



Carl Heinrich Bloch, *The Sermon on the Mount*

The four Gospels are a treasure trove of information about Christ's life, ministry, teachings, Atonement, and Resurrection.

# Teaching the Four Gospels: Five Considerations

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Speaking of the Bible, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “He who reads it oftenest will like it best.”<sup>1</sup> One of the challenges any teacher of the New Testament faces is being able to engender in his or her students a desire to read the Bible *often enough* that they will come to appreciate its rich doctrinal teachings and its powerful testimony of Jesus Christ. The four New Testament Gospels, in particular, are a treasure trove of information about his life, ministry, teachings, Atonement, and Resurrection, much of which is not available anywhere else in scripture.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some issues that may be of worth for those teaching the New Testament. The five issues that we will address are the genre and purposes of the individual Gospels, the challenges of teaching the four Gospels as a whole, *exegesis* and *eisegesis* (i.e., approaches to interpreting the New Testament Gospels), specific passages that can be difficult to teach, and the value of Restoration scripture in teaching the New Testament Gospels. The discussion in each of these sections is limited. We will only have space to discuss a couple of examples. Nevertheless, the hope is that this

discussion will introduce teachers to some of the depth, richness, and complexity of the four Gospels.

### Genre and Purposes of the Four Gospels

*Genre.* The genre of a “Gospel” seems to have been invented by Mark. He is the only New Testament Gospel author who identifies his work as such: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The Greek word for gospel, *euangelion*, literally means “the good message,” and, for Mark, the good message begins at the baptism where “a voice from heaven [declares], Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). Mark’s concept of a gospel seems to have been generally informed by the Greco-Roman biography, or *bios*, which was “less concerned with relating historical events than with showing the character of the main figure through his or her words, deeds, and interactions.”<sup>2</sup> What distinguishes it from the *bios* is its reliance on the Old Testament, its emphasis on Jesus’ divine purpose rather than on extolling his virtues, and its usefulness in the preaching of the Church. One scholar has noted, “The close association of the Gospels with early Christian worship and proclamation suggests that we should see them as church documents with a certain biographical character rather than as biographies with a religious tone.”<sup>3</sup>

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are remarkably similar to each other, yet very different from the Gospel of John. They are often referred to as the “synoptic Gospels,” which means that they present the life of the Savior in similar ways, including frequent verbal parallels. The similarities are so significant that many scholars have proposed a literary relationship between the first three Gospels. The most common explanation of this literary relationship, known as Markan priority, posits that Mark’s Gospel was written first, and then Matthew and Luke each used the Gospel of Mark as a source for their own accounts, to which they added sayings of Jesus and some of their own unique material.<sup>4</sup>

Although not all scholars accept the argument of Markan priority, three points in particular make this conclusion probable. First, Matthew and Luke generally follow the Markan sequence of events, even though Papias (an early second-century bishop of Hierapolis) says that Mark was not interested in writing the events in order.<sup>5</sup> When Matthew and Luke disagree with Mark’s chronology, the differences can usually be explained as the result of Matthean and Lukan editorial tendencies. Significantly, Matthew and Luke never agree

on the sequence of events when they differ from Mark. Second, there is evidence that Matthew and Luke have “corrected” the Markan account. For example, when Mark uses a rare or difficult word, Matthew and Luke render the passage using more common terminology, and they often improve his grammar.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes they will modify passages that provide theological difficulties for them. For example, Mark 6:5 says that Jesus “could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.” Matthew’s account avoids the implication that Jesus’ power was in any way limited: “And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). Third, a primary reason for concluding that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest Gospel is the fact that it is the shortest. It is more likely that Matthew and Luke would later add additional material about the life of Christ than that Mark would purposefully omit so many good stories about the Savior. Mark does not have a tendency to shorten stories, because when Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain the same story, Mark often preserves the longer version.<sup>7</sup>

John’s Gospel is very different from the synoptic Gospels. In fact, the majority of its teachings, stories, and miracles are *not* found in the synoptic Gospels. It uses a high Christology to describe Jesus, meaning that, to a greater extent than the synoptic Gospels, from its opening chapter John’s Gospel emphasizes Jesus’ divinity.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Clement of Alexandria described it as “a spiritual gospel.”<sup>9</sup>

*Purposes.* As we would expect, all four Gospels testify that Jesus is the Messiah or Son of God, although each does it in different ways, with different emphases, because the authors are all writing to different audiences.

Mark does not appear to be an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry. Instead, Papias, the second-century bishop of Hierapolis, records that “Mark, having become Peter’s interpreter, wrote down accurately everything he remembered, *though not in order*, of the things either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, followed Peter, who adapted his teachings as needed but had no intention of giving an ordered account of the Lord’s sayings. Consequently Mark did nothing wrong in writing down some things as he remembered them, for he made it his one concern not to omit anything which he heard or to make any false statement in them.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, although Mark was apparently a second-generation Christian,<sup>11</sup> he wrote down the memories of Peter.

Mark appears to be writing to a Gentile audience who live outside of Palestine, because he explains geography (Mark 13:3), translates Aramaic phrases (5:41; 15:34), uses Latin terms such as *legion* (5:9, 15) and *centurion* (15:39), interprets Jewish customs (7:3–4), and mentions Roman, rather than Jewish, divorce laws (10:11–12).

After the baptism, Mark's account moves quickly. It focuses on showing that Jesus' teachings and deeds were astonishing to his audiences (1:22; 5:42; 6:2; 7:37; 10:24, 26; 11:18). It shows that there is a cost in choosing to be one of Jesus' disciples. The result of John the Baptist's preaching was that he was "put in prison [*paradidomi*]" (Mark 1:14). The result of Jesus' preaching was that he was "delivered . . . up [*paradidomi*]" (John 18:30; see also John 1:14; 10:33). Likewise, for the disciples, who are also expected to preach, there is an expectation that they will also be delivered up (*paradidomi*; see Mark 13:9–10). Lastly, it emphasizes the suffering and eventual vindication of the Savior. Sometimes Mark's Gospel is described as "a Passion narrative with an extended introduction."<sup>12</sup> In other words, the account frequently points the reader to, and focuses on, the events on the cross (3:6; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34, 45; 15:15–41). The Resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus after the horrible events of the Passion.<sup>13</sup> Mark's Gospel is written to show that despite opposition, misunderstanding, suffering for sins, and an ignominious death, Christ was able to triumph over all things.<sup>14</sup>

Matthew was a member of the Twelve writing to a Jewish audience for two main purposes. He wrote to convince his audience that Jesus was the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. Matthew goes to great lengths to attach Old Testament prophetic statements to Jesus' deeds. He frequently uses the phrase "as it is written" (Matthew 2:5; 4:4, 6–7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31), although on one occasion he attributes a passage to Jeremiah when it is actually from Zechariah (see Matthew 27:9; see by comparison Zechariah 11:13). Additionally, Matthew seeks to show that Jesus is the "new Moses." He is the only Gospel author to link Jesus' story to that of Moses by including the stories of the holy family's trip to Egypt and the slaughter of the innocents (see Matthew 2:14, 16). Just as Moses received the law on a mountain, Jesus goes up into a mountain to give the new law (Matthew 5:1; in contrast with the Lukan version, Luke 6:17, where it is given on a plain). Given his Jewish audience, it is not surprising that Matthew includes in Jesus' apostolic commission the directive to "go not into the way of the Gentiles and into any city of the

Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5–6).

But Matthew’s Gospel seems also to have been written to convince his audience to accept the Gentile mission.<sup>15</sup> In a number of places he includes Gentiles, showing that they were an important part of the kingdom: he includes four Gentile women in Jesus’ genealogy (Matthew 1:1–6); he includes the story of the Wise Men, whom Matthew sees as Gentiles, who recognize the child Jesus when the people of the covenant, who had access to the prophecies, do not (Matthew 2:1–11); and he includes stories which show times when Gentiles’ faith is so remarkable that it overshadows that of the covenant people (see Matthew 8:5–13; 15:21–29). All of these aspects of Matthew’s Gospel prepare the reader for Jesus’ final words on the Mount of Olives, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

Like Mark, Luke also appears to be a second-generation Christian writing to a Gentile audience. He opens his Gospel with his own “statement of intent” to Theophilus: “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1–4).

The major purpose of Luke’s writings (including the book of Acts) is to show that the gospel of Jesus Christ is available to all. Luke, unlike Matthew, extends Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam, the father of all humans, rather than just to Abraham (see Luke 3:38; see by comparison Matthew 1:1). His is the only Gospel to include the calling of the Seventy (Luke 10) in addition to the Twelve (Luke 9:1–6). The number seventy may have reference to the seventy nations mentioned in Genesis 10 and may, therefore, prefigure the expanded mission in Acts that includes the Gentiles.<sup>16</sup> Luke includes Jesus’ sermon given on a plain to “the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon [i.e., Gentiles]” (6:17). He shows Jesus’ concern for those who were deemed “marginal” in Jewish society: the poor (6:20), the Samaritans (10:29–37; 17:11–19), and women, often using couplets of men and women such as Simeon and Anna testifying of Jesus at the temple (2:25–38) and



the disciples and the women accompanying Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem (8:1–3).

John also includes a specific “statement of intent,” although unlike Luke, his is at the conclusion of his Gospel. He indicates that he chose what to include in his Gospel (and what to leave out) for a specific reason: “But these things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). Unlike the synoptic Gospels, which concentrate on Jesus’ Galilean ministry, John’s Gospel concentrates on his Judean ministry. In addition, John includes frequent passages that contribute to this Gospel’s high Christology. John opens his Gospel with a statement of Jesus’ divinity in the premortal realm. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). This theme is then expanded throughout the text. He frequently records Jesus using the divine name to identify himself (“before Abraham was, I am [*egō eimi*]” in John 8:58; but also in John 4:25–26; 6:20). He also records numerous dialogues where Jesus, as the “one from above,” converses with those that are “of the earth” (John 3:31; see also 3:12–13; 8:23). The purpose of these dialogues is for Jesus to help his listeners throw off the earthly blinders that limit their perspective, so that they can begin to see as he sees and gain an eternal perspective (e.g., 3:1–21; 4:5–42).

Thus each of the four Gospels adds a distinctive witness to Jesus’ life and ministry which if recognized can add an important and enriching element to teaching the life and ministry of the Savior.

### Challenges of Teaching the Four Gospels

Teaching the four Gospels is a rewarding opportunity, but there are also some challenges that teachers must face. Here I will briefly describe just two.

The first challenge New Testament teachers may have is to convince their students of the value of studying the Bible. As is often noted, the Prophet Joseph taught, “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”<sup>17</sup> This teaching may, at first glance, suggest that the Prophet had serious reservations about the accuracy of the Bible. Yet it must also be remembered that the Prophet loved the Bible and frequently taught from it in his sermons.<sup>18</sup> So what should Latter-day Saints think about the accuracy of the biblical text?



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The translation of the New Testament is a complex issue. We have no autographs, or original manuscripts, of any New Testament text. Our earliest text is the Rylands papyrus (P<sup>52</sup>), a fragment from John 18, which dates from the first quarter of the second century. This means that all of the approximately 5,700 extant manuscripts of the New Testament are at best copies and at worst manuscripts that are over a thousand years removed from their autographs. Within these manuscripts scholars estimate that there are between 200,000 and 400,000 textual variants.<sup>19</sup> These numbers, at first glance, seem daunting and may reinforce some skepticism of the accuracy of the New Testament. But a careful study of the variants shows that many of them are not malicious scribal attempts to alter the text, but are the result of innocent copying errors. In other words, very few of these variants are theologically significant.<sup>20</sup> One example of a passage from the Gospels that is important for Latter-day Saints is Matthew 5:22. The KJV reads, “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause* shall be in danger of the judgment” (emphasis added). The phrase “without a cause” is



found in some late New Testament manuscripts but is not attested in earlier ones.<sup>21</sup> The phrase seems to be a later scribal addition to “allow room for righteous indignation,”<sup>22</sup> maybe even to allow for Jesus’ actions when he cleansed the temple (see Matthew 21:12–14). Most modern translations do not include the phrase.<sup>23</sup> For Latter-day Saints, in particular, this point is significant because the phrase is not found in either the corresponding passage in the 3 Nephi account (3 Nephi 12:22) or the Joseph Smith Translation (JST).

In addition to the Prophet’s statement, the Bible may be underappreciated because the Book of Mormon teaches that as a result of the great and abominable church, “there are many plain and precious things taken away from the [Bible], which is the book of the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 13:28). While it is possible that the loss of plain and precious things may be the result of the removal of key passages and teachings, the manuscript tradition shows that the text of the New Testament is remarkably stable. It is therefore possible that the loss is the result of the *reinterpretation* of doctrine rather than from large-scale removal of passages. For example, early Christians debated at some length about the doctrine of the virgin birth and how that impacted the nature of the mortal Christ, and they also debated about the nature of the Resurrection. The existence of these debates did not result in the removal of the birth and the Resurrection narratives from the text, but the early Christians interpreted the accounts in sometimes drastically different ways, which eventually influenced the Christian Creeds.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, I would suggest that we be cautious in our interpretation of 1 Nephi 13:28. If we are not careful, our interpretation may overshadow our confidence in the truth and power of the Bible and might even influence where we put our emphasis when we recite the eighth Article of Faith. If we put our emphasis on the first part of the sentence, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God,” we can have a very different understanding of the Bible than if we put our emphasis on the second part, “as far as it is translated correctly.” The first, while acknowledging some textual and translational issues, reaffirms our commitment to the Bible and its teachings as the “word of God”; the second, if we are not careful, may justify a neglect of or marginalization of the Bible. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has taught, “Occasionally, a few in the Church let the justified caveat about the Bible—‘as far as it is translated correctly’ (A of F 1:8)—diminish their exultation over the New Testament,” but then he goes on to remind us, “Inaccuracy of some translating must not, however, diminish our appreciation for the powerful *testimony* and ample

*historicity* of the New Testament. . . . These pages are a treasure trove testifying of Jesus.”<sup>25</sup> Additionally, it is important to remember that in other places the Book of Mormon emphasizes the importance of the Bible. For example, both Lehi and Mormon teach the importance of combining the truths taught in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Lehi teaches his son Joseph that the Bible and the Book of Mormon “shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord” (2 Nephi 3:12). Likewise, Mormon implores latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon to “lay hold upon the gospel of Christ which shall be set before you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you” (Mormon 7:8).

A second challenge that teachers of New Testament Gospels face is how they are going to organize their class. Having four Gospels poses a challenge not found when teaching other scriptural texts. Should we use a harmony approach, similar to those used by Elder James E. Talmage and Elder Bruce R. McConkie and followed by the Sunday School and Institute New Testament manuals?<sup>26</sup> The major advantage of this approach is that it gives students a sense of the life and ministry of Jesus in some sort of chronological order. The Gospels, and any subsequent harmony of them, do not narrate the entire life of the Savior but rather present highlights of the ministry and unique portraits of his life. It is significant that the Joseph Smith Translation designates the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John “testimonies” rather than “gospels.”<sup>27</sup> A limitation of the harmony approach is illustrated in a statement by Papias, who taught that Mark “wrote down accurately everything he remembered, *though not in order*, of the things either said or done by Christ.”<sup>28</sup> To further complicate the matter, the synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Luke, who generally follow Mark’s order, sometimes record a different sequence of events. If Mark was not concerned with preserving all the events of the life of the Savior in their precise chronological order, and since the other Gospels occasionally differ in their order of events, it then becomes very difficult to establish a precise chronology for a harmony.<sup>29</sup>

An alternate approach is to teach each of the Gospels individually. The advantage of this approach is that it allows the students to appreciate the unique emphases, teachings, and interpretations of each of the Gospels that

are often lost in a harmony approach.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, each Evangelist wrote his Gospel thinking that it would read as an autonomous whole rather than as part of a harmony.<sup>31</sup> The challenge with this approach is that there will be a lot of overlap, especially in teaching the synoptic Gospels, which cover much of the same material. Personally I use a mixed approach. I spend three class periods at the beginning of the course going over background material: the world of the New Testament; the formation of the Bible; and the unique characteristics of each of the four Gospels. During this time I have the students read the Gospel of Mark so that they become familiar with the basic story of Jesus' ministry. Then I work through a harmony of Matthew and Luke (with, because of personal interest, an emphasis on Matthew), adding in the material of the Gospel of John where appropriate.

### **Exegesis and Eisegesis:**

#### **Approaches to Interpreting the New Testament Gospels**

*Exegesis* is a hermeneutical, or interpretive, approach to scriptural texts that attempts to understand a passage within the context of the text itself. This approach to scripture is different from *eisegesis*, which seeks to interpret the text from the perspective of the reader and often interprets the text divorced from its original context.<sup>32</sup> It is the latter approach to scriptures with which many Latter-day Saints are most familiar, particularly when they desire to identify a principle that can be applied for modern readers. While there is some value to this approach, there are times when exegesis will help teachers and students to identify important principles that are difficult to ascertain simply from eisegesis.

Exegesis can be as simple as realizing that the context for the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 has nothing to do with the modern understanding of talents as an ability to sing or to dance or to be a good public speaker and so forth. Rather, the word *talents* is a transliteration of the Greek word *talanton*, which refers to a weight or measure—to money. Thus the parable is about slaves who have been entrusted with their master's business affairs.<sup>33</sup> As one scholar has noted, “The ‘talents’ . . . represent not the natural gifts and aptitudes which everyone has, but the specific privileges and opportunities of the kingdom of heaven and the responsibilities they entail.”<sup>34</sup> This particular parable is one of a series of parables used in the Olivet Discourse. In the first part of the discourse, Jesus, in part, describes the conditions preparatory to his Second Coming. The parables that follow teach principles of

how to prepare for that event. Therefore, the parable of the talents must be understood in this context. The talents therefore represent any stewardship with which we are entrusted and must magnify to help build the kingdom in preparation for the Second Coming.

Exegesis can also be achieved recognizing the editorial hand of the author.<sup>35</sup> Latter-day Saints are familiar with this process in the Book of Mormon, in which Mormon and Moroni frequently act as editors, both by choosing which texts to include and by inserting their voice into the text. The four Gospels are uniquely situated to help us recognize editorial emphases because we often have three, or sometimes four, accounts of a particular story. In these instances it is just as important to recognize the differences in the accounts as it is to emphasize the similarities. A question that is helpful for readers to ask is not just what does the story say, but why did the author choose to record it *this* way?

One example where we see Matthew's editorial hand is in his recounting of the miracle of the stilling of the storm (see Matthew 8:23–27). This story is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels. Mark and Luke use the story to show that Jesus has power over the physical elements (see Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25), but while Matthew's account acknowledges this power, he uses the story differently.<sup>36</sup> In chapters 8 and 9, Matthew has collected a series of miracles, one of which is the stilling of the storm.

What is interesting in this collection is the passage that immediately precedes the stilling of the storm:

Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

But Jesus said unto him, "Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. (Matthew 8:18–22)

These verses stand out in a chapter that deals with miracles because they focus on discipleship and the cost of choosing to follow Jesus. In contrast to Matthew, Luke uses his corresponding verses to introduce the calling of the Seventy (see Luke 9:57–10:16).

Besides changing the context for the story, Matthew's editorial hand is evident in four other ways that indicate he has a different emphasis in recounting this miracle. First, in describing the storm, Matthew uses the Greek word *seismos*, translated in the KJV as "tempest," whereas both Mark and Luke use *lailaps*, translated as "storm" (see fig. 1). At first glance this change may seem insignificant, but in the New Testament, *seismos* is almost universally associated with the destructions and tribulations that take place at the end of the world (see Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18; the exception is Acts 16:26). The tempest in Matthew thus becomes a symbol for the difficulties disciples face as they choose to enter the ship or, in other words, the Church.

Second, in Matthew's account, the cry of the disciples is different. In both Mark and Luke, the disciples address Jesus with "Master," which is "a human title of respect."<sup>37</sup> (Mark uses the Greek word *didaskalos*; Luke uses *epistata*.) However, in Matthew's account they cry out, "Lord, save us." Here the disciples use the term "Lord" (the Greek word *kyrios*), a term which in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) is "used as an expository equivalent for the divine name" YHWH.<sup>38</sup> In the New Testament, *kyrios* is also used as a title for God, either in the quotations of passages from the Old Testament (see Matthew 27:10; Mark 1:3; 12:36) or independently (see Matthew 1:20, 24; Mark 5:19; 13:20). Thus Matthew emphasizes that it is a divine being, not just a great human, who is in the ship.

Third, in Mark and Luke the disciples cry to Jesus because they are going to perish, but in Matthew's account the disciples add a plea for Jesus to "save [*sozō*] us," a plea that can have both a physical and a spiritual dimension.<sup>39</sup> Thus Matthew's story emphasizes Jesus acting in his divine capacity, not just as someone who has power over the physical elements but also as someone who has the power to save his disciples from physical and spiritual buffetings they experience when they choose to follow Jesus and enter into the ship.

Fourth, in contrast to Mark and Luke, Matthew changes the position of Jesus' question about the disciples' faith. In Mark and Luke, Jesus awakes, rebukes the wind and the sea, and then asks about their faith. In Matthew, however, Jesus awakes, asks about the disciples' faith first, and then rebukes the wind and the sea. Thus the emphasis in Matthew is on the disciples' faith, or lack thereof, rather than the power to rebuke the wind and the sea. As one scholar has noted, "The expression *ὀλιγοπιστία* (or *ὀλιγόπιστος*) [i.e., "little faith"] is a favourite word of Matthew's; apart from Luke 12.28 he is the only

evangelist to use it (6.30; 8.26; 14.31; 16.8; 17.20) and it always denotes a faith that is too weak, that is paralysed in the storm (8.26; 14.31) and in anxiety (6.30; 16.8), and thus is exposed as an appearance of faith (17.20) which is not sufficiently mature to withstand the pressure of demonic powers.”<sup>40</sup>

**Table 1: The Gospel Writers’ Editorial Hand**

Matthew 8:23–26	Mark 4:35–40	Luke 8:22–25
23. And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.	35. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them,	22. Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them,
	Let us pass over unto the other side.	Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth.
	36. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.	23. But as they sailed he fell asleep:
24. And, behold, there arose a great tempest [ <i>seismos</i> ] in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves:	37. And there arose a great storm [ <i>lailaps</i> ] of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.	and there came down a storm [ <i>lailaps</i> ] of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy.
but he was asleep.	38. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him,	24. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying,
25. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying,		
Lord, save us: we perish.	Master [ <i>didaskalos</i> ], carest thou not that we perish?	Master, master, [ <i>epistata</i> ] we perish.
26. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?		
Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.	39. And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.	Then he arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.
	40. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?	25. And he said unto them, Where is your faith?



So what does all of Matthew's editorial activity mean? By introducing the miracle stories with verses about discipleship, Matthew indicates to his readers that the miracle of the stilling of the storm should be interpreted through the lens of discipleship. The costs of following Jesus mentioned in verses 18–22 are the costs a disciple must be willing to pay to follow Jesus into the ship. The ship then is a metaphor for the Church. Perhaps disciples might think that following Jesus into the ship/Church would mean that their struggles in life would be over, that they would have a pleasant, calm voyage across the sea. But the storm comes quickly. Tribulations are a part of discipleship. In such a situation, abandoning the ship, or walking away from the Church, is not the best option. Rather there is safety in the ship because that is where the Son of God is. Even though he is asleep, he has the power to protect the ship and all who are in it, even though they might not have sufficient faith initially when the winds arise. Here is the important miracle that Matthew has for his readers: the miracle that Christ can save in spite of the very real and powerful physical and spiritual buffetings that a disciple experiences.

The stilling of the storm is just one example of the importance of understanding not just what the passage says but understanding why the author said it *this way*. Thus exegesis can be a powerful tool to enhance eisegesis, or in other words, understanding the intent of the original author provides opportunities to identify and teach principles that will help modern readers live the gospel.

### **Considerations When Teaching Some Difficult Passages**

As with teaching any text, there are always some passages that present either historical or doctrinal difficulties for modern readers. Readers of ancient texts, even the scriptures, must be able to deal with a certain amount of ambiguity. An important role for teachers is to help their students learn to deal with this ambiguity. Latter-day Saints do not believe in scriptural inerrancy, so we are in some ways theologically better equipped to deal with ambiguity in the Gospels. Ambiguity can come from a number of sources. For example, we have access to limited information about the ancient world. Although we try to re-create the world of the New Testament Gospels, this limitation means that, at best, we create an approximation—an educated approximation, but an approximation nevertheless. Of course, as we have noted above, this does not mean that we shouldn't try to examine and understand the historical context, but it does mean that sometimes we cannot answer all of the

questions. At times those limitations can be clarified by the prophetic word and Restoration scripture (as we shall see below), but generally prophetic sources weigh in on theological rather than historical issues.

Another difficulty arises because, although the ancient authors were inspired, they often relied on other sources and other people's memories of events. They did not have access to video recordings of events or eyewitness testimonies where they could check the events and eyewitness quotes. Even if they did, eyewitness testimonies, in ancient and modern times, seldom align perfectly with each other. Each eyewitness focuses on and remembers different things and remembers in different ways. This fact will have an effect on the story related, especially when there are three or four texts telling the story. For example, when Jesus was arrested and Peter three times denied that he was one of Jesus' disciples, the four accounts are unified in stating that initially it was a maid who confronted Peter (see Matthew 26:69; Mark 14:66; Luke 22:56; John 18:17). However, there is some discrepancy in each of the accounts about who evokes Peter's second denial. In Mark it is the same maid (Mark 14:69); in Matthew, it is another maid (Matthew 26:71); in Luke, it is someone else—a man (Luke 22:58); and in John, it is not an individual but a group (John 18:25). Given the limited information that we currently have, it is difficult to reconcile these passages.

Sometimes the intent of the Gospel authors and their audience will influence what they include in their accounts and how they include it. For example, if a person was reading the New Testament accounts of Jesus' birth for the first time, it is understandable that they might not think that the accounts in Matthew and Luke were telling the same story. Matthew and Luke include very different genealogies (see Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38) and different stories. Matthew recounts the birth from Joseph's perspective and includes the story of the wise men's visit to the young Jesus and the holy family's subsequent trip to Egypt (see Matthew 1:18–2:15). Luke recounts the birth from Mary's perspective and includes her visit to Elizabeth, the Roman census, and Joseph and Mary's subsequent trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where it is the shepherds, rather than the Wise Men, who worship the young baby (see Luke 2). If a reader is looking for differences in the two accounts, then there are plenty to be found. These differences have led some scholars to question the historicity of the two birth narratives.<sup>41</sup> However, it is important to note that although the accounts are very different as to the historical events,

Joseph A. Fitzmyer reminds us that there is an important nucleus of material where the two accounts are in agreement:

1. Jesus' birth is related to the reign of Herod (Luke 1:5; Matt 2:1)
2. Mary, his mother to be, is a virgin engaged to Joseph, but they have not yet come to live together (Luke 1:27,34; 2:5; Matt 1:18)
3. Joseph is of the house of David (Luke 1:27; 2:4; Matt 1:16, 20).
4. An angel from heaven announces the coming birth of Jesus (Luke 1:28-30; Matt 1:20-21)
5. Jesus is recognized himself to be a son of David (Luke 1:32; Matt 1:1)
6. His conception is to take place through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; Matt 1:18, 20)
7. Joseph is not involved in the conception (Luke 1:34; Matt 1:18-25)
8. The name "Jesus" is imposed by heaven prior to his birth (Luke 1:31; Matt 1:21)
9. The angel identifies Jesus as "Savior" (Luke 2:11; Matt 1:21)
10. Jesus is born after Mary and Joseph come to live together (Luke 2:4-7; Matt 1:24-25)
11. Jesus is born at Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7; Matt 2:1)
12. Jesus settles, with Mary and Joseph, in Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 2:39,51; Matt 2:22-23).<sup>42</sup>

Theologically, the accounts of Matthew and Luke are in agreement on the most important questions about Jesus' birth.

Another significant historical difficulty is the discrepancy in the timing of the Passover meal during the Passion week. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus met with his disciples on "the first day of the feast of unleavened bread" (Matthew 26:17; see also Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). More specifically, Mark adds, "when they killed the Passover" (Mark 14:12; see also Luke 22:7). In all of these accounts, Jesus' meal with his disciples is understood to be the Passover *seder*. In John's Gospel, however, Jesus' meal with his disciples took place the evening before the Passover (see John 13:1), with his crucifixion occurring the afternoon before the Passover meal (when lambs were being killed for that evening's festivities). The Jews wanted to expedite the crucifixion by breaking Jesus' legs "because it was the preparation [day]" (John 19:31).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this discrepancy was a virtual non-issue because many assumed that the synoptic accounts were historically more accurate than John's account. Primarily, this position reflected the dominant scholarly view that John's Gospel was a late document and was therefore historically unreliable. In recent years, however, the scholarly pendulum has swung in favor of the historical reliability of the fourth Gospel. Archaeologists have found and excavated the pool of Bethesda with its five

porches (see John 5:1–2).<sup>43</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls show that John’s use of the dualism of light and darkness (John 1:5; 3:19; 12:35–36), which for a long time scholars attributed to second-century philosophy, is at home in the Jewish Palestinian milieu of the first century.<sup>44</sup> In addition, John’s knowledge of Samaritan beliefs, worship on Mount Gerizim, and the site of Jacob’s well are all accurate.<sup>45</sup> Thus the scholarly surge in favor of John’s historicity has highlighted the chronological differences between the accounts of the last supper in the synoptic Gospels and John. While many theories have been proposed to explain the differences,<sup>46</sup> the reality is that, until more information is discovered, modern readers again face the dilemma of dealing with some ambiguity in the four Gospels of the New Testament.

In teaching both the birth narratives and the Last Supper, teachers should not be afraid of the ambiguity. Rather they should help their students recognize it when it appears and help them understand that in ancient texts, even scriptural texts, there will be times when the appropriate answer to the question “Why?” is “Here are some possibilities, but at present we don’t have enough information to give a definitive answer.”

Historical ambiguities, however, are not the only type of difficult passages to teach. Sometimes there are also passages that are theologically difficult. For example, Jesus teaches, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery [*porneia*]: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery [*moichaō*]” (Matthew 19:9; see also Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18). In both Matthew and Mark this teaching is part of a longer discussion in which the Pharisees try to discredit Jesus by asking the question “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?” (Mark 10:2). In Mark the issue is whether Jesus allows divorce. In Matthew’s version the Pharisees assume that Jesus allows divorce and they instead question: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife *for every cause*?” (Matthew 19:3; emphasis added). In this instance the issue seems to be tied to one of debates in the first century between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, who interpret the Mosaic injunction in radically different ways. Deuteronomy 24:1 reads, “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.” The followers of Shammai’s interpretation focused on the phrase “because he hath found some uncleanness in her” and taught that infidelity was the only justification

for divorce. The followers of Hillel, however, focused on the phrase “she find no favour in his eyes” and interpreted it much more loosely.<sup>47</sup>

In Matthew’s account, Jesus’ response about marrying someone who is divorced seems to be given to the Pharisees who were part of a larger crowd. In Mark, however, the response is given at a later time only to the disciples: “And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her” (Mark 10:10–11). Elder Bruce R. McConkie thus taught, “This strict law governing divorce was not given to the Pharisees, nor to the world in general, but to the disciples only, ‘in the house,’ at a later time as Mark explains. Further, Jesus expressly limited its application. All men could not live such a high standard; it applied only to those ‘to whom it is given’ [Matthew 19:11].”<sup>48</sup> President Joseph Fielding Smith interpreted this law in terms of a temple sealing.<sup>49</sup> Elder Dallin H. Oaks teaches, “The kind of marriage required for exaltation—eternal in duration and godlike in quality—does not contemplate divorce. In the temples of the Lord, couples are married for all eternity. But some marriages do not progress toward that ideal. Because ‘of the hardness of [our] hearts,’ the Lord does not currently enforce the consequences of the celestial standard. He permits divorced persons to marry again without the stain of immorality specified in the higher law. Unless a divorced member has committed serious transgressions, he or she can become eligible for a temple recommend under the same worthiness standards that apply to other members.”<sup>50</sup>

Another example of a difficult doctrinal passage is the discussion between Jesus and the Sadducees about marriage in the Resurrection (see Matthew 22:29–30; Mark 12:24–25; Luke 20:34–35). The Sadducees came to Jesus, “Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.” They then go on to apply the Mosaic teaching to a hypothetical situation where seven brothers each in turn married a woman until eventually all of the brothers and the woman had passed away. The Sadducees then asked, “Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her” (Matthew 22:23–28). Jesus’ response is sometimes brought up by those who try to discredit the LDS teaching on eternal marriage.<sup>51</sup>

What this debate seems to lose sight of, however, is that this passage is only secondarily about marriage. The real issue that the Sadducees are pushing with Jesus is about the Resurrection because, as all three synoptic authors

emphasize, the Sadducees did not believe in it (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27). “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine” (Matthew 22:29–33). As one scholar has noted, the Sadducees’s question “does not pose a serious question; it is simply designed to show how absurd is the belief in a future resurrection.”<sup>52</sup> It is possible, therefore, that Jesus’ response about marriage in the Resurrection was a form of parody. Jesus tells the Sadducees that they don’t understand either the scriptures about Levirate marriage nor the power of God to bring about the Resurrection. In effect, he may be saying to them, “If, as you believe, there is no resurrection, then obviously the wife will not belong to any of the brothers because *you don’t even believe that there will be a resurrection.*”

### **The Four Gospels and Restoration Scripture**

Unlike other Christians, Latter-day Saints have additional tools to enrich their study of the New Testament. Here I will briefly discuss three major ways that Restoration scripture can aid the student of the New Testament Gospels.

First, Restoration scripture confirms the truthfulness of the New Testament teachings, in a time when their historicity is sometimes under attack. Two examples will suffice. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (Matthew 5–7) is very different from the sermon in Luke (Luke 6:17–49). Some scholars argue that the Lukan sermon is the historical sermon that Jesus gave and that the Matthean sermon was a later compilation of Jesus’ sayings to supplement the Lukan material.<sup>53</sup> One of the difficulties scholars see in the Matthean account of the sermon is the disjointed nature of the text; there does not appear to be any coherence to the sermon. For Latter-day Saints, however, who have in 3 Nephi a text remarkably similar to the Matthean sermon,<sup>54</sup> there is no doubt that Jesus taught this as a unified sermon. John W. Welch has argued that the unifying theme of the sermon, which has eluded scholars, is the temple.<sup>55</sup> In short, the 3 Nephi account confirms the historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount.



Another example of how Restoration scripture confirms the teachings of the New Testament Gospels is found in Luke's account of the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke records that Jesus' "sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Modern scholarship has questioned the historicity of this event. The textual history for this verse is difficult. Some scholars argue that this verse was not original to Luke's Gospel but had been added at a later date, because the verse is omitted in some important early manuscripts. It is, however, possible that the verses were removed by some scribes for theological reasons: because they seemingly showed a weak Jesus who was not prepared for his upcoming death.<sup>56</sup>

But Restoration scripture, in both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, confirms the reality that Jesus sweat blood while in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin teaches that the bloody sweat was a real part of the Atonement: "And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people" (Mosiah 3:7). Likewise, the Savior himself declares to the Prophet Joseph in a revelation, "Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink" (D&C 19:18).

Second, at times Restoration scripture expands and enumerates the doctrine of the Gospels. One example in this category is the use of the New Testament word "gospel" (*euangelion*), which is found twelve times in Matthew and Mark, although it is not used in Luke or John. The Greek word means "good news," but nowhere in the Gospels is it specifically defined. In the Book of Mormon, however, the Savior himself gives a definition in 3 Nephi 27:13–21. The good news is that Jesus "came into the world to do the will of [his] Father," that he was "lifted up upon the cross" so that he could "draw all men unto [him], that . . . men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before [Christ], to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil" (vv. 13–14). In addition, the good news is that through faith, repentance, coming unto Christ, being baptized and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end we can be judged "guiltless before [the] Father" and "stand spotless before [Christ] at the last day" (vv. 16, 20).<sup>57</sup> While all of these

aspects are taught and expounded in the New Testament, nowhere are they brought together in such a succinct and complete definition of the gospel.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell gives another example: “‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matt. 18:3.) What is the full significance of becoming childlike? The Book of Mormon delineates with specificity: ‘And becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father’ (Mosiah 3:19).”<sup>58</sup>

Third, the JST is a valuable tool for the study of the New Testament Gospels. It is important, however, to understand what the JST is and is *not* doing. The editors of the critical edition of the JST have identified five types of changes that the JST makes to the biblical text, all of which can be specifically identified in the Gospels:<sup>59</sup>

“1. Restoration of original text.” It is difficult to determine whether or not a JST change fits into this category. As we will see with some of the other categories of changes, just because the JST includes material that is not in our current text does not mean that it is automatically the restoration of original text. Thomas A. Wayment has identified one example in which that may be the case. He has examined places where the JST agrees with the Latin version of the New Testament and argues that in some of these places the JST may be restoring lost or altered text.<sup>60</sup> One example that he gives is Luke 9:44. Both the Latin version and the JST replace “ears” (as found in the Greek manuscripts) with “hearts” and thus read, “Let these sayings sink down into your *hearts*: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of *man*” (italics indicate JST changes).<sup>61</sup>

“2. Restoration of what was once said or done but which was never in the Bible.” This type of change is also difficult to confirm, but it may include passages that are expanded in the JST but for which there is no evidence in the textual tradition that they were ever part of the written Gospels. For example, in the KJV account of John the Baptist, Matthew writes that John the Baptist declares to the Pharisees and Sadducees, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (Matthew 3:8). The JST, however, includes a lengthy introduction to this statement. “*Why is it, that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of whom I am sent to bear record; and for your*

*sins ye have no cloak. Repent therefore, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance*” (JST, Matthew 3:8; italics indicate JST changes).

“3. Editing to make the Bible more understandable for modern readers.” Sometimes this form of editing is simply to help modern readers understand archaic King James language. For example, Matthew 13:20 reads, “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.” According to Laurence M. Vance, “Anon is a compound of the Old English *on an*, ‘in one,’ that signified ‘in one moment.’”<sup>62</sup> It translates the Greek word *euthus*, which is often translated as “immediately.”<sup>63</sup> Given that *anon* is rarely used in modern English, the JST changes it to read, “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and *readily* with joy receiveth it” (JST, Matthew 13:20). But sometimes the editing is more substantial, as is the case with the JST of Matthew 24. Here the JST changes were so substantial that they are included, along with the Book of Moses, as a separate part of the Pearl of Great Price: Joseph Smith—Matthew. One of the significant changes of the JST version was the reordering of the material. The discourse consists of Jesus’ answers to two of his disciples questions, “When shall these things [i.e., the destruction of the temple] be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3). In Matthew 24 there is no distinction between these questions in Jesus’ answer. In the JST, however, the answers to the two questions are delineated. Verses 5–21 answer the first question and verses 21–37 answer the second question. Verse 21 is the turning point between the two answers, and the addition of the word “again” in verses 21, 30, 31, and 32 shows that the signs for the coming destruction of the temple in the first century would be repeated when the Savior returned. As one scholar has noted, “When the Prophet made his revision of the Olivet discourse he moved three verses (7, 8, and 9) from their position in the King James text and placed them at various points later in the narrative. This change gave the prophecy a new chronological sequence, or more accurately, it gave it a more definite chronological sequence. This was enhanced by the repetition of three verses [vv. 6, 9 to vv. 21–22; v. 10 to v. 30; v. 12 to v. 32] which showed that there was to be a recurrence of ancient events in the latter days. It is this reordering and repetition of passages which brings understanding to that area in which there has been the greatest confusion among Bible scholars.”<sup>64</sup>

“4. Editing to bring biblical wording into harmony with truth found in other revelations or elsewhere in the Bible.” John 1:18 provides an example of

this kind of change. The KJV reads, “No man hath seen God at any time.” The JST reads, “No man hath seen God at any time, *except he hath borne record of the Son*” (JST, John 1:19; italics indicate JST changes). It is clear from other biblical passages and from events of the Restoration that people have in fact seen God. In other places in John’s writings the statement is clarified. For example, John 6:46 reads, “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.” Another example may be the JST of John 20:1, which adds that there were two angels sitting at the sepulchre, which brings the story into harmony with the account in Luke 24:1–4.

“5. Changes to provide modern readers teachings that were not written by original authors.” Two brief examples of this type of change may be Matthew 4:1 and 7:1. In the KJV, Matthew 4:1 reads, “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” The JST reads, “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be with God.” The JST change here makes sense. Jesus’ time in the wilderness was a preparatory experience for him before he began his mortal ministry. But the JST change here should not negate the fact that Jesus also went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland quotes Malcolm Muggeridge: “Christ withdrew alone to the desert to fast and pray in preparation for a dialogue with the Devil. Such a dialogue was inescapable; every virtue has to be cleared with the Devil, as every vice is torn with anguish out of God’s heart.” Then Elder Holland goes on to teach that he believes “such dialogues are entertained day after day, hour after hour—even among the Latter-day Saints.”<sup>65</sup>

The KJV of Matthew 7:1 reads, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” The JST reads, “Now these are the words which Jesus taught his disciples that they should say unto the people. Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged: but judge righteous judgment.” In this case, the JST does not seem to be restoring lost text, because the corresponding teaching in 3 Nephi reads, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (3 Nephi 14:1). In this case the JST seems to be adding an additional level of teaching that, given the corresponding 3 Nephi account, was probably not originally spoken by Jesus as he taught the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught: “We are sometimes told that we are not a biblical church. We are a biblical church. This wonderful testament of

the Old World, this great and good Holy Bible is one of our standard works. We teach from it. We bear testimony of it. We read from it. It strengthens our testimony.”<sup>67</sup> Teaching the New Testament Gospels is an opportunity to expand the minds of our students so that they will have the desire to embark on an ongoing study of the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus Christ so that *they* will recognize that we are a biblical church. If we are to take President Hinckley’s teaching seriously, then it is our charge to prepare our students so that they are prepared to “teach from it,” to “bear testimony of it,” and to use it to strengthen their testimonies. Again, as the Prophet Joseph stated, “He who reads it oftenest will like it best.” **RE**

## Notes

1. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 2:14.
2. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 65.
3. Larry W. Hurtado, “Gospel (Genre),” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 279.
4. Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 49–96; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73), 1:69.
5. English translation from Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 569.
6. For more detailed discussions, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:105–6; and Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 56–59.
7. For examples, see Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 50–56.
8. For an LDS discussion on the sources for the four Gospels, see Thomas A. Wayment, “First-Century Sources on the Life of Jesus,” 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), 112–22. For a non-LDS discussion, see James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1:139–72.
9. Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (New York: Penguin, 1965), 192.
10. English translation from Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 569; emphasis added. Another fragment from Papias outlines his intent in recording remembrances of the teachings of the early Church leaders, “I will not hesitate to set down for you, along with my interpretations, everything I carefully learned then from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For unlike most people I did not enjoy those who have a great deal to say, but those who teach the truth. Nor did I enjoy those who recall someone else’s commandments, but those who remember the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and

proceeding from truth itself. And if by chance someone who had been a follower of the elders should come my way, I inquired about the words of the elders—what Andrew or Peter said, or Philip, or Thomas or James, or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples, and whatever Aristion and the elder John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying. For I did not think that information from books would profit me as much as information from a living and abiding voice.” English translation from Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 565.

11. Some have speculated that the unnamed young man in Mark 14:51 was a reference to Mark, although there is no scriptural basis for this. For a brief discussion, see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 595–96.

12. Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature, and Social Context*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003), 324.

13. The issue of where Mark’s Gospel ends is complex. For two recent LDS discussions on the issues, see Thomas A. Wayment, “The Endings of Mark and Revelation,” 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), 75–81; and 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): 89–96. For a non-LDS discussion, see France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 695–98.

14. Gaye Strathearn and Frank F. Judd Jr., “The Distinctive Testimonies of the Four Gospels,” *Religious Educator* 8, no. 2 (2007): 60–64.

15. For an expanded discussion, see Strathearn and Judd, “Distinctive Testimonies,” 64–69.

16. Richard D. Draper, “Counting the Cost: The Apostolic Mission of the Twelve and Seventy,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, vol. 2, *From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzappel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 35–40. Some important manuscripts indicate that the number was seventy-two. See, for example, Codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Ephraemi, Regius. Nevertheless, scholars still see this passage as indicative of an expanded mission. See, for example, I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary of the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 415.

17. *History of the Church*, 6:57. It should be noted that the second half of this statement (“Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors”) was an editorial addition to the Prophet’s statement after his death. See *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 256. For a discussion of how the writings of the Prophet Joseph in *History of the Church* were compiled and edited, see Kent P. Jackson, *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 59–61.

18. He made reference to passages from the New Testament Gospels 1,148 times in the material collected in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, according to a count of the scriptural references in Richard C. Galbraith, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 462–67.

19. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 52; Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 14–15.



20. For discussions of some of the issues surrounding the King James Version of the Bible and modern translations, see Blumell, “Text-Critical Comparison,” 67–126; and Gaye Strathearn, “Modern English Bible Translations,” in *King James Bible and the Restoration*, 234–59.

21. The phrase is found in a seventh-century correction made in Codex Sinaiticus, and in Codices Bezae (fifth century), Regius (eighth century), Freer (fourth–fifth century), and Koridethi (ninth century). But the Madalen papyrus (c. AD 200), the original hand of Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus (fourth century) all omit the phrase.

22. Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:512n4.

23. Although, the English Standard Version does include a footnote saying, “Some manuscripts insert *without a cause*.”

24. Gaye Strathearn, “*Sōma sēma*: The Influence of ‘The Body Is a Tomb’ in Early Christian Debates and the New Testament,” in *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles: From the Day of Pentecost through the Apocalypse*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 276–98.

25. Neal A. Maxwell, “The New Testament—a Matchless Portrait of the Savior,” *Ensign*, December 1986, 20; emphasis in original.

26. This approach to the New Testament has ancient roots. Tatian, an early Christian apologist, used the four Gospels to create one single harmony, the *Diatessaron* (c. AD 175). This text was very influential in Syria during the third and fourth centuries. An English translation of the Arabic version is found in Allan Menzies, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 10:43–129. In antiquity, Ephrem the Syrian wrote a commentary on the *Diatessaron*. See Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

27. Although the current LDS version of the King James Bible says that the JST identifies all four New Testament Gospels as “testimonies,” Joseph Smith only made that addition for the Gospels of Matthew and John, not Mark and Luke. See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 235, 442. For a convenient collection of the JST changes in the New Testament, see Thomas A. Wayment, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

28. Papias, quoted in Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 569.

29. For example, in Luke’s Gospel the account of John the Baptist’s imprisonment is in Luke 3:19–20, *before* he baptized Jesus in Luke 3:21–22. In Mark and Matthew, the imprisonment takes place some time after the baptism (Mark 6:17–29; Matthew 14:3–12). In this instance, logic favors the chronology presented in Mark and Matthew over that of Luke. In other instances, however, the decision is not so straightforward. For example, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter immediately after John’s disciples ask about fasting (Matthew 9:14–26). In Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels, however, the two events are separated by three chapters (Mark 2:18–22; 5:21–43; Luke 5:33–39; 8:41–56). Determining the chronology in this instance is much more difficult.

30. For a more expanded discussion of the individual emphases of the Gospel writers, see Strathearn and Judd, “Distinctive Testimonies,” 59–85.

31. For a discussion on the importance of reading Matthew as a whole, see Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, translated by J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–21.

32. For discussion of exegesis and eisegesis in interpreting scriptural texts, see Eric D. Huntsman, "Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text," *Religious Educator* 6, no. 1 (2005): 107–26.
33. For a discussion, see John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 1010–21.
34. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 951.
35. For a more detailed discussion of Matthew's editorial hand, see Gaye Strathearn, "Matthew as an Editor of the Life and Teachings of Jesus," 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), 141–56; Graham Stanton, "Matthew as a Creative Interpreter of the Sayings of Jesus," in *The Gospel and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 257–72.
36. This editorial process was first noticed by Günther Bornkamm, in "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 52–57.
37. Bornkamm, "Stilling of the Storm," 55.
38. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 3:1058.
39. For examples where *sozō* is used in a physical sense, see Matthew 14:30; 27:40, 42, 49; Mark 15:30; and Acts 27:20, 31. For examples where *sozō* is used in a spiritual sense, see Luke 19:10; John 12:47; 1 Timothy 1:15; and 2 Timothy 4:18 (where the KJV translates it as "preserve").
40. Bornkamm, "Stilling of the Storm," 56.
41. For example, see E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), 85–88. An important question about the birth narratives is, where did Matthew and Luke get their information? For a discussion of the difficulties, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, updated ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 32–37. For many scholars today the historicity of the birth narratives has receded in the scholarly debate. Interest is now often focused more on what the birth narratives tell us about what later Christians thought about Jesus than on their historical reliability. For example, Henry Wansbrough writes, "The importance of the infancy narratives lies not in the precise historicity of the events but in what these narratives show about Jesus, or rather, about Christian belief in Jesus." Henry Wansbrough, "The Infancy Stories of the Gospels since Raymond E. Brown," in *New Perspectives on the Nativity*, ed. Jeremy Corley (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 5.
42. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX): The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 307.
43. John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 155–57. James H. Charlesworth notes the significance of this find: "No other ancient writer—no author or editor of the Old Testament, the Pseudepigrapha, not even Josephus—mentions such a significant pool in Jerusalem. Moreover, no known ancient building was a pentagon, which was apparently what John was describing with the five porticoes." James H. Charlesworth, "Reinterpreting John: How the Dead Sea Scrolls Have Revolutionized Our Understanding of the Gospel of John," *Bible Review* 9 (1993): 20.

44. James H. Charlesworth, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel according to John" in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 65–97. Charlesworth argues for a direct link between John and Qumran. In this he has probably exceeded the evidence. See David E. Aune, "Dualism in the Fourth Gospel and the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reassessment of the Problem" in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studien in Honor of Peder Borgen*, ed. David E. Aune, Torrey Seland, and Jarl Henning Ulrichsen (Boston: Brill, 2003), 281–303. Aune shows that there is a greater affinity with other Jewish sources than the Dead Sea Scrolls. For a more recent discussions on the relationship between John and Qumran, see Mary L. Coloe and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

45. For some discussions of historically accurate information about Samaritan belief, practices, and places, see Robert J. Bull, "An Archaeological Footnote to 'Our Fathers Worshipped on this Mountain,' John 4:20," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1977): 460–62; Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 131.

46. For a discussion on possible ways of resolving these differences, see David Rolph Seely, "The Last Supper According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke," in *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior's Final Hours*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 64–74.

47. Mishnah *Gittin* 9:10:

A. The House of Shammai say, "A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity,

B. "since it is said, *Because he has found in her indecency in anything* (Dt. 24:1)."

C. And the House of Hillel say, "Even if she spoiled his dish,

D. "since it is said, *Because he has found in her indecency in anything.*"

E. R. Aqiba says, "Even if he found someone else prettier than she,

F. "since it is said, *And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes* (Dt. 24:1)."

English translation from *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 487. Josephus says that he divorced his first wife because he was "not pleased with her behaviour." "Life of Flavius Josephus," in *Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1981), 21.

48. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:548.

49. See Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, April 1961, 48–50.

50. Dallin H. Oaks, "Divorce," *Ensign*, May 2007, 71.

51. Many scholars interpret Jesus' answer as teaching that resurrected life transcends the mortal life and that marriage will no longer be part of an angelic existence. For examples, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 70; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 3:227–30. At least one, however, argues that Jesus' statement that "no new marriages will be initiated in the eschatological [resurrection] state" is "surely not the same as claiming that all existing marriages will disappear in the eschatological state." Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 328. Tertullian argues that in the Resurrection marriages will continue to be recognized. See

Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 4:66–67.

52. Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 70.

53. John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Studies in Antiquity & Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 171–72. For an LDS reading that sees the two sermons as different accounts of the same sermon, see Thomas A. Wayment, “The Sermon on the Plain,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, *From Bethlehem through the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 355–78.

54. Although the texts are remarkably similar, they are not the same. See Krister Stendahl, “The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 139–154. Stendahl emphasizes that Jesus’s frequent use of the phrase “come unto me” is the key textual element that distinguishes the Matthean and 3 Nephi accounts.

55. John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999). For an academic treatment, see John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

56. Blumell, “Text-Critical Comparison,” 96–103; see also I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary of the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 831–33. For a more in-depth examination of why these verses may have been removed from the original Lucan text, see Lincoln H. Blumell, “Luke 22:43–44: An Anti-Docetic Interpolation or an Apologetic Omission?,” forthcoming.

57. See also 2 Nephi 31:2, 9–21; 3 Nephi 11:31–39. Another term for the gospel is the doctrine of Christ (Jacob 7:6).

58. Neal A. Maxwell, “The New Testament—a Matchless Portrait of the Savior,” *Ensign*, December 1986, 25.

59. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 8–11.

60. Thomas A. Wayment, “Quest for Origins: The Joseph Smith Translation and Latin Version of the New Testament” in *A Witness for the Restoration: Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Andrew C. Skinner (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2007), 61–91.

61. Wayment, “Quest for Origins,” 80–81.

62. Laurence M. Vance, *Archaic Words and the Authorized Version*, rev. ed. (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1999), 16.

63. For examples in the KJV, see Matthew 4:22; Mark 1:12, 42. The King James translators used a number of words to translate *euthus*, including “straightway” (e.g., Matthew 4:20; 14:27; Mark 1:10, 18, 20), “by and by” (Matthew 13:21), and “forthwith” (Mark 1:29, 43).

64. Richard D. Draper, “Joseph Smith—Matthew and the Signs of the Times,” *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 2, *The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 290. These are not the only JST changes to the Oliver Discourse. For discussion of all of the changes, see the entirety of Draper’s article and Kent P. Jackson, “The Oliver Discourse,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, 2:318–43.

65. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Inconvenient Messiah,” *Ensign*, February 1984, 68.

66. For a discussion of both elements of judging, see Dallin H. Oaks, “‘Judge Not’ and Judging,” *Ensign*, August 1999, 7–13.

67. “Selections from Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley,” *Ensign*, March 2001, 64.