



Chap. x.

The King James Bible and the Book of Mormon

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For the Latter-day Saint, the commemoration of the King James Bible has a dimension not found elsewhere in the Christian world, that being the relationship between the KJV and the other books of scripture within our canon. The LDS canon of scripture includes not just the Bible but also the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. These three additional books of scripture rely on and reflect the language and texts of the KJV. The relationship between the KJV and the Book of Mormon in particular is complex, as the Book of Mormon includes large blocks of biblical text similar to equivalent passages in the Old and New Testaments and translated into King James English.¹ Beyond the large blocks, there are numerous paraphrases of biblical texts as well as allusions to biblical events and use of biblical imagery. All of these are not only biblical but also specifically written in King James English and thus sound similar to the King James Bible versions of the passages. And even when the Book of Mormon is not explicitly referencing or quoting biblical text, the rest of the Book of Mormon prose reads “biblically,” the translation utilizing King James English to reveal the Book of Mormon’s message.²

But perhaps more important, the Book of Mormon also includes a meta-narrative in which the significance of the Bible is demonstrated through its role in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. While this metanarrative

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runs through the entire book, it is found predominantly in the writings of Nephi as the Father's covenant with his children is outlined. Of course, whether or not the Bible mentioned in the Book of Mormon is the KJV is another question entirely. This chapter will explore the intersections between the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the King James Version of the Bible and hopefully recognize the guiding hand of God in the purpose of all three.

KING JAMES ENGLISH AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

One may begin this study by noting that though the King James Bible was officially tied into the other books of the English-speaking Latter-day Saint canon in 1979 and 1981 (with new editions of the standard works), for large segments of the Church, the KJV is not the Church's Bible and therefore has no particular value. For instance, in France the Church employs a popular French Protestant Bible, while in Latin America the Church uses a Spanish Protestant Bible. In each location the Bibles are not translations of the KJV into the native language but already existing, well-recognized biblical versions in the people's own tongue.

Yet because the Book of Mormon was originally written in King James language, we are confronted with the fact that the KJV, regardless of what Bible translation one reads, influences every member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by virtue of its cadence, language, and terminology appearing in the original English Book of Mormon. In light of this fact, two questions arise concerning the presence of the King James English and text in the Book of Mormon: (1) Why does the Book of Mormon incorporate King James English? and (2) How did such English get into the Book of Mormon text?

Of the two questions, the first is easier to answer, at least from a cultural perspective: the presence of King James English, or Early Modern English, in the Book of Mormon is most likely the result of the KJV's influence on religious discourse in the early nineteenth century. Such language, though no longer the spoken English, was used in sermons and discourses to impose a sense of tradition to what was being spoken and written.³ In fact, as late as the early twentieth century, King James language was still used in certain translation mediums. For instance, Charles's translation of the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, Loeb's series of translations

for ancient Latin and Greek texts, and other translations of Classical and Near Eastern texts were written in the King James English to instill an air of antiquity to the nonbiblical texts. That such language would be utilized for the Book of Mormon—a text that purported to be not only ancient but directly related to the Bible—is not a surprise.

More difficult to explain are the large blocks of biblical text that are in many places exactly the same, word for word, as the King James versions of the same passages. Though some have stressed that the Book of Mormon biblical texts feature many differences from the KJV versions, the reality is that most of the changes in the text are superficial in nature, meaning that they tend to modernize some of the more archaic renditions rather than changing the underlying biblical concept.⁴ For example, in the Isaianic passages, the Book of Mormon often replaces *which* with *who*, the more accurate form, or, in the case of Isaiah 6/2 Nephi 16, removes the plural *-s* from the term *seraphim*. In these cases, the textual meaning is not affected, merely the archaic English element. This is not to say that there are no significant changes in the Book of Mormon variants, but it is an acknowledgment that many of the changes do not appear to be based on an original text but on the KJV's translation instead.⁵

From this fact, one may be inclined to assume that Joseph Smith merely used the pertinent passages of the King James Bible when he came upon those passages while translating the Book of Mormon and made changes to the text when it was deemed necessary. The problem with this assumption is that of the accounts describing the translating process, none mention that he used a Bible, and in fact a few of the accounts state explicitly that Joseph did not use any biblical text during the translation process. Unfortunately, it is unclear what exactly the translating process was.⁶ Joseph himself declined to elaborate in 1831 when his brother Hyrum invited him to share details to the gathered congregation.⁷ Beyond this, we are left with others' recollections of the process. Of those recollections, those of the Three Witnesses and the actual scribes have greater impact than others, but not surprisingly, there is not harmony among the different accounts.⁸ Whether one of those descriptions, if any, or an amalgamation of all of them is the accurate account is unknown, as each one has questionable provenance for the historian, particularly the late-dating and secondhand transmission of most of them. What these accounts report is simply conjecture, since no

hold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish, and shall be driven to darkness.

Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterwards did more grievously afflict by the way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor. For every battle of the warrior with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of government and peace there is no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

The Lord sent his word unto Jacob and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and the stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together; the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind: and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand stretched out still.

For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts. Therefore will the Lord cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush in one day.—The ancient, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed. Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one of them is a hypocrite and an evil-doer, and every mouth speaketh

1830 Book of Mormon, page 95, printed by E. B. Grandin, Palmyra, New York; image shows 2 Nephi 18:22–19:17, containing Isaiah 8:22–9:17; punctuation added by compositor John H. Gilbert; Gilbert added paragraph breaks to match paragraph signs (¶) in KJV.

one else actually translated anything. As was pointed out before, where all the accounts agree is that Joseph did not use another record. This only complicates the matters though, since, as Philip Barlow points out, the KJV influence is so extensive throughout the Book of Mormon. More than fifty thousand phrases of three or more words, excluding definite and indefinite articles, are common to the Bible and the Book of Mormon.⁹

Some have tried to reconstruct the process and in so doing have established a theoretical spectrum ranging from a loose translation process to a tightly controlled translation process. The loose translation idea suggests that regardless of the physical action via the Urim and Thummim, the seer stone, or other means, the translation was ultimately a mental effort on the part of the Prophet, who, while given impressions as to the meaning of the text, had to discern the full meaning and then provide the English words that best fit the impressions received. In this theory, the KJV may have played an important role as Joseph utilized the King James English, primarily gathered through his own reading of the KJV, to arrive at the English translation. It is clear that KJV language is used throughout the Book of Mormon and not just in the biblical quotations.

The second theory, tight control, suggests that Joseph was shown words, clauses, or sentences of English text that are the result of the actual translation process being done in the divine realm.¹⁰ Yet no matter how much the proponents of each theory try to prove conclusively one method of translation or the other, the evidence they set forth can be understood in different ways. In the end, we are simply led to conclude that the similarities between the Book of Mormon and the King James Bible arise from the manner in which “the gift and power of God” (title page, Book of Mormon) was utilized to translate the record, with no real understanding as to what the “gift and power of God” actually alludes to.

But a lack of clear answers does not mean that we cannot make some observations. We do know that within the context of Joseph Smith’s time, the use of King James English for religious purposes is neither unique nor strange but was common when one sought to establish tradition and authority for either the written or the spoken word. It does seem clear that the presence of King James English may have conveyed a sense of authority early in Church history because the early revelations recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants that were given before the Book of Mormon was

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completed, as well as Joseph's earliest account of the First Vision, appear also to have utilized King James English.¹¹

The familiarity of Joseph's contemporaries with King James English would have made their reading of the Book of Mormon an easier experience and one in which they could more readily accept the claims made by the book as both scripture and as an ancient record that was tied to biblical history. The use of King James English in the Book of Mormon would itself be part of the Lord's promise that he would reveal his truth to humankind "after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). The specific phrase "manner of language" suggests that such transmission would occur not only in terms of the actual language but even in specific mannerisms that would be recognized by the audience in question. That this "manner of language" worked, at least in part, can be evidenced by how quickly the Book of Mormon became known as the "Golden Bible" or "Mormon Bible" by believers and critics alike, demonstrating a tacit understanding that, at the very least, the Book of Mormon sounded biblical. Thus the presence of King James English and even KJV passages in the Book of Mormon functioned to establish the book's validity to people already familiar with the words of God via King James English while making it easier to recognize the truths found therein because of the text's familiar cadence and sound.

As for the second observation, how Joseph Smith placed King James English and text in the Book of Mormon, we begin by summarizing that in terms of the translation process. Whether Joseph used an actual KJV text is unknown, although there is no evidence that he did. If one assumes that he did not, whether he used loose or tight control of the translating process is unknown because evidence can be provided either way. As vague and ultimately inconclusive as these answers are, they may in fact reveal an important facet of the Book of Mormon and its relationship with its readers. Like other claims the book makes that can neither be confirmed nor denied through solely academic means, one is left to rely on the Lord to know whether or not the book is true. Though Moroni's promise concerning "these things" is specifically about the gospel message found within the Book of Mormon (Moroni 10:4; see v. 5), it also applies to the manner in which the book came forth. In other words, the promise has as much to do with the revelation that Joseph Smith was a true prophet as it does

with the revelation that the events described in the Book of Mormon really happened. The lack of any firm answers about the translation process requires that one take Moroni's promise seriously, as only the Holy Ghost can resolve the uncertainty by helping us find peace in Joseph's declaration that the Book of Mormon, and thus its King James English, came about through "the gift and power of God," however it was done.

THEY SHALL BE ONE

Of course, the relationship between the Book of Mormon and the Bible is more than textual passages and beautiful prose. It is also manifested in a metanarrative, or theme, in which the text of the Book of Mormon references itself in relation to the existence of another written record containing God's word, known in the Book of Mormon as "the Bible." The primary text concerning this relationship is found in 1 Nephi 13–14, as part of a visionary response to Nephi's request concerning his seeing, hearing, and knowing the dream of his father Lehi recorded in 1 Nephi 8. Our relevant passage begins in 1 Nephi 13:19 with Nephi's introduction to the colonization of the New World by Europeans. As Nephi watches the colonists' growing prosperity, he notices their possession of a book: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the land; and I beheld a book, and it was carried forth among them" (v. 20). The angel asks Nephi, "Knowest thou the meaning of the book?" (v. 21). The question may appear straightforward, but there is no indication that Nephi has ever seen this book before in any context. Moreover, the angel is not asking whether or not Nephi is aware of this record but more pointedly if he knows what the book represents. In other words, the angel is not asking, "What is the book?" but a more powerful question, "What is the meaning of the book?" What follows for the rest of the chapter and into chapter 14 is a series of visions and discourses. In them, one can see a pattern emerging in which God's work to fulfill the covenant, the marvelous work, is ultimately the deliverance of the plain and precious truths leading to the establishment of covenants. He accomplishes this work through the transmission of records containing the necessary knowledge about both truths and covenants.

The book itself, we are told, originated "from the mouth of a Jew." The designation of *Jew* in the Hebrew Bible comes into use after the Assyrian

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conquests to refer to those Israelites, whether actual descendants of Judah or not, who remained in the Palestinian area. Thus the term was used by Nephi to refer to himself and his group, though he was of the tribe of Manasseh. The presence of this designation suggests then that the book's origin began at some time in the seventh or sixth century BC and had a Judean origin. There is some confusion as to what Nephi meant by "book." The physical item Nephi saw possessed by the Gentiles would have been a book with a binding and individual paper pages. But the original record from which the Gentile book came, also designated as "book," is, we are told, "a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass," which does not exactly resemble a modern book (1 Nephi 13:23). More importantly, what the angel highlights is not the medium of the writing but the engravings themselves, however those engravings are preserved.

The record contained a history of the Israelite people ("the Jews"), including the covenants between God and Israel and presumably the specific history involved with those covenants.¹² We are also told that many of the prophecies of the Israelite prophets are contained within, but that the brass plates contain more. Notwithstanding the lesser amount of material, the angel states that what is contained within the text, specifically the covenants of God with Israel, sufficed and would be of "great worth unto the Gentiles" (1 Nephi 13:23). Significantly, this material also apparently includes the texts now found in the New Testament, for later, in 1 Nephi 14:23, Nephi is shown John the Revelator and told, "Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true; and behold they are written in the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew."¹³ We are also given the name of this book, the "book of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 13:28), which intimates its importance to the purposes of the Lamb.¹⁴

Following the description of the book, Nephi is told of its transmission process under the leadership of the twelve Apostles of the New Testament, and he is introduced to the corruption of this record with the formation of the great and abominable church, which stripped from the gospel many plain and precious truths as well as many of the "covenants of the Lord" (1 Nephi 13:23).¹⁵

Yet, even in this state, the book retains its designation as the book of the Lamb of God and appears to be necessary to the furthering of God's

purposes. Though Nephi sees the effect that the loss of plain and precious truths has on the Gentiles, he is also shown the following:

And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it came forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren.

And after it had come forth unto them I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first. (1 Nephi 13:38–40)

The chapter closes with the angel stressing the unity in purpose of both records: “And the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore they both shall be established in one” (1 Nephi 13:41). In these texts, the prominent role of the Bible in revealing God’s word is demonstrated. Even in its corrupted state, as the book of the Lamb of God, it is the means by which Lehi’s descendants are reintroduced to the gospel of Christ, to Christ as the Lamb. In fact, the text establishes that the transmission of the Bible to Nephi’s descendants must happen before the restoration of the plain and precious truths through the Book of Mormon. Thus, without the introduction of the Bible, the Gentiles would not receive the record of Nephi’s seed, nor would Nephi’s seed be prepared for the earlier Nephite record. In both cases, it is the Bible that prepares the way for the Restoration. Finally, we are told the later records that would emerge are to establish the truths already present within the first book, not to replace them, again stressing the importance of the book of the Lamb of God.

In this sense, then, Nephi is shown not just the history of the Bible but, more important, its function, or, as the angel had suggested earlier, its *meaning* within the plan of salvation. The meaning of the Bible, or its purpose, coincides with the concept of the condescension of the Lamb of

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God presented earlier in the vision. Like Christ, who would come down into a mortal, corrupted body, and in so doing provide a way for others to partake of the fruit of the tree, so the Bible, even in its corrupted state, would be spread across the world and become the primary means by which all of humankind could learn of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Nephi's vision, the condescension of Christ is also associated with the covenantal history of Israel. Not surprisingly, so is the Bible. Throughout chapters 13 and 14, the covenantal relationships between the house of Israel, God, and the Gentiles are described. Within those descriptions, the role of the books Nephi was seeing, particularly as mediums of revelation by which an understanding comes of those relationships and their role toward salvation, is provided. Thus the angel's question concerning meaning can apply to what the book means in terms of the covenant.

As a symbol of the covenant itself, the history outlined to Nephi concerning the book's creation, loss of plain and precious truths, and transmission across the world can parallel the same pattern of scattering that Israel experiences, a pattern of movement necessary for the fulfillment of the Father's covenant. As the Book of Mormon makes clear, the scattering of Israel is associated with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that through Abraham's seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This purpose for the Abrahamic covenant is found three times in the Book of Mormon and in each case is associated with the necessity of scattering Israel so that all can hear the gospel of Christ. Yet the scattering necessitates a return as well, not just spatially but spiritually. In other words, the scattering also causes members of the house of Israel to forget who they are and therefore requires that they be restored to their proper understanding. This second form of return is begun, according to the vision, with the dissemination of the Bible, the primary tool by which God has revealed more of his word to more of his children.

The complex symbolism of the Bible as both condescension and covenant can lead one to associate the Bible's presence in Nephi's vision with the purpose and function of the iron rod in Lehi's dream—bringing others safely and truly to the tree whose fruit is most precious. This association may be implied in Nephi's later description of the fruit of the tree as "most precious and most desirable above all other fruits" (1 Nephi 15:36) and the angel's description of the restoration of "plain and most precious"

truths through the emergence of the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 13:26). If one views the Book of Mormon as the tree, the plain and precious truths within being the fruit, then the Bible acts as the iron rod, which leads one to the tree. It goes without saying that both are necessary for salvation, but the function of the Bible as the instrument that leads one to the fruit, and therefore as a condescension, does appear to be one of the primary principles of Nephi's vision. On a purely historical analysis, one must admit that in terms of effect, the Bible has had a greater impact on humankind, even being the primary scriptural tool to teach certain Restoration principles.

The surprisingly Bible-centric vision of Nephi does conclude with the Book of Mormon's role in the fulfillment of the covenant. As Moroni addresses future Gentiles approximately one thousand years after the vision, "When ye shall receive this record ye may know that the work of the Father has commenced upon all the face of the land" (Ether 4:17). Later in his record, Nephi warns the Gentiles, who will play a fundamental role in delivering both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, not to become fixated on the Bible as the only form of scripture: "Many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. But thus saith the Lord God: O fools" (2 Nephi 29:3–4). What follows reveals to us the manner in which God, not man, thinks of the Book of Mormon and the Bible. God begins by asking those who would say there cannot be any other Bible if they are fully appreciative of the effort and trials that the Jews went through to bring to pass the Bible that they possess: "And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? Do they remember the travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles?" (v. 4).

Overall, these questions suggest that the Gentiles are not appreciative, or even sufficiently aware, of the Jewish people's efforts in creating the Bible in the first place. The second of these questions in particular addresses what the Gentiles even mean when they say they have a Bible and do not need another, thus asking the reader to be aware of the language and terminology that one uses; this point is important to the third question, which suggests that to have a Bible means to have gone through the type of adversities requisite to those who are participants in God's covenant.¹⁶ Thus the Gentiles'

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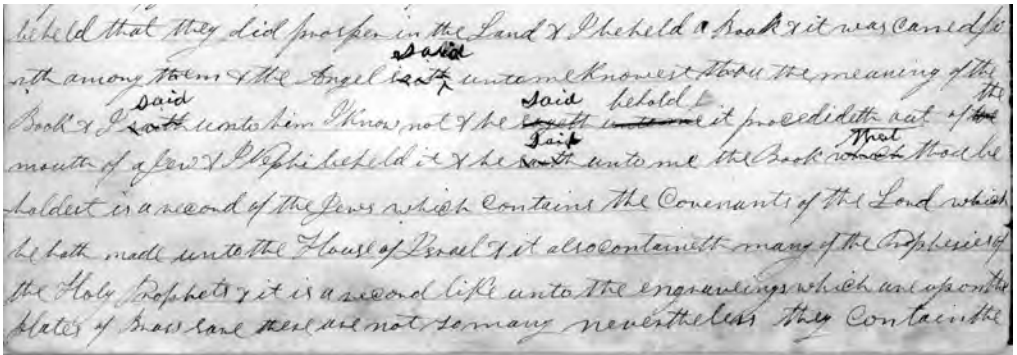
claim to have a Bible is invalidated in that while they may possess one, they did not create one through their efforts and travails.

The Lord continues to challenge the Gentiles to introspection when he asks another question: “Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?” (2 Nephi 29:6). This question appears to repeat the rhetorical questions asked earlier, emphasizing the Jewish effort in bringing to pass the Bible, but the question also precedes a five-verse-long discussion on other nations that God has interacted with and the commensurate records describing these interactions. The rhetorical question that posits the Bible came from Jews, followed by this history of other records, suggests that those other records may too be titled “Bibles.” In this manner, the Book of Mormon, at least in 2 Nephi 29, can be considered a Bible, that is, a record that leads to salvation brought about by “Jews” through diligence to God while experiencing adversity.¹⁷

WHAT WAS THE BIBLE NEPHI SAW?

As the astute reader may have recognized, while the above discussion gives us some indication as to the role of the Bible in the Book of Mormon, the question as to whether or not the book of the Lamb of God may be the King James translation has not been addressed. This is so because the question cannot be answered with certainty because no particular biblical text is delineated by either the prophet or the angel. It is possible that 1 Nephi 13:10–20 includes the Spanish or Portuguese colonization of Central and South America, in which case Nephi could have been viewing a Catholic Bible when he witnessed the biblical record possessed by the Gentiles. Certainly the missionary work undertaken by the Spanish and Portuguese clergy is one of the primary reasons behind the dominance of Christianity in those areas today, thereby fulfilling Nephi’s understanding of the purpose of the Bible.

Yet it is also possible that 1 Nephi 13:10–20 describes the early North American colonization by the British. By verses 34–35 of the same chapter, referring to the Restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, it appears that the Gentiles referenced are those specific colonists or their descendants. Thus it is possible the book Nephi sees “carried forth among them” (v. 20) was the King James Bible. More intriguing is the possibility that the King James Bible, as opposed to



Book of Mormon Printer's Manuscript, page 20, handwriting of Oliver Cowdery with corrections for 1837 edition by Joseph Smith; image shows 1 Nephi 13:20–23, in which an angel discusses content of the Bible.

other Bibles, is uniquely suited to fulfill the requirements of the book of the Lamb of God in Nephi's vision by providing the foundation for a covenantally minded people, meaning a people who thought in terms of covenant, such as ancient Israel.

Not long after the Geneva Bible was published, it became the Bible of choice for English readers. While it was recognized as the best of its time, there was one area that concerned many, the extensive marginalia of notes and commentary that encompassed the actual biblical text. The problem was that the commentary provided only the Puritan religious viewpoint. This marginalia no doubt influenced more religious sensibilities than is recognized, by virtue of its incorporation into the study of the Geneva Bible by its readers.¹⁸ The King James Bible was compiled some fifty years later, after a few attempts to wrest biblical popularity from the Geneva Bible had failed. Most striking was its complete lack of a marginal commentary, mandated by King James when he ordered that the new translation be made. The lack of the commentary made the KJV uniquely adaptable in ways the Geneva Bible could not be. As odd as it may sound, the commentary of the Geneva Bible made the interpretation, and therefore application, of the text inflexible, whereas the openness of the KJV allowed for literal interpretation of events as well as individualized, personal application. This is ironic, since the KJV was originally compiled for usage at the lectern specifically.¹⁹

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In the New World, although there is evidence that the Geneva Bible was used, it appears that the KJV quickly became the Bible of choice, specifically for the Puritans and their descendants. Part of this popularity is due to excellent timing in terms of basic economics and the fact that the Geneva translation was out of print not long after the first colonists arrived. But for the newly colonizing Puritans, the openness of the KJV, in contrast to the Geneva Bible, allowed them the opportunity to define their experience in accordance to their understanding of the biblical text, evidenced by their early sermons and speeches in which they defined their colonizing experience in relation to ancient Israel. Specifically, they defined themselves as New Israel, called and chosen to settle a new promised land.²⁰ More specifically, they understood themselves as a covenant people finding meaning and purpose in the Old Testament texts concerning covenants, which the Geneva Bible had relegated as mere allegory or metaphor. Not surprisingly, this classification included the responsibility to preach the word to others, including the native inhabitants. This preaching is a rich and powerful element of American history, as the new immigrants sought to enlighten to the best of their abilities those who did not possess the gospel of Jesus Christ.²¹

Thus Puritan covenant theology, a theology developed more fully in the New World than in the Old and made possible after 1611 through the King James Bible, became a template to describe the overall colonization experience. For generations, the openness of the King James Bible in terms of interpretation and the covenant-oriented theology described above created a unique religious environment that came to define the early American religious experience.²² It was in this New England environment—saturated with the history and mission of a uniquely covenant-minded people with an understanding that scripture can be personally interpreted—that Joseph Smith and the other early Saints emerged.

The discussion of corporate covenant emerges in Latter-day Saint history as early as 1829 in the early revelations. And as for the role of personal interpretation among the early Saints, two examples may suffice to show the Bible's impact. The first is a description from Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet, who, describing her life prior to the Restoration, stated, "I said in my heart that there was not then upon earth the religion which I sought. I therefore determined to examine my Bible, and taking

Jesus and the disciples as my guide, to endeavor to obtain from God that which man could neither give nor take away. . . . The Bible I intended should be my guide to life and salvation.”²³ The second example is Lucy’s son, Joseph. While we are all aware of the impact James 1:5 had on him, what is often forgotten is that it was Joseph’s own personal interpretation of the verse that led to his decision. Interestingly, if Joseph had used the Geneva Bible with its marginal note, he would have found the following notation that commented on “lacking wisdom”: “to endure patiently whatsoever God layeth vpon him.”²⁴ In this case, the commentary interprets wisdom as patience in enduring one’s fate. Contrast this with Joseph’s 1835 interpretation upon reading the verse: “Information was what I most desired at this time, and with a fixed determination to obtain it, I called on the Lord for the first time.”²⁵ The importance of a Bible free of explicit commentary for the foundation of the Restoration becomes clear. Thus it was in this environment, with a Bible uniquely designed to emphasize the literal nature of covenants while allowing for personal revelation, that the Father’s covenant, promised so long ago, began to be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon is a strong one in terms of language and cadence and a powerful one in terms of covenantal theme. For the Latter-day Saint, this recognition is both a blessing and a warning. It is a blessing because it is through the Book of Mormon that we can gain a greater appreciation and understanding of what the Bible truly is and represents. Perhaps no other people can understand what the Bible provides better than the Latter-day Saints, thanks to the Book of Mormon. Yet the warning consists of subordinating the relevance of the Bible in comparison with the Book of Mormon. Too often we ignore the beautiful and eternal principles of the Bible by focusing solely on what the Book of Mormon offers, thus failing to recognize that the two are in actuality one complete text, each complementing the other.

By recognizing the unique nature of the King James Bible and the subsequent impact this unique nature had, we can gain a further appreciation of Moroni’s invitation to find out for ourselves whether the Book of Mormon is true (see Moroni 10:4–5). It is on the foundation of the KJV that one can read the Book of Mormon with relative ease, and it is

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certainly through the KJV that many became prepared for the plain and most precious truths revealed through the Book of Mormon. Simply put, our understanding of what the Book of Mormon says, and even what the Book of Mormon is, is incomplete without the Bible. Yet the same holds true as well, in that through the Book of Mormon, the full purpose of the Bible is revealed as one of the plain and precious truths restored in the latter days. Thus neither is complete without the other, a concept that we might find beneficial as we seek to understand God's word "according to [our] language, unto [our] understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3).

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NOTES

1. There are approximately twenty explicit textual passages in the Book of Mormon that are directly quoted from ancient Israelite scripture. Most prominent are the texts of the prophet Isaiah, but passages can be found similar to the KJV texts of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Micah, and Malachi. Passages from the latter two books are found in 3 Nephi and are presented to the Nephites by Jesus during his Nephite ministry. 3 Nephi also contains material similar to Christ's New Testament teachings more commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount.
2. One such example is found in 1 Nephi 17:45, in Nephi's description of the voice of God as a "still small voice."
3. "Like other translators of ancient texts and following the precedent set with earlier revelations, Smith cast the book into seventeenth-century prose, though his own vocabulary and grammar are evident throughout." Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 27. "KJV was born archaic: it was intended as a step back. . . . The reasons for making KJV look back were three-fold: first, it was intended to reset the standard of the solid middle-of-the-road Anglican establishment, historically built since King Henry handed down the Verbum Dei. Second, Latinity, rather than contemporary English, was thought to bring with it the great weight of the authority of the past, of what was understood as fifteen hundred years of solid Christian faith. . . . There is a third, more fundamental, point. The world is divided into those who think that sacred Scripture should always be elevated above the common run—is not, indeed, sacred without some air of religiosity, of being remote from real life, with a whiff of the antiquarian." David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 441–42.

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4. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66–69.
5. For example, Royal Skousen has demonstrated that of the 516 variants between the Book of Mormon's Isaiah texts and the KJV's Isaiah texts, 150 (approximately 29 percent) of them are concerned with the italicized portions. This is even more significant when one realizes that there are a total of 392 italicized words in the KJV Isaiah, thus of the 392 italicized words in KJV Isaiah, 150 (38 percent) are the subject of variation in the Book of Mormon Isaiah texts. Royal Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 369–90. As most readers are aware, the italicized portions of the KJV denote an English translation that is not necessarily reflective of the actual Hebrew or Greek text. Thus, concern over the italicized portions of the biblical text suggests that alignment of the Book of Mormon with the King James Bible was the concern in many places, rather than alignment with an original Hebrew or Semitic text.
6. For a review of the accounts that we do have, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "By the Gift and Power of God," *Ensign*, September 1977, 79–85; Richard Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 48–68; Stephen D. Ricks, "Translation of the Book of Mormon: Interpreting the Evidence," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993): 202–8; Daniel C. Peterson, "A Response: 'What the Manuscripts and the Eyewitnesses Tell Us about the Translation of the Book of Mormon,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 2 (2002): 67–71; Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 61–93.
7. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:220, footnote.
8. Emma Smith, the wife of the Prophet, recounted that Joseph would look on the plates using the Urim and Thummim without reference to any other text and would spell out long, difficult words. One interview with her is reported by Edmund Briggs, who visited in Nauvoo in 1856. Unfortunately, his account was not published until 1916. See Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9 (1916), 446–62. Emma was also interviewed a few years prior to her death by her son Joseph Smith III. This account was published in 1879. See *Saints' Advocate* 2, no. 4 (October 1879), 49–52. Joseph Smith III affirmed to a colleague that his mother declared that Joseph Smith Jr. had used no text other than the plates in the translation process. See Joseph Smith III to James T. Cobb, February 14, 1879, Letter book 2, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, cited in Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 29. David Whitmer recounted that Joseph would look into a hat containing the seer stone and in the darkness created by his lowered head would see the translation. See David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 12. Martin Harris's account is not as detailed as Whitmer's but corresponds generally to Edward Stevenson's account of a lecture Martin delivered in

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Salt Lake City on September 4, 1870. See *Deseret Evening News*, September 5, 1870, reprinted in *Deseret News*, November 30, 1881, and *Millennial Star* 44 (February 1882): 86–87. Oliver Cowdery, the primary scribe for Joseph during the translation process, is said to have related that Joseph would place the Urim and Thummim, directly on the plates to receive the revelation, though elsewhere the scribe merely said that Joseph used the Urim and Thummim without a description as to exactly how. This description is found in a personal statement by Samuel W. Richards, who purportedly was recounting a conversation that he had with Oliver about the translating process. See Statement of Samuel W. Richards, May 25, 1907, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, cited in Anderson, “By the Gift and Power of God,” 81. In earlier sources, Oliver merely said that Joseph “translated, with the Urim and Thummim.” *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (1834): 14. In 1848 Reuben Miller recorded that in a speech given upon his return to the Church in Iowa, Oliver said that Joseph had “translated it by the gift and power of God by means of the Urim and Thummim.” Journal of Reuben Miller, October 21, 1848; see Anderson, “Reuben Miller, Recorder of Oliver Cowdery’s Re-affirmations,” *BYU Studies* 8, no. 3 (1968): 277–93.

9. “Like the revelations that preceded it, and even more extensively than scholars have hitherto guessed, the Book of Mormon narrative bulges with biblical expressions. More than fifty thousand phrases of three or more words, excluding definite and indefinite articles, are common to the Bible and the Book of Mormon.” Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 27.
10. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 11–Mosiah 16, *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon* 4, part 2 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1048–52.
11. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 14–15.
12. Later, in chapter 14, the book is again referenced. In verse 20, Nephi is shown one of the Apostles of the Lamb, the same body that translated and transmitted the book of the Lamb of God purely. Nephi is told that this individual, later named John, would watch and write down the remaining portion of the vision and that what John wrote would be just and true. Moreover, the record was to be written in “the book which thou beheldst proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew” (v. 23). This specific text appears to be the Revelation of the Apostle John as found at the end of the New Testament. Interestingly, this verse suggests, then, that the “mouth of the Jew” referred to an origination during the New Testament time period, as John’s Revelation is often dated around AD 100. The timing between the book of the Lamb of God, as originated in chapter 13 and then described in 14, suggests that the reference to the book that proceeds forth from the mouth of the Jew is meant to include the writings of all who have the fulness of the covenant prior to the apostasy. Thus Christians who lived during the New Testament dispensation appear to have received the designation of “Jew” in the Book of Mormon.
13. This is also suggested in 1 Nephi 13:24, where the reader is told that the Apostles “bear record,” an indication that they did not just witness the events but also wrote them down.

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14. This designation is significant in light of its prominent use within the rest of Nephi's vision. In fact, of the thirty-five references to "Lamb of God" in the Book of Mormon, twenty-seven are found in 1 Nephi 11–14, while five of the other eight are in texts that have to do with Lehi's dream (see 1 Nephi 10 and 2 Nephi 21–33). This suggests that this particular designation was significant to the overall content and meaning of Nephi's vision and its particular theme of the condescension of Christ in both the Old and the New Worlds.
15. It bears mentioning that Nephi is not merely being told these things but is actually witnessing them as well; see "behold" in 1 Nephi 14:23–24.
16. "In the vein of modern scholarship, the passage seems to say that scripture is the product of a people whose labors and pains must be honored along with their records." Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 100.
17. We learn elsewhere in Nephi's writings that he considered himself a Jew, and therefore the Book of Mormon could rightfully fit the requirements for a Bible, namely that it was brought forth through the "travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews" (2 Nephi 29:4).
18. See Harry S. Stout, "Word and Order in Colonial New England," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19–38, 22.
19. See David Lawton, *Faith, Text and History: The Bible in English* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 82–83.
20. "The Puritans' new order was given classic formulation in the first New World sermon of their governor John Winthrop, preached while still on board the flagship Arbella. . . . He proceeded to inform his fellow travelers that they were different from all other peoples on earth; not because of their own righteousness, but because God had singled them out, like Israel of old, to be the instruments of his redemptive plan for mankind. . . . The business of New England would be the carrying out of a divine 'commission' from God to establish his Word in the midst of a professing, 'peculiar' people. . . . It is important to remember that in delivering his platform Winthrop was not simply expressing a private opinion which he would like to see implemented. He was articulating the official, public ideology of the land. Henceforth New England society would go on public record as a special covenant people." Stout, "Word and Order in Colonial New England," 27.
21. For more information, see Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity and Native Community in Early America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); David Murray, "Spreading the Word: Missionaries, Conversion and Circulation in the Northeast," in *Spiritual Encounters: Interactions between Christianity and Native Religions in Colonial America*, ed. Nicholas Griffiths and Fernando Cervantes (Birmingham, England: University of Birmingham Press, 1999), 43–64; Andrew H. Hedges, "Strangers, Foreigners, and Fellow Citizens: Case Studies of English Missions to the Indians in Colonial

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New England and the Middle Colonies, 1642–1755” (PhD diss., University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign, 1996).

22. “During and following America’s First Great Awakening, the latent propensity of ordinary men and women to disregard the teachings of the learned and to lean instead on their own scriptural interpretations became increasingly manifest.” Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 7. See also John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), who addresses the same phenomenon as essential to the rise and popularity of Methodism in the early United States: “The revolutionary era marks a divide between two worlds—between, as Gordon Wood, Alan Taylor, and others have argued, an earlier world ordered through deference, hierarchy, and patronage and a later period in which ordinary people grew increasingly unwilling to consider themselves inherently inferior to anyone else” (7).
23. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 37. For more on Lucy Mack Smith as reflective of the early American individualized relationship with the Bible, see Nathan O. Hatch, “Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum,” in Hatch and Noll, *The Bible in America*, 69.
24. 1560 Geneva edition.
25. “Joseph Smith Journal, 1835–1836,” November 9–11, 1835, in Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 87–88.