, without diminishing in any way the translators’ obvious expertise or the possibility of inspiration in their work, it is simply not the case that “it would be difficult today to gather 50 scholars with the knowledge of ancient languages possessed by these men.” Richard N. W. Lambert and Kenneth R. Mays, “400 Years of the King James Bible,” *Ensign*, August 2011, 42. There are any number of biblical scholars today whose language expertise is superior simply because they are drawing from over four hundred years of additional research on biblical languages.

As one example, KJV Proverbs 26:23 reads, “Burning [=fervent] lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd [=an earthen vessel] covered with silver dross.” The KJV translates the Hebrew phrase *ksp sgm* as “silver dross,” but this does not make sense within the context of this passage on hypocrisy because dross is a negative material and the image requires something attractive that hides something inferior underneath, just as “burning lips” and a “wicked heart” are negative qualities within a person. Furthermore, silver dross was not used to cover earthenware but would have been discarded. A solution to this puzzle became available in 1929 when French archaeologists uncovered the remains of Ugarit, a late second-millennium BC city that once thrived on the coast of what is now Syria. The people there spoke Ugaritic, a language closely related to Biblical Hebrew, and the decipherment of Ugaritic texts has allowed scholars to better understand the Hebrew vocabulary of the Old Testament. In this instance, a Ugaritic word *spsg* “glaze” makes it possible to reinterpret the Hebrew of Proverbs 26:23 as *k spsgm*, meaning “like glaze,” which better fits the context because glaze was indeed something attractive used to hide ordinary earthenware underneath. See Kenneth L. Barker, “The Value of Ugaritic for Old Testament Studies,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113 (1976): 128–29. Several modern English translations of the Bible reflect this insight (e.g., the English Standard Version, the New English Translation, and the New Revised Standard Version). The point is that the King James translators could not have possibly made better sense of the Hebrew without additional data, which did not come until after 1929. Recognizing instances like this in which modern translations are more accurate than the KJV does not demean either the skill or the sincere intent of the KJV translators, it simply acknowledges that modern scholars have learned a great deal since that time and are able to use that knowledge to translate the Bible more accurately than ever before.

42. See Carl W. Griffin and Frank F. Judd Jr., “Principles of New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 78–92; Carol F. Ellertson, “New Testament Manuscripts, Textual Families, and Variants,” in Jackson and Judd, *How the New Testament Came to Be*, 93–108; Lincoln H. Blumell, “The Text of the New Testament,” in Jackson, *King James Bible*, 61–74; Lincoln H. Blumell, “A Text-Critical Comparison of the King James New Testament with Certain Modern Translations,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 67–126; Thomas A. Wayment, “Textual Criticism and the New Testament,” in Blumell, *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, 659–71; and Lincoln H. Blumell, “The Greek New Testament Text of the King James Version,” in Blumell, *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, 691–706. Regarding the Joseph Smith Translation, see Spackman, “Why Bible Translations Differ,” 52–54.

43. Hardy, “King James Bible and the Future of Missionary Work,” 16.

44. For the development of the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible in English, see Robert J. Matthews, “The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 4 (1982): 387–424; Fred E. Woods, “The Latter-day Saint Edition of the King James Bible,” in Jackson, *King James Bible*, 260–80; and the documentary *That Promised Day: The Coming Forth of the LDS Scriptures*, broadcast on BYUtv on 3 October 2010, www.byutv.org/player/495be0e6-f235-464a-b971-00f6b9597809/that-promised-day. While the Spanish and Portuguese editions are based on the English edition, they feature several language- and culture-specific adaptations, as well as some improvements over the English edition. See Joshua M. Sears, “Santa Biblia: The Latter-day Saint Bible in Spanish,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2015): 42–75.

45. The Latter-day Saint editions of the Bible do include some footnotes that offer information on historical, cultural, or textual matters, but they appear very infrequently, and several of the notes need to be revised. Some examples of mistakes that remain uncorrected include Isaiah 15:5, footnote *b* (the phrase “heifer of three years old” in the KJV does not suggest that Zoar “should still have been young and vigorous,” rather the Hebrew phrase translated “heifer of three years old” should have been transliterated as a town named Eglath-shelishiyah); Ezekiel 27:16, footnote *a* (the Hebrew behind KJV’s “Syria” is indeed “Aram,” but the Hebrew word itself is misspelled and should read “Edom”); Mark title footnote (the Joseph Smith Translation does not entitle the book “The Testimony of St. Mark”); Mark 13:1, footnote *a* (the JST of Mark 13 was originally created by copying the JST of Matthew 24, but subsequent revisions created some differences between the two texts); Luke title footnote (the Joseph Smith Translation does not entitle the book “The Testimony of St. Luke”); John 1:42, footnote *a* (“Cephas” is Aramaic, not Greek); and John 5:1, footnote *a* (the description of Greek manuscripts is not correct).

46. The Bible Dictionary, which first appeared in the 1979 edition of the Latter-day Saint Bible, is a revision of a Bible dictionary published decades earlier by Cambridge University Press, with the updates focusing primarily on aligning the entries with Latter-day Saint doctrine. See Robert J. Matthews, “Using the New Bible Dictionary in the LDS Edition,” *Ensign*, June 1982, 47–50; and Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 229–32. Although a few minor adjustments were made in the 2013 edition, the scholarly information has not been significantly revised in well over half a century and several entries are now out of date.

As one example, the entry titled “Jamnia” describes it as a place “where, about A.D. 90, a council of rabbis declared the Old Testament canon to be completed. . . . Traditionally, at this council the canon of the Old Testament was decided.” The idea that there was a “council of Jamnia” where the Old Testament canon was fixed became popular in the early twentieth century, but has been thoroughly discredited since the 1960s. See Jack P. Lewis, “Jamnia Revisited,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 146–62.

Even entries focused on Latter-day Saint topics are not all current. For example, the entry “Joseph Smith Translation” states, “Although the major portion of the work was completed by July 1833, [the Prophet] continued to make modifications while preparing a manuscript for the press until his death in 1844.” Although scholars used to think the Joseph Smith Translation was never finished, further research has since concluded that Joseph completely ceased work on the Joseph Smith Translation in 1833, and from then on his sole aim was to publish the work. See Kent P. Jackson, “New Discoveries in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” *Religious Educator* 6, no. 3 (2005): 156–57.

While the Bible Dictionary remains reasonably functional for most Church members’ everyday needs, its deficiencies are yet another reason it can be helpful to supplement the Church’s official Bible with a modern, academic resource. Robert J. Matthews, one of the primary editors for the Bible Dictionary during the 1970s, himself recognized that not all the information would remain current and is “subject to reevaluation as new discoveries or additional revelation may require.” He advised that “if an in-depth discussion is desired, the student should consult a more exhaustive dictionary.” Matthews, “Using the New Bible Dictionary,” 48.

47. *HarperCollins Study Bible*, 1854.

48. *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 218.

49. *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1595. This edition uses the New American Standard Bible, which was published in 1971 with an update in 1995.

50. This is the reading in the 2013 edition of the Latter-day Saint Bible in English. The original 1979 heading spoke of “John’s translation.”

51. This revelation is usually dated to April 1829 based on the recollection of Joseph Smith a decade later; see “History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” p. 15, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/21. On the possibility that it was given in May, see Frank F. Judd Jr. and Terry L. Szink, “John the Beloved in Latter-day Scripture (D&C 7),” in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 95–96. The original version of the revelation, found on pp. 13–14 of Revelation Book 1 (www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-book-1/7) and as Chapter VI in the 1833 Book of Commandments (www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-commandments-1833/22), was later expanded with additional detail for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/168). It is this expanded version that contains the phrases I have quoted herein.

52. Of course, modern revelation and academic scholarship are not mutually exclusive. Thomas Wayment’s *New Testament study Bible*, written specifically for a Latter-day Saint audience, uses the best academic scholarship but in this case also points out that John’s fate is described in 3 Nephi 28:4–6 and Doctrine and Covenants 7:1–6.

53. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999). This edition uses the New American Standard Bible.

54. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, Volume 2: Prophets* (New York: Norton, 2019). This three-volume study Bible uses Alter’s own translation, which aims to capture the flavorful poetics of the original Hebrew.

55. On the challenges translators face, see Spackman, “Why Bible Translations Differ,” 30–65; and McClellan, “As Far as It Is Translated Correctly,” 52–83.

56. For the context from which the King James translators emerged and worked, see Adam Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). Nicolson notes, “Of course, the King James Bible did not spring from the soil of Jacobean England as quietly and miraculously as a lily. There were arguments and struggles, exclusions and competitiveness. It was the product of its time and bears the marks of its making” (xiii).

57. M. Russell Ballard, “Questions and Answers” (BYU devotional, 14 November 2017), speeches.byu.edu/talks/m-russell-ballard_questions-and-answers/. On another

occasion President Ballard gave similar counsel: “Wise people do not rely on the internet to diagnose and treat emotional, mental, and physical health challenges. . . . Instead, they seek out health experts, those trained and licensed by recognized medical and state boards. . . . [Similarly,] we should find thoughtful and faithful Church leaders to help us. And, if necessary, we should ask those with appropriate academic training, experience, and expertise for help. This is exactly what I do when I need an answer to my own questions that I cannot answer myself.” M. Russell Ballard, “By Study and By Faith,” *Ensign*, December 2016, 25.

58. See a recording of the devotional at www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2018-09-1000-worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults-a-face-to-face-event-with-elder-cook.

59. Several Latter-day Saints have pointed to this positive aspect of the KJV’s archaic language. Ronan Head observes that “there is merit in the struggle to understand, as it forces the Latter-day Saints to rely on revelation.” Ronan James Head, “Unity and the King James Bible,” *Dialogue* 45, no. 2 (2012): 50. Lincoln Blumell and Jan Martin write that “the seventeenth-century phraseology feels richer and more capable of carrying complex and multiple meanings than most twentieth- and twenty-first-century translations do. Flattened language, language that is submissive to its audience, loses some, if not all, of its ability to move, challenge, chastise, and inspire. It is true that the language of the KJV can be strange and difficult in places, but strange does not mean incomprehensible and difficult does not always mean detrimental.” Blumell and Martin, “King James Translation of the New Testament,” in Blumell, *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, 679.

60. See Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi’s Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2016), 1–2.

61. Hardy, “King James Bible and the Future of Missionary Work,” 27; emphasis added.

62. Of course, the language register in biblical books varies from text to text. Isaiah was an educated poet with a firm command of his native Hebrew, so his writings often incorporate creative literary touches like wordplay. At the other end of the spectrum we might place the Gospel of Mark. While Mark in the King James Version “strikes the modern reader as elegant, formal, and magisterial[,] . . . Mark’s [original Greek] text . . . would not have sounded antiquated, lofty, or reverent but rather common and plain.” Julie M. Smith, *The Gospel according to Mark*, Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2018), 24.

63. See E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012).

64. Dallin H. Oaks, “Scripture Reading and Revelation,” *Ensign*, January 1995, 8–9.

65. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Come and Partake,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 48.

66. “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1523, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/166.

67. See Matthew J. Grey, “‘The Word of the Lord in the Original’: Joseph Smith’s Study of Hebrew in Kirtland,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 249–302.

68. See the journal entry for 17 February 1836 at “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1523, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/166.

69. See the interview with Thomas A. Wayment at LDS Perspectives Podcast, www.ldspectives.com/2017/09/26/jst-adam-clarke-commentary/. A full treatment is forthcoming in Thomas A. Wayment and Haley Wilson-Lemmon, “A Recovered Resource: The Use of Adam Clarke’s Bible Commentary in Joseph Smith’s Bible Translation,” in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith’s Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press).