

# The King James Bible in the Days of Joseph Smith

*Kent P. Jackson*



At the time of Joseph Smith's birth in English-speaking America, the King James Bible *was* the Bible. Very few had ever heard of the existence of other English translations, nor did people know or care about their Bible's origin or history. Americans didn't even call it the King James Version, a title that became popular later. They called it the Bible. By the time of the Prophet's death, however, the idea of new translations had entered the American consciousness. The King James translation was still the Bible, but in contrast with other translations, it was sometimes called the *common Bible*. Still, its rule as America's Bible was never in doubt. During the lifetime of Joseph Smith (1805–44), nine Americans published new translations of all of or significant parts of the Bible. Their motives were not all the same, but most were influenced by one or more of the following concerns about the King James translation: its archaic English, the availability of better Greek texts than those that were used for it, and concerns that it had doctrinal inadequacies.

Many of Joseph Smith's contemporaries believed that the old language of the King James Version no longer communicated as successfully as it did when it was first translated. Joseph Smith's dialect of English was essentially the same as ours today, but in the previous two hundred years, English had undergone a significant transformation. Also, when the King James Bible was first published, it was already in an old form of

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English because it was, by intent, a revision of translations made in the previous century.

By the time of Joseph Smith, historians and linguists had come to believe that the New Testament in the King James Version was based on Greek manuscripts that were not as good as others that had become available. All of the English New Testament translations from William Tyndale to King James were based on a Greek text tradition commonly called the *Textus Receptus*, first compiled by Erasmus of Rotterdam and culminating in editions by Theodore Beza. Beginning in Erasmus's day, however, scholars became increasingly aware of the existence of earlier Greek texts that they believed were closer to the originals. Over two thousand fragments of ancient New Testament manuscripts were known then, and scholars were applying textual criticism to understand the variant readings in them. Textual criticism is the science of examining and comparing diverse texts to determine which derive from which and what the original reading was. It is a necessary science because no original New Testament manuscripts exist and all of the fragments are copies of copies of copies, creating many variant readings. By Joseph Smith's time, textual criticism was coming of age. In addition, scholars were developing a better understanding of the Hebrew and Greek languages and of the world in which the Bible came into existence. Nineteenth-century translators felt that they had better sources and better tools than those that had been available to King James's translators two centuries earlier.

Another concern, though not as important historically as the other two, also played a significant role. It was that the translators of the King James Bible—the in-house product of the highly authoritarian Church of England—deliberately or innocently selected words to protect the church's interests, rather than to render meanings that the original authors intended. For example, since the sixteenth century, there had been contention over the translation of the Greek verb *baptízō*. To translate it accurately, the English word *immerse* would be used, but this would put in question the church's practice of baptizing by sprinkling. King James's translators, like some others before them, simply anglicized the word: *baptize*, a word that has little meaning on its own. They did the same with the New Testament word *epískopos*, "overseer," "presiding officer," rendering it *bishop*. Whether intentionally or not, the use of the word *bishop* identified the

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humble leaders of local New Testament congregations with the powerful and wealthy rulers of the Church of England. And the translators followed Catholic vocabulary by using *repent* instead of *turn around*, *reform*, or *change one's heart*, any of which would better render the underlying Hebrew and Greek words.

These concerns about the King James Version are instructive, because they tell us important things about the translation, how it was perceived, and much about the way the Bible was viewed and understood by Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century. The American translations that we will examine will be our window into that world and its ideas of scripture.

### CHARLES THOMSON

The first of the American Bible translators was Charles Thomson (1729–1824), who translated and published a complete Bible in 1808—the first new translation of the Bible published in the United States. Remarkably, it was also the first translation ever made of the Septuagint into English.<sup>1</sup> Thomson, who served as secretary to the Continental Congress and who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, spent close to twenty years translating the Bible. He published it without a preface to explain his motives for using the Septuagint, but it appears that he chose it out of an interest in the Greek language and because he knew that the Septuagint had never been translated before.

The Septuagint is the Greek Old Testament that was translated from Hebrew in the third through second centuries BC. It is of great importance historically, and for Christians it is significant because it was the version that New Testament authors generally used when quoting from the Old Testament, rather than the Hebrew. Thomson mentioned that point, but he did not seem to argue the Septuagint's superiority over the Hebrew, as others sometimes did.<sup>2</sup> For his New Testament, he used some form of the *Textus Receptus*, but with emendations from other Greek texts. There is evidence that he consulted other English translations, including the King James. In some cases, he departed from traditional theological language, sometimes rendering *repent* as “reform” and *church* as “congregation.” Both of these go back to the original meanings of the words.

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XX. I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the  
3 land of Egypt—out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt  
have no other gods besides me.  
4 Thou shalt not make for thyself an idol, nor the likeness  
of any thing, which is in the heaven above, or in the earth be-  
low, or in the waters under the earth; thou shalt not worship  
5 them; nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a zealous  
God, retributing to them who hate me the sins of fathers upon  
6 children to the third and fourth generation; but shewing mer-  
cy for thousands [of generations] to them who love me and  
keep my commandments.  
7 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in  
vain; for the Lord thy God will not hold him guiltless who  
taketh his name in vain.

*Charles Thomson translation, Exodus 20:1–7; note paragraphs based on content,  
verse numbers in margin, heavy influence of KJV.*

The verse divisions used in today's Bibles were an invention of the sixteenth century, and the practice of beginning each verse with a paragraph indent was first used in an English Bible not long thereafter. Thomson printed his Bible in a one-column format and placed the verse numbers in the left margin, not in the text, and he divided the text into large paragraphs based on the content. In those developments, he anticipated the common practices of later generations. Thomson chose a dialect of English largely consistent with that of the King James translation, with the familiar use of the verbal endings *-est* and *-eth* and the pronouns *thou*, *thee*, and *ye*. He also inserted quotation marks for Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament and used them in some other places as well.

Thomson wrote that to translate well is to reproduce the original author's "purpose," "spirit and manner," and by giving the translation "the quality of an original, by making it appear natural."<sup>3</sup> In general he succeeded with these aims for his translation, but it had very little impact in his own time or later.

### ABNER KNEELAND

Abner Kneeland (1774–1844), a Baptist-turned-Universalist, published two editions of his translation of the New Testament in 1823. One edition

presented Greek and English texts in parallel columns, and the other had only his English translation.<sup>4</sup>

Kneeland was well versed in the emerging science of New Testament textual criticism and believed that other Greek texts were superior to those used for the King James Version. He also had serious doctrinal concerns about several Greek words that he believed were mistranslated in the King James. The Greek text Kneeland used was that of J. J. Griesbach, a pioneering scholar of textual criticism who published an important Greek New Testament text.<sup>5</sup> Based on Griesbach, Kneeland enclosed in brackets in his translation “words which should probably be omitted” and words that are lacking in some good manuscripts but “whose omission is less probable than the others.” He also provided a list of

the most important passages from the King James Version that he omitted altogether.<sup>6</sup> Kneeland’s English translation, as he stated on the title page, was “upon the basis of the fourth London edition of the Improved Version, with an attempt to further improvement from the translations of Campbell, Wakefield, Scarlett, Macknight, and Thomson.” Like several other translators of his generation—and like the King James translators—Kneeland began with someone else’s English text and then edited it to meet his own needs. He and his sources employed English not far removed from that of the King James translation, with the familiar archaic pronouns and verb endings. Like most other modern translators, he divided the text into content-based paragraphs, rather than turning each verse into a paragraph. He also added quotation marks for all quoted dialogue.

Kneeland’s Unitarian theology is shown in some of the English words he selected for important doctrinal concepts. In his preface, he expresses

41 “Then he will say also to them on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into the aionian fire, prepared for the impostor and his emissaries. 42 For I was hungry, and ye gave me no food: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye lodged me not: naked and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.’ 44 “Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ 45 Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Verily I tell you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.’ 46 And these shall go away into aionian punishment \*: but the righteous into aionian life.”

*Abner Kneeland translation,  
Matthew 25:41–46; note  
paragraphs based on content,  
quotation marks, and  
the word aionian.*

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concern over the translation of the Greek word *hadēs*, the world of departed spirits—what Latter-day Saints call the Spirit World. By translating it with the word *hell*, the King James Bible had burdened it with medieval baggage not intended by the original authors. Kneeland transliterates, rendering it “hades” in English (e.g., Luke 16:23). The Greek adjective *aiōnion*, translated “everlasting” and “eternal” in the King James, was also problematic for Kneeland. Like other Universalists, he rejected the idea of “eternal punishment.” The word means “for an age.” Without a good corresponding English word, Kneeland simply transliterated it into the less-than-helpful artificial word “aionian.”<sup>7</sup>

Kneeland’s published translation is significant as a work of scholarship—it was an early American publication of Griesbach’s Greek text in parallel with a respectable new translation. But it never generated enough interest for a reprint, and it “went largely unnoticed by American Protestantism.”<sup>8</sup>

### ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

Alexander Campbell (1788–1866), a leader in the Reformed Baptist movement, first published his translation of the New Testament in 1826, with later editions in subsequent years.<sup>9</sup> It was based on the work of three other men, whose translations he placed together and then revised and edited.<sup>10</sup> Campbell made revisions where he felt the Greek text called for them, making more and more changes with each subsequent edition. His preface listed three general reasons why a new translation was justified.

First, the English language had changed substantially since the publication of the King James Version. “A living language,” he wrote, “is continually changing. . . . Words and phrases at one time current and fashionable, in the lapse of time become awkward and obsolete. But this is not all. Many of them, in a century or two, come to have a signification very different from that which was once attached to them.” Even if the King James had been perfect in its own time, Campbell argued, “the changes in the English language which have since been introduced, would render that translation in many instances incorrect.”<sup>11</sup> Campbell’s New Testament was thus, by design, a translation into contemporary English. He retained the archaic pronouns and verb endings in his first edition but removed them in his second. In that edition and later, the archaic forms are used

only when addressing God. In the second edition, *bishop* was changed to *overseer* and *deacon* to *servant*, but in the third edition, he returned the traditional words to the text.<sup>12</sup>

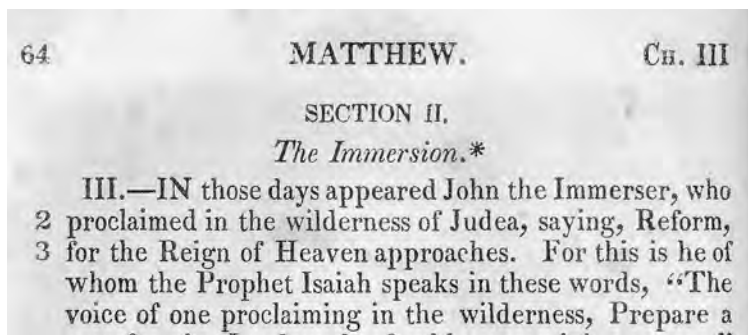
Second, Campbell believed the King James text contained doctrinal errors that were the result of sectarian bias on the part of the translators. He believed those errors were caused when “the tenets of the translators, whether designedly or undesignedly, did, on many occasions, give a wrong turn to words and sentences bearing upon their favorite dogmas.”<sup>13</sup>

Third, Campbell believed that in his day, scholars had better knowledge of original languages, better academic tools, and better Greek texts to work from than King James’s translators did. He wrote, “We are now in possession of much better means of making an exact translation, than they were at the time when the common version appeared. The original is now much better understood than it was then.” He gave examples of where he believed the King James translators had misunderstood the Greek, leading to incorrect wording in the English text.<sup>14</sup> Relying on Griesbach, an appendix in Campbell’s first edition explained his translations of several difficult passages and presented alternatives.<sup>15</sup> In the text of his first and second editions, he printed in italics passages which Griesbach had identified as being of questionable authenticity. By the third edition of 1832, he had removed most of the questionable passages and relegated them to his appendix, where they appeared in a list titled “Spurious Readings.”<sup>16</sup>

Campbell held a strong belief in the authority of earliest Christianity and the earliest New Testament texts. Like William Tyndale, he did not believe the received and institutionalized translation had intrinsic authority simply because it was received and institutionalized. The most well-known aspect of his translation—the use of *immerse* and *immersion* in place of *baptize* and *baptism*, was for him neither an innovation nor a sectarian interjection. It was simply a case of translating the Greek words as they were intended to be understood.<sup>17</sup>

Campbell’s New Testament was printed in a one-column format and divided into paragraphs based on content, with verse numbers in the margin so as not to interrupt the text. Unlike the other American translations of the early nineteenth century, Campbell’s sold tens of thousands of copies and went through many printings. But this was mainly because Campbell was the head of a large denomination that used his translation.<sup>18</sup>

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*Alexander Campbell translation, Matthew 3:1–3; note verse numbers in margin, Immerser for Baptist, and reform for repent.*

### GEORGE R. NOYES

George R. Noyes (1798–1868) was a Unitarian minister, Harvard professor of Hebrew, and translator of twenty-two books of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament. His first translation was the book of Job, published in 1827. He then published translations of the Psalms, the Prophets, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.<sup>19</sup> His translations were generally well received.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the material in the Old Testament books that Noyes translated is written in poetry, and Noyes had particularly strong feelings about how the poetry had been translated and produced in the King James Version. In the introduction to his Job volume, he explains why he felt the new translations were needed: “The obscure and unintelligible passages, which occur in almost every page of the old version, are sufficient to convince every intelligent reader, that it is not what it ought to be. In truth, the toleration and support of the errors in the present English version of the Scriptures, are a disgrace to the Christian community.”<sup>21</sup> Noyes felt that the poetry was damaged in the King James by being placed in prose columns and interrupted by paragraph indents for the arbitrary beginnings of verses. He wrote of the “wretched arrangement” and of the “injustice” that had been “done to the Hebrew poets.”<sup>22</sup>

Noyes believed that the King James Version had “great merit, in several respects,” and that “no new translation can, or ought to succeed, which does not essentially resemble it in language and style.”<sup>23</sup> True to that endorsement, his translations employ archaic pronouns and verb endings



2 It shall come to pass in future times,  
That the mountain of the house of Jehovah shall be es-  
tablished above the mountains,  
And exalted above the hills ;  
And all nations shall flow to it.  
3 And many kingdoms shall go, and shall say,  
“ Come, let us go to the mountain of Jehovah,  
“ To the house of the God of Jacob,  
“ That he may teach us his ways,  
“ And that we may walk in his paths !”  
For from Zion shall go forth a law,  
And the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.

*George R. Noyes translation, Isaiah 2:2–3; note verse numbers in margin, poetic lines, quotation marks, and the use of Jehovah.*

and have a feel similar to that of the King James. Noyes believed that as a translator, he needed to make the text “more true to the original” and “more intelligible” than the current translation.<sup>24</sup> He set the text in one column, and he arranged the poetry of the Old Testament in poetic format, with verse numbers out of the way on the side, even in prose sections. He also added quotation marks.

Noyes’s translations are characterized by his use of the divine name “Jehovah” where the King James translation has “the LORD.” Wherever the words “the LORD” appear in the King James Version (with small capital letters), it is in place of God’s name, spelled *yhwh* in the Hebrew text and probably pronounced Yahweh—“Jehovah” in English. In the King James Bible, the translators followed the pattern of the Latin Vulgate and replaced the divine name with “the LORD.”<sup>25</sup> Noyes was not unique in using “Jehovah” in a printed Bible, and it is sometimes used in non-English Bible translations today, including in the LDS edition of the Spanish Reina Valera Bible.<sup>26</sup>

#### JOHN G. PALFREY

In 1828 John G. Palfrey (1796–1881) published a translation of the New Testament that was more like a new edition of the King James translation. Palfrey was a Unitarian minister and later a Harvard professor. He was influenced by textual criticism and believed that the King James Bible needed to be revised to reflect the best Greek texts available. Originally

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7 eth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are  
8 three that bear record; the spirit, and the water, and  
9 the blood; and these three agree in one. If we re-  
ceive the witness of men, the witness of God is great-

*John G. Palfrey translation, 1 John 5:7–8; note absence of “Johannine Comma.”*

with his students in mind, he published his translation with the title *The New Testament in the Common Version, Conformed to Griesbach’s Standard Greek Text*.<sup>27</sup> The “Common Version,” again, was the King James, and Palfrey’s new version was not only based on it but reproduced all of it except for where Griesbach’s Greek text disagreed with the *Textus Receptus*. In those instances, Palfrey revised the King James translation to conform with Griesbach’s text, but he made his revisions in imitation of King James style. Thus Palfrey created, to the best of his ability, the New Testament that King James’s translators would have created had they used different Greek texts to begin with. He wrote, “The editor of this volume . . . has exactly reprinted the Common Version, except in places where the Greek text, from which that version was made, is now understood to have been faulty. In other words, he has aimed to present the Common Version precisely such as it would have been, if the translators could have had access to the standard text of Griesbach, instead of the adulterated text of Beza,” that is, the *Textus Receptus* from which the King James was translated.<sup>28</sup>

Palfrey’s concern with the King James Bible was thus not with its language but with its underlying Greek text. In his introduction, Palfrey provided a primer on Greek New Testament texts since the sixteenth century. He explained the origin of the *Textus Receptus* and why scholars felt it was not as good a text as others that were available.<sup>29</sup> But like most other translators in the early nineteenth century, he preferred the familiarity of what had come to be seen as scriptural language.<sup>30</sup>

### EGBERT BENSON

Egbert Benson (1746–1833) self-published a translation of the New Testament epistles in 1830. Benson was a prominent New York lawyer and politician. He was a member of the Continental Congress and the US House of Representatives, attorney general of New York, judge on the New York State Supreme Court, and judge on the US Second Circuit

Court of Appeals. He was of Dutch ancestry and a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, and he translated the New Testament letters “in conformity to the Dutch version.”<sup>31</sup> According to Margaret Hills, Benson’s “object in this edition seems to have been to give the proper translation of the terms for *charity* and *bishop*, which he rendered as ‘love’ and ‘overseer.’”<sup>32</sup> The rendering of *agápē*, “love,” as “charity” by the King James translators was a matter of concern for some. Tyndale, Geneva, and the first edition of the Bishops’ Bible used “love,” but the King James translators followed later editions of the Bishops’ Bible with the Latin-based word *charity*, which still miscommunicates in English today. Benson praised the Dutch version for translating the Greek word *epískopos* with the “indigenous” Dutch word for *overseer*, rather than with the “exotic” word *bishop*. He criticized both Luther and the English translators for choosing the “exotic” word.<sup>33</sup>

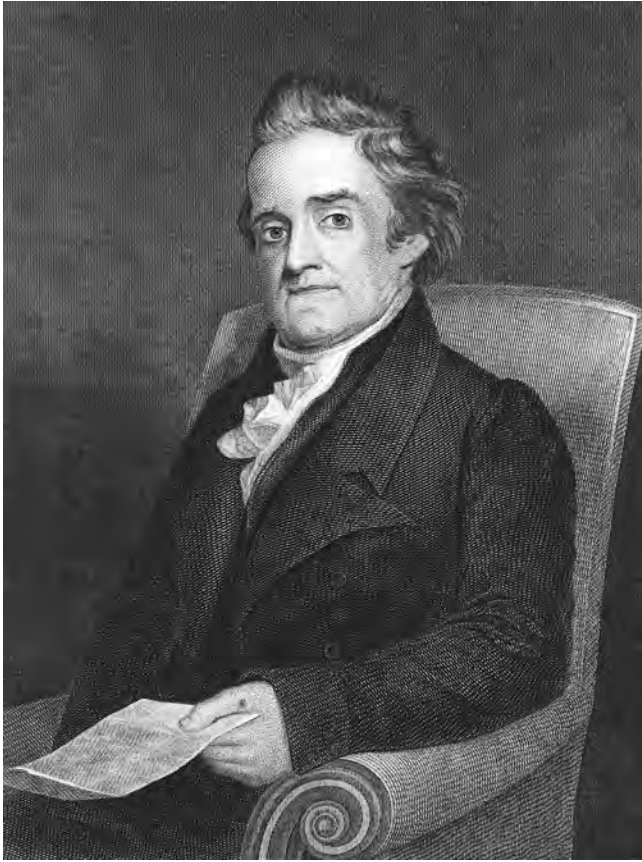
Benson printed very few copies of his new translation. It remained virtually unknown, and it was never reprinted.<sup>34</sup>

#### NOAH WEBSTER

Noah Webster (1758–1843) is better known as a creator of dictionaries than as a creator of a new translation of the Bible, but he published a complete translation in 1833. The title page reveals his intent. It was “in the Common Version” with “Amendments of the Language”—a revision of the King James Bible with changes where he considered them appropriate and necessary.<sup>35</sup>

Webster’s preface states what his concerns were with the King James Version and what his intentions were with the new one. Like Campbell, he argued the necessity of a revision on the grounds of changes in the language since 1611. “In the lapse of two or three centuries,” he wrote, “changes have taken place, which, in particular passages, impair the beauty; in others, obscure the sense, of the original languages. Some words have fallen into disuse; and the signification of others, in current popular use, is not the same now as it was when they were introduced into the version.” Webster stated that the effect of such changes for contemporary readers would be “a wrong signification or false ideas.” He wrote that “a version of the scriptures for popular use should consist of words expressing the sense which is most common, in popular usage, so that the *first*

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Noah Webster (1758–1843), lexicographer and reviser of  
*King James Bible*.

*ideas* suggested to the reader should be the true meaning of such words, according to the original languages.”<sup>36</sup>

Webster made three kinds of changes in the text: He replaced words he considered obsolete or inappropriate with contemporary words; he corrected “errors in grammar,” such as changing *which* to *who* when referring to humans and *his* to *its* when referring to animals and inanimate objects; and he inserted euphemisms to replace words or phrases that he felt should not be uttered in polite company. “The language of the scriptures ought to be pure, chaste, simple and perspicuous, free from any words or phrases which may excite observation by their singularity.”<sup>37</sup>

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The preface to Webster's Bible is followed by a ten-page, fine-print introduction in which he detailed his "principal alterations in the language of the common version of the Scriptures."<sup>38</sup> It is an annotated list of most of the words that he replaced, with an explanation for each change, as well as a discussion of grammatical usage. In all, he noted over 130 words or phrases which no longer communicated what the scriptural authors intended, or which had been replaced by other words to convey better the intended thought. Webster's edition is thus an update of the King James, with fewer than two hundred words or phrases modernized wherever they appear. This conservative effort shows his belief in the authority of the King James Version. For him, there never was a question of replacing it, just of repairing it so it could last longer as the English Bible. He wrote: "In the present version, the language is, in general, correct and perspicuous; the genuine popular English of Saxon origin; peculiarly adapted to the subjects; and in many passages, uniting sublimity with beautiful simplicity. In my view, the general style of the version ought not to be altered." "My aim has been to *preserve*, but, in certain passages, more clearly to *express*, the sense of the present version."<sup>39</sup>

Despite the fact that Webster had significant name recognition as a lexicographer and publisher of educational tools, Americans were not drawn to his Bible as he had hoped. Still, he sold enough of the first printing to republish the New Testament in 1839 and the entire Bible in 1841.<sup>40</sup>

## RODOLPHUS DICKINSON

The most singular American Bible translation was that of Rodolphus Dickinson (1787–1863), rector of the Episcopal Parish at Montague, Massachusetts.<sup>41</sup> In 1833 he published his *New and Corrected Version of the New Testament*,<sup>42</sup> a work that can best be characterized as an attempt to upgrade the literary quality of the Bible. Dickinson believed the King James translation lacked the literary refinement befitting a sacred text. His lengthy preface, with its dense syntax and exotic vocabulary, gives readers a foretaste of what his translation would be like. One sentence in the preface contains 603 words, eighty-four commas, and fifteen semicolons.<sup>43</sup> Dickinson decried the King James Bible's "harsh and indelicate expressions," its "inelegance and inaccuracy," its "frequently rude, and occasionally barbarous attire," its "paucity of language," and its "unnumbered faults, extending

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to almost every verse.”<sup>44</sup> He asked, “Why should the inestimable gift of God to man, be proffered, in a mode that is unnecessarily repulsive?”<sup>45</sup>

Dickinson argued that with all the modern advances in science, education, democracy, and literature, a new version of the Bible was not only possible but required. His new translation would be the solution. He explained that it incorporated the best understanding of the original Greek text, information from the finest commentaries, and his many years of hard effort. It was also enhanced by his lack of denominational bias or “private speculations.” He was guided only by his willingness to surrender his own interests to “the divine authority of the original scriptures” and by his desire “to mingle the sublime principles . . . of our religion, with the rich and varied luxuriances of our language.”<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, the “rich and varied luxuriances” of the English language set Dickinson’s translation apart from all others. His rendering of John 3:3–5 is emblematic of much of the new version. Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Except a man be reproduced, he cannot realize the reign of God. Nicodemus says to him, How can a man be produced when he is mature? Can he again pass into a state of embryo, and be produced? Jesus replied, I most assuredly declare to you, that unless a man be produced of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>47</sup> It is not clear whether Dickinson’s version is a translation at all. His preface does not mention a Greek text from which it derives. The wording gives the impression that he took the King James and perhaps other English translations and simply edited the language, replacing words and phrases with others intended to be more literary. For the most part, this meant taking simple phrases and making them complex, and replacing common English words with synonyms of Latin origin—the more obscure and exotic the better.

Dickinson rightly identified the chapter and verse divisions as not part of the original biblical documents. So he left them out entirely. He divided the text into paragraphs based on the content, as others had before him. He also abandoned traditional titles for new ones: “The History by Mark,” “The History by Luke of Apostolic and Ecclesiastical Transactions” (Acts), and “The Letters, Visions, and Prophecies, of John” (Revelation).

The *New and Corrected Version* was not received well. It was called “a great mistake,” “a discredit and reproach to our literature,”<sup>48</sup> “full of pretensions, and void of merit.”<sup>49</sup> One reviewer suggested how to make such a

her who is reputed sterile. For nothing is impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; may it be to me in conformity to thy disclosure! And the angel departed from her.

And Mary arose, at that period, and went to the highlands, with expedition, to a city of Judah; and entered the house of Zechariah, and saluted Elizabeth. And it happened, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the embryo was joyfully agitated; and Elizabeth was pervaded by the Holy Spirit; and she exclaimed with a loud voice, and said, Blessed are you among women! and blessed is your incipient offspring! And whence this occurrence to me, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? For behold, when the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears, the embryo was enlivened with joy. And happy is she who has believed, that those things, communicated to her from the Lord, will be accomplished.

And Mary declared, My soul celebrates the praises of the Lord, and my spirit exults in God my Saviour; because he has kindly viewed the humble situation of his handmaid; for behold, from this time, all pos-

*Rodolphus Dickinson translation, Luke 1:36–48; note absence of verse numbers and translator's choice of vocabulary.*

translation: "Take the common version, and wherever you find a word or phrase agreeable to the ear, substitute a harsh one," wherever you find a well-constructed sentence, "make it utterly obscure," and "above all, wherever you see a word of Saxon origin, exchange it for one of Latin or French derivation."<sup>50</sup> "The translation of this book seems to be prompted by just one principle—a desire to scatter over the pages as many long, dictionary words as possible."<sup>51</sup> Dickinson's New Testament was republished in Toronto in 1837 with the title *Productions of the Evangelists and Apostles*.<sup>52</sup>

#### DAVID BERNARD

In 1842, David Bernard (1798–1876) published a new translation of the entire Bible.<sup>53</sup> Bernard, who was a Baptist pastor in New York and Pennsylvania, identified himself as the "proprietor" and oversaw the translation and publication of the new version. It is not known to what extent he served as a translator. For over a decade, Bernard had already been known in some circles as an abolitionist and as an opponent of Free Masonry.<sup>54</sup> The same year that his translation came out, he and a coauthor published a pamphlet calling for a revision of the King James Bible.<sup>55</sup> Of particular interest to these two authors was the translation of the Greek word *baptizō*, which they argued should be translated as "immerse." It

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seems that concerns over doctrinally sensitive words and archaic language were the motivations behind the new translation. It is a revision of the King James Version, undertaken by “several biblical scholars,” as the title page states. None of those translators are identified there, but in the New Testament preface, Asahel C. Kendrick identifies himself as the translator of the New Testament.<sup>56</sup> Bernard states in his preface that the goals of the translation were to create uniform spelling and word choices, replace obsolete and indelicate words, and correct errors.<sup>57</sup>

Bernard’s Old Testament, like Noyes’s earlier, uses “Jehovah” where the King James uses “the LORD.” His New Testament was an “immersion” translation. Beginning with Alexander Campbell’s version of 1826, many Baptists had seen the translation of *baptizō* as “immerse” to be a test dividing true believers in the Bible from others. Bernard’s translation was clearly influenced by his Baptist denominational interests, but it was not a denominational publication. Yet predictably, readers often saw it within the context of contemporary theological issues. For those who liked the translation, it was evidence of “profound and accurate scholarship.”<sup>58</sup> Fellow immersionist Alexander Campbell called it “a decided improvement of the James Version,” and “a work of very considerable merit.”<sup>59</sup>

### THE ENDURING KING JAMES BIBLE

Before the Restoration of the gospel could take place in America, there had to be a Bible in the English language. The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants both take for granted the existence of the Bible, while building on its foundation. Book of Mormon writers knew that people of the latter days would have the Bible before they would have the Book of Mormon. And as the Restoration would take place in an English-speaking country, there needed to be an English Bible, and it needed to be in the hands of ordinary people. Because of the relationship that would exist between the Book of Mormon and the Bible, it makes sense that God would cause the Book of Mormon to be translated into the scriptural idiom of its original audience—the language of the English Bible. For that reason, I believe that the language of the King James Version determined the language in which the Book of Mormon was revealed. If there had been a different English Bible in 1829, the Book of Mormon would have



been revealed in such a way as to reflect that Bible sufficiently to meet the needs of the Restoration.<sup>60</sup>

That the language of the King James Version was already dated by the time of Joseph Smith was the natural result of changes that had taken place in English since the translation first came about. By the early nineteenth century, many had come to see the archaic language as problematic. The Bible was no longer in the spoken tongue of living people, and thus it had become in many instances difficult to read. Because that was not the intent of the original writers or of the King James translators themselves, some felt that the translation had unintentionally become a misrepresentation of the originals and hence needed to be modernized. Indeed, the prose of the Hebrew Old Testament was in the language of everyday speech of ancient Israelites, in plain vocabulary and style. To people in Jeremiah's day, there was nothing "old" or "scriptural"-sounding about it. The same can be said of the Greek prose of the New Testament, written in the common vocabulary and style of ordinary literate people. Dickinson's translation was a failure because, from the start, it so severely misrepresented the words and intent of the original writers. By Joseph Smith's day, King James language had come to be seen as "scriptural" language. And for many, even for critics of the King James translation, it was viewed as an indispensable component of the word of God. Thus the free-thinking liberal Abner Kneeland and the scholarly George Noyes both mimicked the style of its language because they liked its feel of antiquity. It sounded "scriptural" to them, as it did to most other readers. And Palfrey and Webster, bright scholars and linguists in their own right, simply reproduced the King James wherever they could.<sup>61</sup>

Textual criticism, a young discipline in Joseph Smith's day, developed through the nineteenth century and continues to the present. Scholars have found that the Hebrew Old Testament has deficiencies that can be compensated for with reference to the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scroll biblical manuscripts, and other ancient texts. With now over five thousand known New Testament manuscript fragments, researchers continue their quest to ascertain the most original reading for each passage of the New Testament. Most translations today are based not on the *Textus Receptus* but on other manuscript traditions that scholars (including Latter-day Saint scholars) consider to be closer to the original texts. Joseph Smith's

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New Translation of the Bible builds on the King James translation but suggests that all biblical manuscripts known today lack significant material once found in original documents. This, of course, is consistent with Nephi's prophecy that the Bible would not go forth to the world until it had been edited by uninspired hands and that many plain and precious things would be taken from it (see 1 Nephi 13:23–29). Thus we will never arrive at all the original readings using only the tools of textual criticism.

The King James translators knew that the Bible had its greatest authority in its original languages, Hebrew and Greek, in the original words of its authors. Joseph Smith recognized this when he said, "Our latitude and longitude can be determined in the original Hebrew with far greater accuracy than in the English version. There is a grand distinction between the actual meaning of the prophets and the present translation."<sup>62</sup> But having the Hebrew and Greek texts, determining their original wording, and understanding the texts correctly would never be enough. Joseph Smith, like William Tyndale and the King James translators, knew that people needed to be able to read the Bible in their own languages.

Early critics were right in their assertion that the King James translation had some doctrinal imperfections. Joseph Smith said, "[There are] many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelation of the Holy Ghost to me."<sup>63</sup> Like all other translations, the King James did not always give us words that perfectly expressed the authors' intent. But the doctrinal imperfections of the King James translation were never an issue for Latter-day Saints and remain, for the most part, invisible to us. That is because the Restoration provides correct context and meaning wherever the translation employs an insufficient choice of vocabulary. In other words, we are not bothered by words that translators struggled with or mistranslated, because modern revelation defines them correctly. One example is the word *angel*. The word *angel* connotes an androgynous winged creature or a soulless spirit essence. That is probably what the 1611 translators had in mind when they used the word, and that is certainly what readers have in mind when they see it today. But the Hebrew word *mal'āk* and the Greek word *ángelos* both mean "messenger," and *messenger* would have been the linguistically and doctrinally correct translation. Because we understand angels from modern revelation, we have a correct image in mind whenever the word *angel* appears. Thus

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it is not that the King James translation used the right word; it is that modern revelation makes that word work. Some words that were particularly sensitive in the days of Joseph Smith were *angel, baptize, bishop, church, deacon, devil, eternal, hell, repent, and Satan*. Even if better words can be chosen to replace these, modern revelation makes all of them clear to Latter-day Saints, so we understand them correctly.

On the title page of the King James Bible are the words “Appointed to be read in Churches” (removed in the LDS edition). Unlike the creators of the Geneva Bible, who anticipated that readers would study the Bible on their own, the creators of the King James translation intended their Bible to be used in church buildings and under the careful scrutiny of authorities. But such was not to be the case, especially in America. At the time of Joseph Smith’s birth, a lower percentage of Americans were members of churches than are today, and many believers never attended meetings. But most Americans were very religious. They got their religion at home, separate from organized denominations, and they got it primarily through reading the King James Bible. During those years, the printing of Bibles in America reached astonishing heights, and millions were found in the hands of American families.<sup>64</sup> Through the King James Bible, ordinary Americans learned how to read and write, learned good from evil, and learned a fundamental Christianity largely disconnected from the theological intricacies that were debated by intellectuals. The King James Bible thus became one of the most potent forces in creating the American character.

In that environment, a new translation hardly had a chance to succeed, and none really did. There was already a Bible, and it was hardwired into the American consciousness and into the American religious dialect. Americans had grown up with it, and most could see no need for another. One nineteenth-century writer observed, “The common translation . . . is too fully fixed in the affections of the community to be set aside for one more modern, whatever improvements may be introduced.”<sup>65</sup> Another wrote, “The phraseology of King James’s translation is connected . . . intimately with the religious impressions of individuals, and with almost all the religious literature extant in our language.”<sup>66</sup> Latter-day Saint W. W. Phelps took a less-generous stance: “Any man possessed of common understanding, knows, that both the old and new testaments are filled with errors,

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obscurities, italics and contradictions, which must be the work of men. . . . With the old copy [the King James] full of errors; with Dickinson's and Webster's polite translation, with Campbell's improved, and many more from different persuasions, how will a person of common understanding know which is right without the gift of the Holy Spirit?" But speaking of Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible, Phelps added, "The church of Christ will soon have the scriptures, in their original purity."<sup>67</sup>

Not surprisingly, none of the new translations published during the lifetime of Joseph Smith is still in use today. The King James Bible continued to reign supreme for another century and a half. It was not until midway into the twentieth century that other translations began to appear and become serious competitors to it. Today it is no longer the top-selling Bible in English, but it will always be the most important historically and the one that underlies the Restoration.

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### NOTES

1. Charles Thomson, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Covenant, Commonly Called the Old and New Testament: Translated from the Greek*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken, 1808). See Margaret T. Hills, *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible and the New Testament Published in America 1777–1957* (New York: American Bible Society and the New York Public Library, 1962), 27; John H. P. Reumann, *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars: Chapters in the History of Bible Transmission and Translation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 122–44.
2. The Hebrew Bible, which underlies the King James translation, is, in fact, a more accurate and authoritative source, and the Septuagint is derivative from it. Yet scholars have long maintained that some passages of the Septuagint preserve readings superior to those in extant Hebrew manuscripts, something that was confirmed by the discovery of ancient Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Thomson translated from a Protestant printing of the Septuagint that had the books in the order of the Hebrew text, with the books of the Apocrypha removed. See Reumann, *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars*, 131.
3. Quoted in Reumann, *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars*, 133–34.
4. Abner Kneeland, *Hē Kainē Diathēkē. The New Testament, in Greek and English; The Greek according to Griesbach; the English upon the basis of the fourth London edition of*

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- the Improved Version, with an attempt to further improvement from the translations of Campbell, Wakefield, Scarlett, Macknight, and Thomson. In Two Volumes* (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1823); *The New Testament; Being the English only of the Greek and English Testament* (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1823).
5. See Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165–70.
  6. Kneeland, *Hē Kainē Diathēkē*, vol. 2, “Note,” [ix].
  7. See Kneeland, *A Series of Lectures on the Doctrine of Universal Benevolence* (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1818), especially 173–204.
  8. Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 99.
  9. Alexander Campbell, *The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ, Commonly Styled the New Testament. Translated from the Original Greek by George Campbell, James Macknight, and Philip Doddridge, Doctors of the Church of Scotland. With Prefaces to the Historical and Epistolary Books; and an Appendix, Containing Critical Notes and Various Translations of Difficult Passages* (Buffaloe, VA: Alexander Campbell, 1826). See Cecil K. Thomas, *Alexander Campbell and his New Version* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958).
  10. George Campbell, *The Four Gospels, Translated from the Greek. With Preliminary Dissertations, and Notes Critical and Explanatory* (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1789); James Macknight, *A New Literal Translation from the Original Greek, of all the Apostolical Epistles. With a Commentary, and Notes, Philological, Critical, Explanatory, and Practical*, 4th ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1809); Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor: or, a Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament: with Critical Notes; and a Practical Improvement of each Section* (London: John Wilson, Waugh and Fenner, 1739–56).
  11. Campbell, *Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists*, 3rd ed., “General Preface,” [3], 4.
  12. See Thomas, *Alexander Campbell and his New Version*, 46, 49.
  13. Campbell, *Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists*, 3rd ed., “General Preface,” 6.
  14. Campbell, *Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists*, 3rd ed., “General Preface,” 8–9.
  15. Thomas, *Alexander Campbell and his New Version*, 27.
  16. Campbell, *Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists*, 3rd ed., “Appendix,” 34–40.
  17. In the titles of the four Gospels, Campbell used the word *Testimony* instead of *Gospel*. In his New Translation, Joseph Smith did the same for Matthew and John, but not for Mark and Luke. There is no reason to assume influence from Campbell on Joseph Smith, because there are no other meaningful commonalities between Campbell’s translation and Joseph Smith’s.
  18. See Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 105.
  19. George R. Noyes, *An Amended Version of the Book of Job, with an Introduction, and Notes Chiefly Explanatory* (Cambridge, MA: Hilliard and Brown, 1827); *A New Translation of the Book of Psalms, with an Introduction* (Boston: Gray and Bowen,

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- 1831); *A New Translation of the Hebrew Prophets, Arranged in Chronological Order, Volume I. Containing Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah* (Boston: Charles Bowen, 1833); *Volume II. Containing Nabum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Obadiab, Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Boston: James Munroe, 1837); *Volume III. Containing Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Jonah, and Malachi* (Boston: James Munroe, 1837); *A New Translation of the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Canticles, with Introductions, and Notes, Chiefly Explanatory* (Boston: James Munroe, 1846). Some of these also went into later editions. Noyes also published posthumously a New Testament translation: *The New Testament: Translated from the Greek Text of Tischendorf* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1869).
20. See *North American Review* 46, no 98 (January 1838): 298–300. A review that criticizes Noyes's commentary is *American Biblical Repository* 11, no. 29 (January 1838): 260–61.
  21. Noyes, *Amended Version of the Book of Job*, "Introduction," viii–ix. Noyes made similar remarks in the introductions to most of his translation.
  22. Noyes, *New Translation of the Book of Psalms*, "Introduction," iv.
  23. Noyes, *Amended Version of the Book of Job*, "Introduction," ix.
  24. Noyes, *New Translation of the Hebrew Prophets, Volume I*, "Preface," ix.
  25. See the discussions on pages 31–33 and 108 of this volume.
  26. Yahweh is rendered *Jehová* throughout the LDS edition of the Bible in Spanish. See *Santa Biblia, Reina Valera 2009* (Salt Lake City: La Iglesia de Jesucristo de los Santos de los Últimos Días, 2009).
  27. John G. Palfrey, *The New Testament in the Common Version, Conformed to Griesbach's Standard Greek Text* (Boston: Boston Daily Advertiser, 1828).
  28. Palfrey, *New Testament in the Common Version*, "Advertisement," 8.
  29. Palfrey, *New Testament in the Common Version*, "Advertisement," 3–8.
  30. The first printing of his translation apparently sold out, because it was reprinted in 1830. See Hills, *English Bible in America*, 98–99. See also Palfrey, ed. *Harmony of the Gospels, on the Plan Proposed by Lant Carpenter, LL.D.* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1831).
  31. Egbert Benson, *A Manual. The Apostolic Epistles with Amendments in Conformity to the Dutch Version* (New York: Egbert Benson, 1830).
  32. Hills, *English Bible in America*, 109; italics and quotation marks added.
  33. Benson, *Memoir, Read before the Historical Society of the State of New York, December 31, 1816*, 2nd ed. (Jamaica, NY: Henry C. Sleight, 1825), 39.
  34. Hills, *English Bible in America*, 109.
  35. Noah Webster, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, in the Common Version. With Amendments of the Language, by Noah Webster, LL.D.* (New Haven, CT: Durrie and Peck, 1833). Good studies on Webster's Bible include David Norton, "Noah Webster's 1833 Bible," *Reformation* 4 (1999): 197–229; and Harry R. Warfel, "The Centenary of Noah Webster's Bible," *New England Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (September 1934): 578–82.
  36. Webster, *Holy Bible*, "Preface," [iii]; emphasis in original.
  37. Webster, *Holy Bible*, "Preface," [iii]–iv; see also "Introduction," xvi.

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38. Webster, *Holy Bible*, "Introduction," [vii].
39. Webster, *Holy Bible*, "Preface," [iii], v, iv; emphasis in original.
40. See Hills, *English Bible in America*, 123, 159, 166.
41. He is identified as such on his frontispiece portrait. On the title page, he is identified as rector of St. Paul's Parish, Pendleton, South Carolina.
42. Rodolphus Dickinson, *A New and Corrected Version of the New Testament; or, a Minute Revision, and Professed Translation of the Original Histories, Memoirs, Letters, Prophecies, and other Productions of the Evangelists and Apostles* (Boston: Lilly, Wait, Colman, & Holden, 1833).
43. Dickinson, *New and Corrected Version*, "Preface," xi–xii.
44. Dickinson, *New and Corrected Version*, "Preface," [vii], x, xii, xiv.
45. Dickinson, *New and Corrected Version*, "Preface," xiii.
46. Dickinson, *New and Corrected Version*, "Preface," xv.
47. Dickinson, *New and Corrected Version*, 160–61.
48. "Literary Notices," *New-England Magazine* 4 (May 1833): 423.
49. "Folly Dancing on the Bible," *New-England Magazine* 4 (April 1833): 319.
50. *American Monthly Review* 15 (March 1833): 222.
51. "Folly Dancing on the Bible," 318.
52. Dickinson, *The Productions of the Evangelists and Apostles, a faithful and true translation of the Scriptures of the New Testament, with references, subdivisions and an appendix containing notes to the preface and notes on the text* (Toronto: William Lyon Mackenzie, 1837). See Hills, *English Bible in America*, 149–50.
53. David Bernard, *The Holy Bible; Being the English Version of the Old and New Testaments, Made by Order of King James I. Carefully Revised and Amended, the meaning of the sacred original being given, in accordance with the best translations and the most approved Hebrew and Greek lexicographers: By Several Biblical Scholars* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1842).
54. See Alonzo Alvin DeLarme, *History of the First Baptist Church of Norristown, Pa. from the Organization, 1832, to the Present Time, 1897* (Philadelphia: Lehman Bolton, 1897), 59–66. In 1829 Bernard authored an exposé of Masonry: *Light on Masonry: A Collection of all the Most Important Documents on the Subject of Speculative Free Masonry: Embracing the Reports of the Western Committees in Relation to the Abduction of William Morgan, Proceedings of Conventions, Orations, Essays, &c. &c.* (Utica, NY: William Williams, 1829).
55. David Bernard and Samuel Aaron, *The Faithful Translation: an Essay in Favour of Revising and Amending King James's Version of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1842).
56. Kendrick was a respected Greek New Testament expert and professor at Hamilton College. See William E. Paul, *English Language Bible Translators* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2003), 124–25.
57. See Harry M. Orlinsky and Robert G. Bratcher, *A History of Bible Translation and the North American Contribution* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 51. For unfavorable comments, see *Christian Review* 7, no. 26 (June 1842): 315–16.
58. DeLarme, *History of the First Baptist Church*, 62.

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59. Alexander Campbell, "The Bible in Colleges," *British Millennial Harbinger* 13, no. 3 (July 1860): 315, 316. Campbell wrote: "This is, in many respects, a good version. We have had it on our shelf for some 17 years, and often use it in our *studio*. We commend it to Bible students, as an auxiliary." "True Repentance Culminates in Godliness," *Millennial Harbinger* series 5, vol. 3, no. 8 (August 1860): 439. See contrary views in *Baptist Memorial and Monthly Chronicle* 1, no. 5 (May 16, 1842): 145; James L. Chapman, *A Plain Work on Baptism; Embracing a Series of Chapters* (Nashville: John Lelleyett, 1850), 75–82.
60. For example, if the King James translation had followed the Hebrew, instead of the Vulgate, and used "Jehovah" instead of "the LORD," it seems likely to me that the Book of Mormon would have been revealed the same way.
61. A negative consequence, still alive today, was that some people had come to believe that much of the Bible was not intended to be understood. This problem was seen most with regard to the prophetic books of the Old Testament, written in a literary style different from that of normal speech—namely, poetry. In the ancient Near East, poetry was the language of sacred things. Old Testament poetry was intended to be understood, and it was understandable to ordinary Israelites (see 2 Nephi 25:1–2, 5–6). Yet due to the changes in the language, the nature of the translation, and the typesetting of the King James Bible (which treats the poetry as prose and inserts artificial paragraph indents at the beginning of each verse), the prophetic writings had become so difficult to read that many people had adopted the notion that they were intentionally obscure, and that the common metaphor in them was instead a symbolic code.
62. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:342–43.
63. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 211.
64. See Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 29–37; 181–88; and see the list of editions in Hills, *English Bible in America*, 1–183.
65. *Christian Review* 7, no. 26 (June 1842): 315.
66. *American Monthly Review* 15 (March 1833): 224.
67. [W. W. Phelps], "Errors of the Bible," *Evening and Morning Star* 2, no. 14 (July 1833): 106.