

WHO REALLY WROTE THE GOSPELS? A STUDY OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORSHIP

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FOR some, the question of who wrote the books of the New Testament is really no question at all. There are those who would say that all one has to do is look at the title of the book. But the issue of authorship is not that simple. As early as the third century AD, the Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria expressed his doubts concerning the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, while his student Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, challenged the Johannine authorship of the book of Revelation.¹ Debates concerning the authorship of various books of the Bible continued through the centuries. In the late seventeenth century, the French priest Richard Simon asserted that the titles of the four Gospels were not placed there by the Gospel writers themselves but were added much later.²

Even though skepticism of traditional authorship has persisted to the present, this particular issue has been more of an academic exercise than a pivotal issue for many Latter-day Saints and other Christians, who have often accepted traditional authorship without question. The

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Prophet Joseph Smith, however, understood that the process of writing, transcribing, and compiling the books of the Bible was quite complex. He taught, "From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of man, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled."³ This chapter will examine the evidence for traditional authorship of the Gospels in light of latter-day scripture and modern revelation.

THE WRITING OF THE GOSPELS

What was the process by which the Gospel accounts were written? Because of the belief in revelation, Latter-day Saints might suppose that each Gospel writer received an extended revelation concerning the ministry of Jesus Christ, which he then simply wrote down from beginning to end. This is certainly possible. It is true that the brother of Jared, Nephi, and John the Revelator received lengthy visions of the history of the world, which they were then instructed to write down (see Ether 3:22–27; 1 Nephi 14:20–28; Revelation 1:11; 21:5). But God has often followed another model for historical or biographical sacred writings. This is most clearly illustrated in the Book of Mormon.

God could have simply given the prophet Mormon a lengthy revelation concerning the history of the Nephites, which Mormon could have subsequently written down. But instead, Mormon, who was not an eyewitness to the events that happened before his time, relied on written source material for compiling his narrative. For example, Mormon stated concerning his use of the records that were in his possession: "After I had made an abridgment from the [large] plates of Nephi, . . . I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these [small] plates. . . . [The] remainder of my record I shall take from the [large] plates of Nephi. . . . But behold, I shall take these [small] plates, which contain these prophesyings and revelations, and put them with the remainder of my record" (Words of Mormon 1:3, 5–6). This is not to say, of course, that the use of previously written sources precludes revelation. Inspiration is essential in order to appropriately select material from those written sources. After explaining the sources he used, Mormon added, "And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the [large] plates of

Nephi; and *I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me*” (Words of Mormon 1:9, emphasis added).⁴

Concerning the use of previously written material for the writing of scripture, Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “Our understanding of the prophetic word will be greatly expanded if we know how one prophet quotes another, usually without acknowledging his source. . . . Once the Lord has revealed his doctrine in precise language to a chosen prophet, there is no reason why he should inspire another prophet to choose the same words in presenting the same doctrine on a subsequent occasion. It is much easier and simpler to quote that which has already been given.”⁵ For example, when the resurrected Savior appeared to the Nephites, He decided to teach them many things that had already been taught by Isaiah, Micah, and Malachi.⁶ Rather than summarize those teachings in His own words, Jesus quoted directly from the writings of those previous prophets.⁷

How does this apply to the writing of the Gospels? Both Matthew and John were Apostles and eyewitnesses of the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ.⁸ But not all of the Gospel writers witnessed the mortal ministry of Jesus themselves. Papias, an early Christian from the second century, preserved the following information concerning Mark: “Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote down accurately, but not in order, all that he [Peter] remembered of the things said and done by the Lord. *For he [Mark] had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers; but later, as I said, a follower of Peter.* Peter used to teach as the occasion demanded, without giving systematic arrangement to the Lord’s sayings.”⁹ If this tradition is accurate, Mark did not actually witness the events he included in his Gospel but rather wrote down the things he heard Peter teach about the Savior’s ministry.

Luke is the only writer to tell us within his Gospel explicitly about his compilation process:

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect

understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1–4).

Luke said that “many” before him had written down (that is, “taken in hand to set forth,” verse 1) accounts of the life and teachings of the Savior (that is, “those things which are most surely believed among us,” verse 1) but that it seemed like a good idea to him to write an account that was better and more orderly (that is, “in order,” verse 3). In other words, Luke knew of previously written Gospel accounts and used them as he compiled his own Gospel. It is interesting to note that Papias said Mark’s Gospel was accurate, but not “in order.” It is possible that Luke was referring to the Gospel of Mark, among other early written accounts.

Elder McConkie taught the following concerning Luke’s sources:

Many of the early [Christian] saints recorded their testimonies or gospels, bearing eyewitness accounts of the divinity of our Lord and of his ministry among men, just as many with personal knowledge of Joseph Smith and his work of restoration have written journals, letters, and histories delineating what took place in the ushering in of this dispensation. *Luke had access to many of these ancient gospels.* It may be also, as some scholars speculate, that of the four gospels now in the New Testament, *Mark was written first; that Matthew and Luke had before them Mark’s account* when they recorded their testimonies.¹⁰

But Luke did not claim to have personally witnessed the events he narrated in his Gospel. The King James Version reads: “even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2). Because the KJV English of this verse reads somewhat ambiguously, some may assume that Luke claimed that others (“they”) gave written and oral information about the Savior to those, including himself (“us”),¹¹ who were among the actual “eyewitnesses” of the ministry of Jesus Christ. But that is not what Luke actually said, nor would it make sense for Luke to solicit information

about the life of the Savior from others—nonwitnesses—if Luke himself was an eyewitness. The English relative clause “which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word” is a participial phrase in the Greek text that can only refer to the subject of the verb “delivered.”¹² A more accurate way to translate this would be, “Even as they, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, delivered them unto us.”¹³ Thus, Luke is not claiming to be an eyewitness of the Lord’s ministry, but he is saying that he received his information from eyewitnesses.¹⁴ These eyewitness sources seem to include both written and oral accounts.¹⁵

Early Christian tradition from the second century also preserved the following concerning Luke: “This physician Luke, after Christ’s ascension, since Paul had taken him with him as a companion of his travels, composed it in his own name according to his thinking. Yet *neither did he himself see the Lord in the flesh.*”¹⁶ Once again, if these traditions are accurate, neither Mark nor Luke personally witnessed the events they wrote in their Gospels, but both received information from eyewitnesses.

The fact that an author was an eyewitness, however, would not preclude that person from utilizing previously written sources. Take the Gospel of John, for example. A comparison of John 1 with Doctrine and Covenants 93 suggests that the initial part of chapter 1 of John’s Gospel actually came from the writings of John the Baptist.¹⁷ The language of Doctrine and Covenants 93:6–18 is very similar to that found in John 1:1–18. Concerning the source of that information, we are told: “John saw and bore record of the fulness of my glory, and the fulness of John’s record is hereafter to be revealed” (D&C 93:6). Which John is this referring to? The revelation continues: “I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him [Jesus] in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son” (D&C 93:15). According to the Gospel of John, which never refers to John the Beloved by his name, it was John the Baptist who bore record at the baptism of the Savior: “And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom

thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32–34). Thus, John the Baptist also made a written record, a portion of which was used in the Gospel of John.¹⁸ We have been assured "that if you are faithful you shall receive the fulness of the record of John" (D&C 93:18).

Evidence also suggests that the Gospel of Matthew, although attributed to an eyewitness, utilized previously written sources. This is plausible because the Apostle Matthew only had a firsthand knowledge of the Savior's life after his own conversion. For example, Matthew was not an eyewitness to the birth and first years of the Savior. As the Gospel of Matthew begins narrating the birth of the Lord, it says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise" (Matthew 1:18). The Joseph Smith Translation, however, adds: "Now, *as it is written*, the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise" (JST, Matthew 2:1, emphasis added).¹⁹ Thus, even though Matthew was an eyewitness, he used previously written sources for parts of his Gospel.²⁰ Robert L. Millet observed, "For Latter-day Saints, it is not difficult to believe that God could reveal the very same words to Matthew and Luke that he inspired Mark to record. . . . At the same time, it would not be out of harmony with principles of truth for one Gospel writer to utilize the writings of another."²¹ As we can see, rather than dictating to the Gospel writers the details of the ministry of the Savior, God seems to have followed the same pattern used in writing the Book of Mormon: the inspired use of previously written material.

COMPILATION OF THE GOSPELS

The canon of the New Testament did not develop in a day. The process of compilation took centuries. The books that eventually became part of the New Testament canon originally existed singly and separately. For example, when Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians, the Galatian Christians did not instantaneously possess all of Paul's other letters. Over time, early Christian congregations shared and copied documents they collected. Thus, each congregation started out with one or two documents and eventually obtained more and more. Early stages of this process can be seen in the New Testament itself.

Paul encouraged the Saints at Colossae: “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16). Paul did not explicitly direct them to make copies of the other documents. We know, however, that copies were indeed being made, or else the documents would not have survived over the centuries.

The implications of this process are important for our understanding of the authorship of the Gospels. Early Christian congregations may have originally possessed only one Gospel account. As such, there was no pressing need to differentiate one Gospel from another. Whichever Gospel they possessed was not the Gospel according to so-and-so, but rather it was for them simply *the* Gospel. For example, the *Dídache*, an early Christian document written in the first part of the second century, quoted from and referred to what we know as the Gospel of Matthew in the following way: “Nor should you pray like the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded *in his gospel*.”²² This document then quotes from what we know as Matthew 6:9–13. Another early Christian author, Justin Martyr, living in the middle of the second century, quoted from and referred to what we know as the Gospel of Mark in a similar way: “We learn from the *Memoirs* of the apostles that he changed the name of one of the apostles to *Peter* (besides having changed the names of the two brothers, the sons of Zebedee to that of Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder’).”²³ This reference is specifically from what we know as Mark 3:16–17.

The above references suggest that the Gospels may have originally been anonymous. Thus, it is entirely possible, as some scholars had suggested centuries earlier, that the title of each of the Gospels was added after the fact.²⁴ It is important to note, however, that this premise does *not* necessarily imply that traditional authorship is inaccurate. It only means that early Christians who originally possessed one Gospel seem to have either been unaware of or unconcerned about the identity of the author of their Gospel account. It also may mean that the authors of these Gospels were not really concerned about taking credit for their work. These Gospels were testimonies about the Savior; they were not about the authors.²⁵ Even Luke, who is the only Gospel writer to say anything about himself, does not refer to himself by name (see Luke

1:1–3; Acts 1:1–2). All the Gospel accounts, even Matthew and John, are written in the third person and not in the first person.²⁶

Not until early Christian congregations obtained more than one Gospel account did the need arise to differentiate them. During the second century, traditional authorship became more well known and established. The earliest references to each Gospel by name are from the second century.²⁷ Irenaeus, a Christian bishop living around AD 180, is the earliest surviving source to make this distinction, naming all four Gospels together. His poetic description states: “There cannot be either more or fewer gospels than there are. . . . The one according to John . . . tells of his primal, powerful, and glorious generation from the Father. . . . That according to Luke . . . begins with the priest Zechariah sacrificing incense to God. . . . Matthew tells of his human generation. . . . But Mark began from the prophetic Spirit coming to men from on high. . . . Four forms of the Gospel; four forms of the activity of the Lord.”²⁸ Thus, sometime before or during the middle of the second century, Christian congregations began to acquire additional Gospel accounts and tried to ascertain who wrote them. As Christians searched for answers, they ascribed the Gospels to Matthew the tax collector, Mark the missionary companion of Peter, Luke the missionary companion of Paul, and John the fisherman.

THE AUTHORS OF THE GOSPELS

Who really wrote each of our four Gospels? The answer to this question is more complex than it may appear to some. An example from Latter-day Saint Church history may help illustrate the issue. When Latter-day Saints refer to the *Lectures on Faith*, they often say that those lectures were authored by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Careful research, however, has revealed that this attribution is not precisely accurate. There seems to have been multiple authors involved in the writing of the *Lectures on Faith*. Larry E. Dahl explained:

[We have] some historical evidence of Joseph Smith’s participation in their preparation, and acknowledge two recent authorship studies which conclude that others, particularly Sidney Rigdon, were also involved. . . . Both studies conclude

that Sidney Rigdon was heavily involved, and that Joseph Smith was probably the author of Lecture 2. The differences [in word-print studies] suggest that Joseph Smith had less to do with Lectures 3, 4, and 6 . . . and that William W. Phelps and/or Parley P. Pratt could have had at least some editorial influence on Lecture 5. . . . What then can we conclude about authorship of the Lectures on Faith? *It is clear that several of the brethren participated in writing them. It is also clear that Joseph Smith and perhaps others prepared them for publication after they were written.*²⁹

Thus, although Joseph Smith was involved with the publication of the *Lectures on Faith*, other early Latter-day Saint leaders did most of the writing.³⁰ This conclusion does not denigrate the *Lectures on Faith*. It only means that other individuals, in addition to the Prophet Joseph Smith, were involved in the production of those lectures.

The issue of who wrote a book of the Bible is no less complex. For example, one might ask who really wrote the epistle to the Romans in the New Testament. Most people would probably say that Paul wrote it. But Paul was not the person who actually took a writing instrument to a sheet of papyrus and wrote the epistle from beginning to end. Rather, Paul used the services of a scribe, to whom he dictated the contents of the letter: “I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord” (Romans 16:22).³¹ Even though Paul often referred to the letters that he “wrote,” it would be more accurate to say that he dictated at least some of them to a scribe who wrote them down. For example, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul said: “Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not” (Galatians 1:20). Later in the same letter, however, we learn that the only part of the letter that Paul actually wrote with his own hand was the closing. “Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand” (Galatians 6:11). A more accurate translation of that verse is “Ye see with what large letters I have written unto you with mine own hand.”³² After the dictated message was written down by a scribe, Paul himself wrote the concluding remarks with very large handwriting, different from the scribe’s handwriting. According to 2 Thessalonians, this is the way Paul

composed all of his letters: “The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write” (2 Thessalonians 3:18).

Thus, the answer to the question of who really wrote a document of the Bible depends upon whether the credit is given to the person who actually wrote down (or compiled and edited) the information or to the person who was the original source of the information.³³ Let us apply this perspective to each of the four Gospels. Who is the author of the Gospel of Mark? Recall that according to early Christian tradition, Mark was a missionary companion of the Apostle Peter and wrote down those things that Peter taught him about the life of the Savior.³⁴ In this particular case, the scribe rather than the source of the information received credit for the Gospel. Thus, this Gospel might have been called the Gospel of Peter, but it is traditionally called the Gospel of Mark.

Who is the author of the Gospel of Luke? Recall that Luke said that he himself was not an eyewitness but that the information contained in his Gospel came from eyewitnesses.³⁵ Recall also that it is possible that one of those sources could have been the Gospel of Mark, with Peter as the unacknowledged eyewitness.³⁶ Here we have a situation similar to the Gospel of Mark. In this case again, the scribe, rather than the source of the information, received the credit for the Gospel. Thus, we have the Gospel of Luke rather than the Gospel according to whoever was the source of Luke’s information.

Who is the author of the Gospel of John? We know that John was an Apostle and therefore an eyewitness to much of the Savior’s ministry (see Matthew 4:20–22; John 20:2–8). As we have seen, this fact did not preclude the use of previously written sources for his Gospel account—in this case, a portion of the writings of John the Baptist (see John 1:1–18; compare D&C 93:6–18). But interestingly, even though this Gospel is traditionally attributed to an eyewitness, it was not written in the first person but rather in the third person. Let us review the previous examples. Rather than personally write out a complete Gospel by hand, Peter taught Mark about the life of the Savior, and Mark wrote it down. Rather than sit down and write out a long letter by hand, Paul dictated to Tertius the letter to the Romans, and Tertius wrote it down. It is possible that the same is true of John and his Gospel.³⁷

Toward the end of John's Gospel, Jesus reminded Peter that John would not die but rather live until the Second Coming (see John 21:23; compare D&C 7:1–3). Immediately following that conversation, it says, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and *we* know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24; emphasis added). In what way did John write these things? In light of what we saw with Paul and his use of scribes, we should investigate further. One can understand the identity of John as the one who testified of the things in this Gospel, but who is "we"? Whoever "we" refers to, they differentiated themselves from John, or "him." It is possible that this anonymous "we" refers to faithful early Christians—functioning like Mark and Luke—who compiled (or edited or revised) and actually wrote down the Gospel account in its present form.³⁸ This "we" passage is similar to what is found in the Book of Mormon, when Mormon added editorial comments such as "and thus we see."³⁹

Another passage illustrates this idea. After narrating the Crucifixion of the Savior, the Gospel of John states, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (John 19:35). There may be some who conclude that this was John's way of making a veiled reference to himself in the third person.⁴⁰ In light of our discussion of John 21:24, however, it may be more likely that this is another parenthetical comment by the editors of John's Gospel.⁴¹ If so, they received their information about the Crucifixion from the eyewitness John, who testified of the truthfulness of his recollections—to which these anonymous editors added their own testimony in this verse. Thus, the statement in John 21:24 that John "wrote these things" may mean the same thing that Paul means when he said he wrote his epistles: John gave information to scribes, similar to the way Peter gave information to Mark.⁴²

By comparison, then, just as Mark compiled and wrote down the recollections of Peter, so also these anonymous Christians possibly compiled and wrote down the recollections of John. Just as Luke used oral recollections as well as previously written eyewitness accounts for the writing of his Gospel, so also these anonymous compilers may have used oral recollections and previously written eyewitness accounts. For the Gospel of John, these sources included the testimony of John the

Beloved and the writings of John the Baptist. Just as Church leaders today use clerks and secretaries to take notes, compile information, and write letters, it is possible that John used faithful Christians to assist him in the work of the kingdom.⁴³ Just as scribes like Tertius, not Paul himself, actually wrote down what they heard from the Apostles, so also the anonymous “we” in John’s Gospel may have written down and then testified of what they heard from John. Unlike the Gospel of Mark, however, it is not the scribe or the compiler who received the credit for authoring the Gospel of John. Instead, the apostolic eyewitness and source of the information received the credit. Thus, we have the Gospel of John, rather than the Gospel according to whoever wrote down John’s recollections.

Who was the author of the Gospel of Matthew? Unfortunately, there is less evidence available for answering this question than for the other Gospels. We can, however, make a few observations. First, even though the Gospel of Matthew is attributed to an eyewitness, it is also written in the third person rather than in the first person.⁴⁴ In light of our discussion of the other three Gospels, this may suggest the possibility of a similar use of scribes. Second, though this Gospel is attributed to an eyewitness, it used previously written material (compare Matthew 1:18 with JST, Matthew 2:1). It is also possible that the Gospel of Matthew, like the Gospel of Luke, also used the Gospel of Mark as one of its sources. Recall the conclusion of Elder McConkie: “It may be also, as some scholars speculate, that of the four gospels now in the New Testament, Mark was written first; that Matthew and Luke had before them Mark’s account when they recorded their testimonies.”⁴⁵ Lastly, Matthew’s Gospel may also be like the Gospel of John in that the eyewitness, not the scribe who may have compiled the sources, received credit for authoring the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

Latter-day Saints love the Bible and revere it as “the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” (Article of Faith 8). Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin explained: “The fragmentary nature of the biblical record and the errors in it, resulting from multiple transcriptions, translations, and interpretations, do not diminish our belief in it as the word of God ‘as

far as it is translated correctly.’ We read and study the Bible, we teach and preach from it, and we strive to live according to the eternal truths it contains. We love this collection of holy writ.”⁴⁶

Thus, even though there have been problems with translation and transmission of the Bible, Latter-day Saints still believe that the Bible is an inspired document. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught that “inaccuracy of some translating must not, however, diminish our appreciation for the powerful *testimony* and ample *historicity* of the New Testament. . . . These pages are a treasure trove testifying of Jesus.”⁴⁷

Latter-day Saints should feel the same way about the issue of authorship of books of the Bible. We believe traditional authorship as far as it has been handed down to us correctly. We also understand that the issue of who wrote a biblical book is not as important as the truth that the book contains. Concerning this, President J. Reuben Clark concluded:

I am not really concerned, and no man of faith should be, about the exact authorship of the books of the Bible. More than one Prophet may well have written parts of books now collected under one heading. I do not know. There may have been ‘ghost writers’ in those days, as now. The Lord gave Aaron to Moses in an equivalent capacity, and spoke to Israel through Moses by the mouth of Aaron. He may have done the same in other cases. If so, what of it?⁴⁸

Thus, the issue of authorship of books of the Bible should not affect the way we feel about the inspiration of those books. Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels are inspired, even if they used oral or previously written sources and even if the scribes rather than the apostolic sources received the credit for writing them. John’s and Matthew’s Gospels are inspired, even if these Apostles only personally witnessed some of the events included in these Gospels and even if they utilized other early Christians to compile, edit, and write down these recollections. Each New Testament Gospel testifies of the same gospel that the resurrected Savior declared to the Nephites: “And this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be

lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me” (3 Nephi 27:13–14).

NOTES

1. See Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (New York: Abingdon, 1972), 15–18.

2. Kümmel, *The New Testament*, 43–46.

3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:245.

4. Note the conclusion of Ezra Taft Benson: “Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, he [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us” (*A Witness and a Warning* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988], 19).

5. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrinal Restoration,” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 17–18.

6. He also quoted his own words that eventually would be recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Compare Matthew 5–7 with 3 Nephi 12–14.

7. When the Savior quoted from Isaiah (see 3 Nephi 22) and from Malachi (see 3 Nephi 24–25), He identified the sources from which He was quoting (see 3 Nephi 23:1; 24:1). When He quoted from Micah (see 3 Nephi 21:12–21), however, there is no indication that He identified the source.

8. According to Matthew’s Gospel, Matthew was a tax collector when he became a disciple: “And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him” (Matthew 9:9). Matthew’s Gospel also informs us that John was a fisherman when he started following the Lord: “And going on from thence, he [Jesus] saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him” (Matthew 4:21–22).

9. Papias, quoted in Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3.39.15–16, emphasis added. Compare also the following preserved by Eusebius: “When, by the Spirit, Peter had publicly proclaimed the Gospel in Rome, his many hearers urged Mark, as one who had followed him for years and remembered what was said, to put it all in writing. This he did and gave copies to all who asked. When Peter learned of it, he neither objected nor promoted it” (*History of the Church*, 6.14.6–7). English translations are from Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 129–30, 218.

10. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73), 1:69, emphasis added.

11. Luke's plural reference to "us" may indicate that he was not working alone when compiling this information.

12. The phrase "which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers" (*hoi ap' arches autoptai kai hyperetai genomenoi*) is in the nominative case and must be the subject of "they delivered" (*paredosan*). It cannot somehow modify the dative indirect object "us" (*hemin*) (see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], 41–42).

13. See François Bovon, *Luke 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 21, and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 1:294–96.

14. Luke also said that he "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first" (Luke 1:3). This statement most likely means that Luke had carefully "researched" all things from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry (see Bovon, *Luke 1*, 21–22; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 296–98; and Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 42–43).

15. Luke knew previously written accounts ("many have taken in hand to set forth") as well as oral accounts ("they delivered them unto us"). The word *delivered* is translated from the Greek verb *paradidomi*, which can mean "to pass on to another what one knows, of oral or written tradition" (Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 762).

16. The Muratorian Canon, emphasis added. English translation is from Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 93.

17. See Robert L. Millet, "The Formation of the Canonical Gospels," in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 207–8. It would be natural, of course, for John to quote from John the Baptist. Before John became a disciple of the Savior, he seems to have been a disciple of John the Baptist. It is likely that John the Beloved is the unnamed disciple referred to in John 1:35–40. See Robert J. Matthews, *A Burning Light: The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1972), 43–44.

18. Note the conclusion of Bruce R. McConkie: "From latter-day revelation we learn that the material in the forepart of the gospel of John (the Apostle, Revelator, and Beloved Disciple) was written originally by John the Baptist. By revelation the Lord restored to Joseph Smith part of what John the Baptist had written and promised to reveal the balance when men became sufficiently faithful to warrant receiving it" (McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:70–71, parentheses in original). See also Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000–5), 3:178–79.

19. See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 160, 236. For a convenient collection of

the JST changes in the New Testament, see Thomas A. Wayment, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

20. See Millet, “The Formation of the Canonical Gospels,” 205.

21. Robert L. Millet, “The Testimony of Matthew,” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 50.

22. *Didache*, 8.1–3, emphasis added. English translation from *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1:429.

23. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 106.3; italics are in the English translation, from *St. Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 2003), 159.

24. Kümmel, *The New Testament*, 43–46.

25. The JST designates the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John as “testimonies,” rather than as “Gospels” (see Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible*, 235, 442). See also Millet, “The Formation of the Canonical Gospels,” 211.

26. Compare sections of the book of Acts which are written in the first person: Acts 16:10–16; 20:6–15; 21:1–17; 27:1–37; 28:10–16. There are different ways to explain the first-person accounts in Acts. Maybe Luke was an eyewitness for those sections. Or maybe Luke was using eyewitness accounts (travel diaries). It is also possible that Luke was an eyewitness for some sections and used eyewitness accounts for others. Unfortunately, Luke does not give us enough information to determine the answer.

27. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 159, 187, 213–15, 525–27. The earliest extant copies of the Gospels date to the second century and contain the traditional titles. A study of the earliest manuscripts, therefore, does not answer the question of when these attributions were first included as titles of the Gospels (see Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, eds., *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001], 54).

28. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.11.8. English translation is from Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), 131–32.

29. Larry E. Dahl, “Authorship and History of the Lectures on Faith,” in *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, ed. Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 7–8, 10, emphasis added.

30. For a recent study that concludes that Sidney Rigdon was the “principal author” of the *Lectures on Faith*, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Case for Sidney Rigdon as Author of the Lectures on Faith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 1–41, esp. 35. On this conclusion, see also Noel B. Reynolds, “The Authorship Debate Concerning *Lectures on Faith*: Exhumation and Reburial,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 355–82.

31. The Apostle Peter also used the service of a scribe when composing his letters. See 1 Peter 5:12: “By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you.” For more on Paul’s use of scribes, see E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); and Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995).

32. See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 267–68, and J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 560.

33. Consider also the example of Paul’s other letters. Paul often seems to have been a coauthor with other early Christian leaders such as Sosthenes (1 Corinthians 1:1), Timothy (2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1:1), and Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). In each of these cases, however, Paul still received sole credit in the titles for these epistles. On Paul and his coauthors, see Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 33–36, and Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 16–19.

34. Papias, quoted in Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3.39.15–16 and 6.14.6–7.

35. See Luke 1:1–3; see also the Muratorian Canon list mentioned above.

36. See McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:69.

37. Robert L. Millet observed: “There should be no doubt among Latter-day Saints that the canonical Gospels were compiled and composed and organized and written under the spirit of revelation. At the same time, we do not remove any of the importance or spiritual significance from these inspired authors by acknowledging Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as divinely directed *editors* as well as creative authors” (“The Formation of the Canonical Gospels,” 208, emphasis in original).

38. Stephen Robinson and Dean Garrett concluded that in John 21:24, “the pronoun ‘we’ identifies John’s editors” (Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 3:179). Compare also John 1:14: “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among *us*, (and *we* beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father,) full of grace and truth” (emphasis added; parentheses in KJV), and John 1:16: “And of his fullness have all *we* received, and grace for grace” (emphasis added).

39. For example, Alma 24:19, 27, 30; 28:13–14; 30:60; 46:8; Helaman 3:27–28; 6:34–36, 40; 12:1. Unlike this anonymous “we” in the Gospel of John, sometimes Mormon and Moroni identified themselves by name (see Words of Mormon 1:1, 9; 3 Nephi 5:8–20; Ether 12:6, 29).

40. According to this Gospel, John was at the feet of Jesus during at least some of the Crucifixion. From the cross, “when Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home” (John 19:26–27).

41. Compare Mormon’s very similar testimony concerning his use of previously written material and his own eyewitness recollections: “I do make my record from the accounts which have been given by those who were before me, until the

commencement of my day; And then I do make a record of the things which I have seen with mine own eyes. *And I know the record which I make to be a just and a true record*” (3 Nephi 5:16–18, emphasis added).

42. Or it may mean that the anonymous “we” had access to some earlier drafts written by John and used them (as well as the writings of John the Baptist) to compile John’s Gospel.

43. According to Metzger and Ehrman, the use of professional scribes (as opposed to lay Christians) for the reproduction of New Testament manuscripts did not become normal practice until the fourth century (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], 24–25).

44. It is interesting to note that the Gospel of Matthew even narrates Matthew’s own call in the third person, not the first person (see Matthew 9:9). It is possible, according to Elder Alexander B. Morrison, that the author of the Gospel of Matthew was not the Matthew (that is, tax collector, Apostle, eyewitness) mentioned in Matthew 9:9. See Alexander B. Morrison, “Plain and Precious Things,” in this volume. The possibility that the author of this Gospel may have been an early Christian who was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus could help explain the use of the third person rather than the first person.

45. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:69. Note also the conclusion of S. Kent Brown: “It has become increasingly plain to many scholars that the least complex and most convincing solution to the Synoptic Problem holds that Mark was not only the earliest Gospel written but also served as one of the sources for both Matthew and Luke” (S. Kent Brown, “The Testimony of Mark,” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], 65).

46. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Christians in Belief and Action,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 71.

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

48. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *On the Way to Immortality and Eternal Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 209–10. Compare also: “Notwithstanding the corruptions themselves, the Good Old Book stands as a record of God’s dealings with and commandments and promises to his children, in their days of righteousness and in their generations of sin. It still, though corrupted, points out the way of righteousness to the man of faith seeking to serve God. It contains some of God’s counsel to his children” (Clark, *On the Way to Immortality and Eternal Life*, 210).