

# The Bible and the Latter-day Saint Tradition

*edited by*

TAYLOR G. PETREY, CORY CRAWFORD,  
AND ERIC A. ELIASON

The University of Utah Press | Salt Lake City

Copyright © 2023 by The University of Utah Press. All rights reserved.



The Defiance House Man colophon is a registered trademark of the University of Utah Press. It is based on a four-foot-tall Ancient Puebloan pictograph (late PIII) near Glen Canyon, Utah.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Petrey, Taylor G., editor. | Crawford, Cory, editor. | Eliason, Eric A., editor.

Title: The Bible and the Latter-day Saint Tradition / Taylor G. Petrey, Cory Crawford, Eric A. Eliason.

Description: Salt Lake City : University of Utah Press, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022950979 | ISBN 9781647690977 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781647690984 (paperback) | ISBN 9781647690991 (ebk)

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022950979>

Errata and further information on this and other titles available online at [UofUpres.com](https://uofupress.com)

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

# CONTENTS



Introduction: Latter-day Saints and Biblical Scholarship	1
<i>by Taylor G. Petrey</i>	

PART I. THE ANCIENT WORLD OF THE BIBLE  
AS UNDERSTOOD BY LATTER-DAY SAINTS:  
FROM JOSEPH SMITH TO CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

1	The Place of the Bible and Biblical Scholarship among Latter-day Saints in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries	19
	<i>by Philip L. Barlow and Stephen T. Betts</i>	
2	The King James Version and Modern Translations of the Bible	35
	<i>by Thomas Wayment</i>	
3	Joseph Smith's "New Translation" of the Bible	47
	<i>by Grant Underwood</i>	
4	Temple and Priesthood in the Bible and in Mormonism	63
	<i>by Cory Crawford</i>	
5	Dead Sea Scrolls	80
	<i>by Dana M. Pike</i>	
6	The Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods	101
	<i>by Matthew J. Grey</i>	

PART II. CONCEPTIONS OF CANON AND NOT CANON:  
THE BIBLE(S) AND RESTORATION SCRIPTURE

7	The Biblical Canon	117
	<i>by Daniel Becerra</i>	
8	The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha	129
	<i>by Jared W. Ludlow</i>	
9	How the Book of Mormon Responds to the Bible	141
	<i>by Grant Hardy</i>	
10	The Biblical World in the Book of Mormon	154
	<i>by David Calabro</i>	
11	The Bible in the Pearl of Great Price	170
	<i>by Brian M. Hauglid</i>	

Contents

PART III. A VARIETY OF CRITICAL BIBLICAL APPROACHES  
AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO MORMON STUDIES

12	Nineteenth-Century Biblical Interpretation in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints <i>by Amy Easton-Flake</i>	185
13	Historical Criticism of the Bible among the Latter-day Saints <i>by Jason Robert Combs</i>	202
14	Biblical Theology and the Latter-day Saint Tradition <i>by Joseph M. Spencer</i>	217
15	Textual Criticism <i>by Lincoln H. Blumell</i>	230
16	Biblical Archaeology in Latter-day Saint Perspective <i>by George A. Pierce</i>	242
17	Orality, Literacy, and the Cultural World of the Bible in Ancient Near Eastern Scholarship and Latter-day Saint Reception <i>by Eric A. Eliason</i>	254
18	Feminist Biblical Criticism <i>by Deidre Nicole Green</i>	269

PART IV. INHERITANCE AND DIVERGENCE:  
LATTER-DAY SAINTS READ OTHERS READING THE BIBLE

19	The Use of Jewish Scripture in the New Testament <i>by Jared W. Ludlow</i>	287
20	Early Christian Biblical Interpretation <i>by Carl Griffin and Kristian S. Heal</i>	297
21	Early Christian Literature <i>by Grant Adamson</i>	310
22	Medieval Bibles <i>by Miranda Wilcox</i>	323
23	Reformation and Early Modern Biblical Interpretation <i>by Jason A. Kerr</i>	337

PART V. LATTER-DAY SAINT APPROACHES TO THE BIBLE'S  
MAJOR GENRES AND DIVISIONS

24	The Pentateuch <i>by David Bokovoy</i>	351
25	From Exodus to Exile <i>by David Rolph Seely</i>	365

Contents

26	Prophets and Prophetic Literature <i>by David Bokovoy</i>	379
27	Wisdom Literature and the Psalms <i>by Ryan Conrad Davis</i>	393
28	Jesus and the Gospels <i>by Eric D. Huntsman</i>	409
29	Paul's Letters and Acts of the Apostles <i>by Taylor G. Petrey</i>	424
30	The Universal Epistles: James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude <i>by Luke Drake</i>	438
31	Apocalyptic Literature <i>by Jill Kirby</i>	450



*List of Contributors* 463

*Index* 469

## Textual Criticism

LINCOLN H. BLUMELL

In a famous address, Joseph Smith Jr. declared, “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers; ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”<sup>1</sup> This dictum, as well as the first part of the eighth Article of Faith—“We Believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly . . .”—often informs Latter-day Saint (LDS) approaches to the biblical text. Though the Bible is included in the LDS scriptural canon, since the beginning of Mormonism it has never been regarded as inerrant since it is believed to contain errors and corruptions resulting directly from faulty transmission and improper translation (cf. 1 Ne. 13:26–35). It would therefore be fair to say that Smith’s teaching in March 1833 concerning the Apocrypha is probably indicative of how many Latter-day Saints today treat the text of the Bible as a whole: “There are many things contained therein that are true, and it is mostly translated correctly; There are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men. . . . Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth” (D&C 91:1–2, 4). Consequently, a feature of Joseph Smith’s approach (and thus Mormonism’s approach) to the biblical text has been that it is corrupted in places and needs to be understood in light of revelation, which at times even includes textual emendation, as in Smith’s “New Translation” project. Therefore, LDS engagement with the Bible has a distinct “text-critical” component. With this in mind, this chapter seeks to introduce and elucidate the discipline of biblical textual criticism and to do



1. *Joseph Smith Papers, History, 1838–1856*, vol. E-1 (July 1, 1843–April 30, 1844), 1755.

so in dialogue with LDS approaches and text-critical assumptions regarding the Bible.

#### WHY DO TEXTUAL CRITICISM

231

Despite sensational claims to the contrary, no original manuscript (called “autographs”) is extant for any book of the Bible. The oldest extant witness of a biblical text, which naturally comes from the Old Testament (OT), are two small silver amulets that contain a *version* of the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 and date to the seventh or early sixth century BCE.<sup>2</sup> After this, the next oldest extant pieces of the Bible (OT) come from the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and date between c. 200 BCE and 70 CE.<sup>3</sup> So, for the sake of argument, if Moses, who is traditionally believed to have lived in the latter half of the second millennium BCE,<sup>4</sup> authored any of the Torah, the earliest extant remains of any significant block of text occur some one thousand years later. Furthermore, up until 1947 the oldest complete manuscript of the OT (in Hebrew) was Codex Leningradensis dated to 1008 CE. While the extant manuscript evidence for the New Testament (NT) has closer temporal proximity to the time in which it was originally written in the first century CE, the earliest significant NT witnesses come from the third and subsequent centuries.<sup>5</sup> For example, the earliest extant Bibles that contain the NT between two covers (as well as the OT in Greek) date to the latter part of the fourth century. Thus, any printed edition of the Bible, whether it be a modern edition or an early modern edition like the King James Version (KJV), is based on manuscripts that in the best cases date to hundreds, or in some cases over one thousand years after the original text was purportedly produced.

In light of the nature of the evidence, the primary purpose of textual criticism is to determine the most reliable wording of the biblical text from the existing manuscripts given that these later copies contain numerous differences and variants. While biblical textual criticism once sought, and even claimed, the ability to recover the “original text” (*Urtext*) of the Bible, in the last few

2. Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 118.

3. Frank M. Cross, “The Oldest Manuscripts from Qumran,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955): 147–72.

4. On the biblical chronology of Moses see J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA, 1998).

5. Lincoln H. Blumell, “Scripture as Artefact,” in *Oxford Handbook of the Early Christian Interpretation of Scripture*, edited by Paul M. Blowers and Peter W. Martens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

decades it has backed away significantly from such unattainable aspirations. Due to the lack of early manuscript data, uncertainties about the exact process of scribal transmission, as well as the recognition of the complexities involved with oral composition and dissemination, biblical textual criticism today seeks to identify an “initial text” (*Ausgangstext*) of the Bible that can account for subsequent textual developments.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, there is a general recognition among textual critics of the Bible that there are inherent limitations to what this discipline can attain in recovering the earliest text of the Bible. But notwithstanding these limits, textual criticism has greatly improved the text of the Bible overall as it has been able to identify earlier readings, later interpolations, and has successfully classified diverse manuscript families and recensions of biblical texts. In this process textual criticism has even expanded its horizon somewhat in an attempt to provide some context for certain kinds of variants that are clearly deliberate and motivated by theological concerns at different stages in the transmission of the biblical text.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the modern world where a text can be written and mass-produced very easily and with a high degree of stability due to modern technologies like the printing press and computer, in the ancient world the transmission of a text was often quite laborious as it had to be hand-copied letter by letter. Not only did this make production of any substantial text in the ancient world rather difficult, but it also meant that every time a text was copied (and recopied) there was a good chance that errors and variants could be introduced, both incidental and deliberate, with the result that the textual stability was compromised. To give some rather staggering statistics, for the OT a variant reading occurs in the ancient and early medieval manuscript evidence on average at least once in every ten words;<sup>8</sup> so the famous Isaiah scroll from Qumran (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) that dates to the first century BCE and contains all sixty-six chapters has a little over 1,300 variants from the way Isaiah is rendered in most modern editions of the Bible (including the KJV).<sup>9</sup> Turning to the NT, of the roughly 5,700 extant NT manuscripts that include papyri, uncials, minuscules, and lectionaries, there are hundreds of thousands of variants; as one prominent textual critic has put

6. Tommy Wasserman and Peter J. Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 11–3.

7. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

8. Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods, and Results* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 25.

9. Martin G. Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (New York: HarperOne, 1999), 267–71.



it, “There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.”<sup>10</sup>

Though initially staggering, these kinds of statistics do not imply that the copyists and scribes who transmitted both the OT and NT in the age before the printing press were negligent, unskilled, or necessarily malicious, nor that every single verse in the Bible has been subject to corruption and alteration. To be sure, some of the transmitters of the biblical text would have fit within one or all these characterizations, but the manuscript evidence for the most part suggests that the transmitters who hand-copied the biblical text for so many centuries often did their best to accurately reproduce and convey the text. This becomes more apparent when the above statistics are cast in a different light: the majority of these variants are spelling errors or phonetic shifts, the addition or omission of a particle, conjunction, definite article, or a single word. Thus, about 65 percent of biblical variants have to do with alternate spellings and another 25 percent with minor changes that do not significantly alter the overall meaning of the text; therefore, about 90 percent of biblical variants are rather insignificant and make little difference for interpretation. For example, it does not make a big difference whether Joshua 6:9 (KJV) reads “ark of the covenant” or just “ark,” or, for that matter, whether Matthew 2:28 (KJV) reads “lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning” or just “weeping and great mourning.”

On the other hand, a survey of the extant variants attested in biblical manuscripts reveals that some are more significant and go well beyond the omission/addition of a word or two. In the familiar story of David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17), according to one textual tradition (on which the KJV is based) Goliath towers “six cubits and a span” (17:4) or nearly ten feet in height (depending on the length of a cubit), but according to another textual tradition (which is much older and is attested in the DSS) he is “four cubits and a span” or just under seven feet.<sup>11</sup> Turning to the NT, in John 5:1–9 there is the story of Jesus healing a infirm person at the pool of Bethesda and in the preamble a description is given of the environs wherein it is reported that “an angel” was responsible for stirring the water so that the first person entering thereafter was healed (vv. 3b–4). In a number of ancient manuscripts the same story appears but without any mention of the angel troubling the water. To give another NT example, most ancient manuscripts end Mark’s Gospel with 16:8 and women fleeing from the empty tomb “for they were afraid” and contain no post-resurrection



10. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus. The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 90.

11. This is the reading given in DSS 1 Samuel. See Abegg et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, 229.



appearances of Jesus; the ending preserved in the KJV that comprises verses 9–20 is known as the “Longer Ending” of Mark and only appears in later manuscripts. Dozens of other similar such variants, which not only affect the meaning of the text but also potentially have theological implications, could also be cited from both the OT and NT.<sup>12</sup>

### HISTORY OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Already in the ancient world perceptive readers of the biblical text noticed that there were variant readings among the different manuscripts. One early Christian, Origen of Caesarea (died ca. 253 CE), who became a renowned biblical exegete in his own day, made the following observation about the biblical manuscripts available to him:

Now it is plainly manifest that many differences of the copies [of the scriptures] have occurred either from the laziness of certain copyists or from the wicked recklessness of some or from those neglecting improvement of the writings or also from those who either add or omit [to the text] supposing in themselves to improve it [i.e., the scriptures].<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Origen recognized that variants in the scriptural text had arisen both from inadvertent errors caused by negligent copyists as well as deliberately by copyists who added or omitted text as they saw fit. Picking up on the latter point, allegations of deliberate scriptural alteration are widespread in early Christian literature and appear as early as the second century.<sup>14</sup>

While variant readings have long been noted, biblical textual criticism has its roots in the Reformation and Enlightenment. While the Vulgate (Latin translation of the Bible) was the very first book to be published (i.e., the Gutenberg Bible in the 1450s), it took nearly seventy-five years for printed (not hand-copied) editions of the OT (in Hebrew) and New Testament (in Greek) to appear. The first printed Greek edition of the New Testament appeared in 1516 and was produced by the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536). Due to the sway that the Vulgate held in the church, and by extension the

12. For an introductory overview of both Old Testament and New Testament biblical variants along with useful bibliography for further reading see Wegner, *A Students Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*, 44–57.

13. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 15.14. Translation is my own.

14. Origen, *Against Celsus*, 2.27 (where Celsus [second century] is cited); Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.28.13–19 (quoting Victor the bishop of Rome ca. 190 CE).



academy, the text was printed in two parallel columns: Greek in the left and Latin in the right. Once printed it did not take long for bilingual readers to begin to notice differences between the Greek and the Latin text and debates soon thereafter emerged over variant readings.<sup>15</sup> One passage in particular that created no little stir when Erasmus' Greek text was published was 1 John 5:7–8. In Erasmus' first two editions (1516 and 1519) this passage read (in translation): “<sup>7</sup>There are three that bear record: <sup>8</sup>the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three are one.” However, the Latin preserved a longer reading (in translation): “<sup>7</sup>There are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one.* <sup>8</sup>*And there are three that give testimony on earth:* the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three are one” (emphasis added to indicate difference). Many at the time viewed the longer reading as authentic, not only because it appeared in the Vulgate (*the Bible of the church*), but also because they felt it was an important Trinitarian proof text. In reply, Erasmus pointed out that the longer reading that included references to heaven, earth, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, was not attested in any Greek manuscript. Under mounting political and ecclesiastical pressure, as well as the “discovery” of a Greek manuscript of 1 John that was written for the sole purpose of including this passage (Codex Montfortianus from the sixteenth century), Erasmus ultimately included this reading in his 1522 edition of the New Testament (notoriously known today as the “Johannine Comma”).<sup>16</sup> Thus, this erroneous reading is preserved in the KJV since its NT Greek text was essentially based upon Erasmus' third edition of 1522; however, this interpolation has been dropped in all modern translations of the Bible.<sup>17</sup>

As the sixteenth century progressed and printed editions of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts became more widely available, this inevitably gave rise to a greater awareness of biblical variants as well as differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts of the OT and the Greek and Latin of the NT. The first systematic attempt to incorporate, but not arbitrate, the variant readings in the biblical text was in Brian Walton's six-volume Polyglot Bible published between 1655–1657 where variants were published at the foot of every page.<sup>18</sup> Over the

15. In anticipation of this Erasmus published a large appendix to the volume (titled *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*) wherein he justified his Greek text and produced various text-critical arguments for specific readings.

16. Grantley McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma and Trinitarian Debate* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

17. In the Latin Vulgate, this interpolation is first attested in manuscripts of the sixth century.

18. P.N. Miller, “The ‘Antiquarianization’ of Biblical Scholarship and the London Polyglot Bible (1653–57),” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001): 463–82.



course of the next century various scholarly editions of both the OT (Hebrew) and NT (Greek) would regularly appear with textual variants printed alongside the text, which resulted in much debate in the academy and the church as debates and accusations of heresy raged over the status of the biblical text.<sup>19</sup> During this period even Isaac Newton entered the fray of textual criticism and vehemently argued both for and against various readings in the Bible.<sup>20</sup>

The birth of “modern” textual criticism of the Bible began with Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812), a professor of divinity at the University of Jena from 1775 until his death. Though primarily a scholar of the NT, Griesbach’s text-critical methodology applied equally to the OT, and some of the principles he outlined are still used today. Griesbach went beyond just cataloging variants or making theological arguments for one reading or another but laid out an actual methodology for trying to reconstruct the text of the Bible when faced with a host of variant readings for one passage. Beyond arguing that more ancient manuscripts should be given greater weight than more recent ones in text-critical matters and that original language manuscripts should generally be accorded more weight than translations—thus the Greek manuscripts of the NT should be regarded with more esteem than Latin manuscripts—he also quarried the writings of early church fathers to see how they quoted disputed passages. Finally, he came up with a list of fifteen canons for textual criticism, among which were the principles of *lectio brevior* (a shorter reading is probably older than a longer reading of the same passage) and *lectio difficilior* (a more difficult reading is probably older than a reading that makes more sense). Drawing on these and other principles he set forth a number of treatises on variant readings in the Bible and remarkably in a few cases he even anticipated some readings that were later borne out with newer manuscript discoveries.<sup>21</sup>

When Griesbach died at the beginning of the nineteenth century, NT textual criticism was dominated by German scholarship with all the major studies being written in German (or Latin). It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that text-critical studies of the Bible began to appear in English, the first significant one being J. Scott Porter’s *Principles of Textual Criticism*

19. This period is concisely summarized in 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), 152–64.

20. J.A.I. Champion, “‘Acceptable to Inquisitive Men:’ Some Simonian Contexts for Newton’s Biblical Criticism, 1680–1692,” in *Newton and Religion: Context, Nature, and Influence*, edited by J.E. Force and R.H. Popkin (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 1999), 77–96.

21. He showed, for example, that the shorter form of the Lord’s Prayer in Luke 11:3–4 was likely the most ancient version and this was largely proven with the discovery of Codex Vaticanus.

with their *Application to Old and New Testaments* published in 1848. Of course, this does not mean that there was no scholarship in English available on the subject in the early nineteenth century as English Bible commentaries, dictionaries, and encyclopedias were disseminating some text-critical scholarship. For example, Reverend Charles Buck's *Theological Dictionary* (1802), Adam Clarke's *Bible Commentaries* (1810–1826), and Edward Robinson's *Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (1832)—all of which Joseph Smith read<sup>22</sup>—contain text-critical materials. However, aside from the “New Translation” (JST)<sup>23</sup> and passing comments made by Joseph Smith about the text of the Bible,<sup>24</sup> neither in his lifetime nor in those of his immediate successors was there any significant engagement with the text-critical studies of the day.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic increase in English text-critical studies of the Bible with over a dozen different monographs appearing before the turn of the century. This flurry was prompted in part by the monumental publication in 1862 of Codex Sinaiticus, a virtually complete fourth-century CE copy of the Bible (in Greek) that was found at St. Catherine's Monastery (Sinai) by Constantin von Tischendorf (1815–1874). The culmination of these developments contributed to the publication in 1881 (NT) and 1885 (OT) of the Revised Version (RV)—a revision of the KJV that not only included an updated translation but also took into account new textual readings that had appeared since the KJV was first published in 1611 (among other things it dropped the Johannine Comma). The same year that the RV NT was published two British scholars, Brooke F. Westcott (1825–1901) and Fenton J.A. Hort (1828–1892), published a new Greek edition of the New Testament in two volumes titled *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. While the positivistic use of “original” speaks more about the times in which it was published and is not taken today to be the “original text,” the NT text and principles laid out by Westcott and Hort are by and large accepted in contemporary scholarship. The



22. Christopher C. Jones, “The Complete Record of the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (2009): 192–93; Matthew Bowman and Samuel Brown, “Reverend Buck's *Theological Dictionary* and the Struggle to Define American Evangelicalism, 1802–1851,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 3 (2009): 469. See also Thomas A. Wayment and Haley Wilson-Lemmon, “A Recovered Resource: The Use of Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary in Joseph Smith's Bible Translation,” in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, edited by Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020).

23. For Robert J. Matthews, while the JST restores to some extent the intent of the ancient meaning, he does not maintain that in every case it is a text-critical restoration. Robert J. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation:” *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1975), 234–37.

24. *Joseph Smith Papers, History, 1838–1856*, vol. A–1 (December 23, 1805–August 30, 1834), 183.



principal contribution of this work was that it effectively overthrew the *textus receptus* (“received text”) underlying the KJV NT, which up until that point had been revered in many quarters as *the* canonical Greek text of the NT.

Not all welcomed the rapid advances in biblical textual criticism and the publication of the RV. John W. Burgon (1813–1888), dean of Chichester, in a series of lectures and publications denounced both the RV and the Greek NT text of Westcott and Hort; for him, it was seemingly incomprehensible that the *textus receptus* underlying the KJV NT could need any significant revision, viewing it as he did, to have been the inspired text of God. Though Burgon’s arguments attracted much attention at the time, in part because there was a large group of KJV-only supporters who did not like the RV, his text-critical assumptions and arguments have been almost completely rejected in modern scholarship as they are often based on faulty assumptions and special pleading. Even though many of Burgon’s text-critical arguments were refuted in the decades following his death, in certain quarters they persisted well into the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup>

#### LDS APPROACHES TO TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Here one finds an intersection with what is the only LDS monograph dealing extensively with textual criticism and published by an LDS leader. In 1956, J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961), then a member of the quorum of the twelve apostles, published *Why the King James Version*.<sup>26</sup> While the book is not explicitly about textual criticism, textual criticism undergirds much of Clark’s discussion about the differences between the KJV and other translations like the RV, American Standard Version (ASV), and the Revised Standard Version (RSV). The survey the book offers of ancient biblical manuscripts and witnesses is adequate and even somewhat useful (by 1950s standards) insofar as it is descriptive—relying as it does on the descriptions of ancient texts given by Fredrick G. Kenyon (1863–1942) who was the keeper of manuscripts at the British Library from 1889–1931. But where the book periodically has problems is in the text-critical arguments where it is regularly asserted that the KJV preserves the most accurate readings whereas more contemporary English translations are viewed with much distrust and even disdain (e.g., RV, ASV, RSV). Since Clark was not a biblical scholar and had no training with ancient languages

25. Edward F. Hills, *The King James Defended! A Christian View of the New Testament Manuscripts* (Des Moines, IA: The Christian Research Press, 1956).

26. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Why the King James Version* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1956).

or texts—a caveat that is explicitly stated at the outset of the book<sup>27</sup>—he relied heavily on the arguments Burgon made over half a century earlier to defend the KJV and its textual basis. Beyond the inherent problems of using Burgon’s text-critical arguments, Clark ended up, perhaps unwittingly, defending passages like the Johannine Comma and others that LDS today would be more than happy to excise for purely theological reasons to say nothing of the fact that they are later interpolations.<sup>28</sup>

While Clark’s publication is the only monograph published by an LDS leader that substantially engages with textual criticism of the Bible, the subject was occasionally broached by a few other twentieth-century LDS leaders. As president of the quorum of the twelve apostles, Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) published in 1954 *Man: His Origin and Destiny* in which chapters 26 and 27 respectively deal with the authenticity of the OT and NT. In both chapters, there are brief excurses on biblical textual criticism wherein the work of Kenyon is cited, and it is acknowledged that the text of the Bible has been transmitted with alterations and corruptions.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, Bruce R. McConkie (1915–1985) as an apostle wrote a three-volume *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (1965–1973) where the subject is brought up very generally. While there is no explicit engagement with biblical textual criticism, the commentary contains a number of text-critical assertions and in a few instances McConkie discusses a New Testament passages for which there is a notable variant (of which he is seemingly unaware) and asserts that something is wrong with the text as it appears in the KJV.<sup>30</sup>

27. Clark, *Why the King James Version*, 21, states, “Since the author’s own scholarship is wholly insufficient to enable him to do any original research in this great field of human thought (which means the author has no standing in that field—and ought to have none), and since, as a matter of fact, the original sources were not available to him even if he could have used them, he has quoted most extensively from writers who are learned and who have done the research necessary to give them a standing.” Shortly before publishing the book Clark consulted David O. McKay, then president of the church, to run it by him. While McKay left the decision to publish solely with Clark, he did have some reservations with the project and appropriately warned him. See Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 185.

28. Clark, *Why the King James Version*, 247, where a defense of the Johannine Comma is implied based on a quote drawn from F.H. Scrivener (1813–1891).

29. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*, 6th ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1965), 509–11.

30. For example, in the story of Jesus’ healing at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–9) McConkie notes that the angel troubling the water so that first person thereafter entering was healed “was pure superstition . . . If we had the account as John originally wrote it, it would probably contain an explanation that the part supposedly played by an angel was merely a superstitious legend.” See Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, vol. I: *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965), 88.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM GIVETH AND  
TEXTUAL CRITICISM TAKETH AWAY



As it is practiced by trained scholars, textual criticism provides a somewhat mixed bag of evidence for LDS claims about the Bible. On one hand, it is evident that both the Old and New Testaments were susceptible to textual change and corruption over the course of their transmission history and that variants were not just inadvertent or accidental; even if such variants account for the vast majority of the changes there is clear evidence that at times the text was purposely changed for theological reasons.<sup>31</sup> On this front one notable case that text-critically corresponds with an underlying LDS hermeneutic of suspicion with the biblical text is Luke 22:43–44 that narrates Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane: “And there appeared an angel unto him [Jesus] from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” For LDS, Jesus’ salvific act of atonement was not just confined to the events on the cross but included his sufferings in Gethsemane on the night before he was crucified, which is even found in non-biblical LDS scriptures like Mosiah 3:7 and Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19, where Jesus’ “bleeding from every pore” is part of his act of atonement. Few LDS are aware, however, that this passage (Luke 22:43–44) is either altogether omitted by certain modern translations or is included and marked with asterisks or placed in brackets because it does not appear in some ancient manuscripts. Recently, I have argued that this passage was most likely a part of Luke’s Gospel but that it was deliberately excised by later Christians because it posed theological problems in the aftermath of the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE<sup>32</sup>—in fact, this is the only passage in the Bible for which we have direct ancient evidence that “orthodox” (i.e., pro-Nicene) Christians were deliberately excising it.<sup>33</sup> For LDS readers, this could call to mind a paradigm in which “plain and precious” parts of the Bible would be taken away (cf. 1 Ne 13:26–35).

On the other hand, just as textual criticism might give so might it also take away in a very literal sense. The beloved story of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53–8:11 and not being condemned to death by Jesus is clearly

31. Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiquene Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (Freiburg, Germany: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).

32. Lincoln H. Blumell, “Luke 22:43–44: An Anti-Docetic Interpolation or an Apologetic Omission?” *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 19 (2014): 1–35.

33. See Epiphanius, *The Anchored One*, 31.3–5.



an interpolation; while it might have some ancient pedigree, it was certainly not originally a part of the Gospel of John. Furthermore, textual criticism can potentially cause some problems for LDS non-biblical scriptures that parallel biblical texts for which there are variants. In 3 Nephi 13:9–13 appears a version of the Lord’s Prayer (cf. Matthew 6:9–13) and in v. 13 it reads: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” While this corresponds verbatim with Matthew 6:13b in the KJV, modern translations have universally dropped this passage since it does not appear in the earliest manuscript evidence and is typically thought to be an interpolation that was added when the Lord’s prayer was later read in worship services.



In summary, it is best to avoid extremes in text-critical assertions—namely, every verse of the Bible has been altered and corrupted or that non-biblical LDS scriptures always preserve the most original reading that can emend the biblical text. Along these lines, Latter-day Saints would also do well to have a little less antipathy toward modern translations of the Bible since they often have a much better textual basis than the KJV; in most places where the KJV text differs from that of a modern version (translation issues aside) the latter is likely to preserve a more ancient reading because of the underlying textual basis. Thus, when a number of modern translations do not include a verse (e.g., Matthew 23:14, Mark 15:28, Luke 17:36, Acts 15:34, Acts 28:29, and Romans 16:24), it is not because they are trying to hide something but rather because the ancient manuscript evidence is decidedly against its authenticity.