

Preface

In the mid-1970's I attended an early morning seminary class in Sycamore, Illinois. I have a vivid recollection of the year we studied the New Testament. We had a cardboard chart with the names of the students down the left margin and the name of each book of the New Testament across the top margin. Whenever we finished reading a book, we got to place a gold star in the accompanying square on the chart. I read the entire New Testament that year and completed my row on the chart, but my comprehension of what I read was very low. There were times when I would read several pages, reading every word, and then look back and realize that I did not have a clue what it was I had just read. I have never forgotten the struggle I faced as a young person in attempting to comprehend the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

More recently, I was asked to give a presentation on studying the scriptures as a Relief Society Enrichment class. I made an overhead projection copy of the book of Philemon (which I selected simply because it is so short), and then as I led the class we read and discussed it together, slowly, verse by verse, marking the projected image on the board liberally. Some of the insights we offered were drawn from the Greek text. For instance, in KJV Phil. 1:2 Paul addresses his letter in part "to our beloved Apphia." The Greek reads Ἀπφία τῆ ἀδελφῆ *Apphia tē adelphē* "to Apphia the sister," showing that this clearly was a woman, and may well have been Philemon's wife. Some of the insights were explanations of the peculiarities of the archaic usage of the KJV. For instance, the word "communication" in verse 6 now means something different than its primary meaning in the early 17th century (a phenomenon known as "linguistic drift"). The word is often used in the KJV with the sense "conduct," although here it probably means either "participation" or "fellowship," depending on how one understands the rest of the verse. We gave background information, such as about Paul's imprisonment, and explanations of cultural matters, such as concerning the institution of slavery at the time. After working our way through the entire book, the sisters in the class felt as though they actually understood every word we had read, so they could fully appreciate in its entirety the message of this letter written by the Apostle Paul.

After teaching that class, I realized that there was a great need for basic information about the Bible in the Church, and a great hunger and desire for that information. I resolved to write a book in an effort to help individuals understand the language of the scriptures they were reading, which has turned into the present volume. I love the footnotes in the Church's 1979 edition of the KJV beginning with the tags IE, OR and GR (or HEB for the Old Testament), but it seemed clear to me that there were too few of them for most readers due to severe space constraints caused by the many other features included in that edition of the Bible. So I began to write my own set of footnotes, focusing in particular on helping the reader comprehend the sometimes difficult language of the KJV.

I did not get very far, however, before I realized that writing such notes was much more difficult and time consuming than it looked at first blush. I knew I would need help. Early in the process I bounced ideas off of Richard Hopkins, an Internet friend who was then active in LDS publishing, to conceptualize the project. I then recruited some Saints whose work on the scriptures I knew and respected to work on the project as well. John H. Jenkins has written the notes on Luke, Acts and Romans, and John A. Tvedtnes has written the notes on the Johannine literature (John, 1-3 John and Revelation).

Along the way there were other members of the team, who had to drop out for various

reasons; nevertheless, their contributions were significant and are appreciated. John Gee (who did some preliminary work on James and offered useful comments on the Gospels) and Daniel McKinlay (who did some preliminary work on Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians) of the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at BYU had to drop out due to the press of other matters, and Marc Schindler unfortunately and untimely passed away after writing some preliminary notes to chapters in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Daniel Hopkins (Richard's son) maintained a website for contributors to the project for a time that was helpful to us.

John Jenkins wrote the chapter on the basics of New Testament textual studies and most of the appendices, although I wrote the appendix on further resources, and Marc and Craig Schindler wrote the primer on early modern English. In the introductions to the biblical books, the information on key manuscripts was written by John Gee.

Although the Saints are accustomed to doctrinal commentaries, which use the scriptural text as a platform for doctrinal exposition, this book is of a different type altogether. Our focus has been on explicating the language so that the reader can understand it. Although our comments occasionally touch on doctrinal matters, they are not meant to be doctrinally prescriptive.

Much of the need for this book would be obviated if one were simply to read the NT in a good, modern translation. It has been our experience, however, that the vast majority of Latter-day Saints are uncomfortable reading the Bible in any translation other than the KJV. Inasmuch as the Church's commitment to the KJV seems unlikely to abate any time soon, the next best thing is to learn to read the KJV, as archaic as it now is, with full comprehension.

We should also be clear that we have no intention in any way of "replacing" the Church's 1979 edition of the KJV. That edition has many features, such as the Topical Guide, Bible Dictionary, Joseph Smith Translation (JST) and maps that we have no intention of duplicating. This book is meant as a supplement to, not a substitute for, that edition. What this volume will provide is a much expanded set of explanatory notes explaining what is going on in the text, together with some light background commentary. Our aim has been rather pragmatic; we hope to give the Latter-day Saint who wishes to strive for a better understanding the resources to comprehend the words he or she is reading, together with a brief introduction to New Testament scholarship.

For ease of reference we have provided the standard KJV text, with wide margins to allow for personal note taking. Running headers at the top of the page will make it easy to find what one is looking for. The text will be presented in a paragraph format with frequent in-text captions. Quotations from the Old Testament are given in bold type. The main feature of the book is the footnotes presented at the bottom of the page. Where we reference Greek words, we give the text both in a Greek font (usually using the actual form of the word found in the text rather than the lexical or dictionary form) and in an English transliteration. In writing the notes, our aim has always been to read the text and to try to identify where it is difficult to understand, and to help to resolve those difficulties for the reader.

I intentionally edited the notes with a light hand, so as to allow each contributor room to give full utterance to his distinctive voice. As a result, the reader may notice stylistic differences among the notes accompanying the different books of the New Testament. The notes in some books may be fuller than in others. John Tvedtnes makes more frequent and heavy use of scriptural cross-referencing than the other contributors. This was John's preference, which I respected.

Occasionally, the same or a similar note is used multiple times when the same or similar

wording or concept occurs multiple times in the scriptural text. While this might seem redundant to one sitting by the fireplace and reading the text straight through like a novel, to one using the text more as a reference or study aid for particular passages I trust such repetition (which obviates the need for constant flipping of pages back to crossreferenced notes) will be appreciated as a convenience.

The reader may also note occasional differences in positions taken by the different contributors. To one unaccustomed to the ways of scholarship, this may seem unusual, but it is really quite normal. Even faithful, committed LDS scholars sometimes disagree about this or that detail, and the contributors to this volume are no exception. I believe that any such differences of opinion are minor, few, and far between.

The Eighth Article of Faith teaches us that the Bible is the word of God as far as it is translated correctly. It is clear from Joseph Smith's teachings that this includes both the process of turning the Greek into English, and the process of copying the Bible over the centuries. In our day and age, many Latter-day Saints also find that the simple process of understanding the words of the KJV can be a hinderance to learning God's word from it.

While secular scholarship cannot replace divine revelation, it can help illuminate passages and words in the Bible that human hands have darkened, and it can, if guided by the Spirit, help us better understand the word of God as he has preserved it. The principles revealed in D&C 91 may, we believe, be applied to every arena where human wisdom and divine inspiration are commingled.

The King James Version is one of the high points of English literature, and a glorious monument of human devotion to God; but it is not perfect, and it is not always easy to understand. Our hope is that our endeavors here can help our fellow Saints understand it better, appreciate it more, and draw closer to their God and their Savior thereby.

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