

Genesis: A New English Translation by Kent P. Jackson

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Reviewed by Joshua M. Sears

Although Genesis contains just over six percent of the text of the Old Testament, the Latter-day Saint *Come, Follow Me* curriculum lingers on this book from January through nearly the end of March—almost a quarter of the Old Testament study year. Clearly, Genesis and the Restoration texts connected with it (Moses and Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price) are seen as especially worthy of our attention. To assist in our study, Kent Jackson’s *Genesis: A New English Translation* combines three resources: a modern English translation of Genesis, excerpts from Joseph Smith’s translation, and commentary written in the style of study Bible notes.

Jackson’s translation is based on the traditional Hebrew Masoretic Text, with occasional corrections based on readings from other ancient sources such as the Greek Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls (xv).¹ The English is modern without being colloquial. Sentences are grouped into paragraphs that show the narrative’s structural logic. Poems are presented in stanzas that signal to readers that they are reading poetry and help them scan the poetic lines.²

In some ways, Jackson’s translation choices defer to the precedent set by the King James Version (KJV). This includes rendering the divine name Jehovah (pronounced *Yahweh* in Hebrew) by the euphemistic title “the LORD,” a choice that Jackson notes “is familiar and customary in English” (9).³ It could have been an interesting break with tradition

1. Examples of passages with these text-critical updates include Genesis 4:8 on page 15; 22:13 on page 63; 41:56 on page 103; 47:21 on page 114; and 49:10, 24 on page 119.

2. Jackson identifies poetry in Genesis 1:27; 2:4, 23; 3:14–19; 4:23–24; 5:1–2; 8:22; 9:6, 25–27; 14:19–20; 16:11–12; 17:16; 24:60; 25:23; 27:27–29, 39–40; 28:3–4; 35:11–12; 48:15–16; and 49:2–27.

3. On two occasions, the book of Genesis uses the phrase “’*adonay* YHWH,” literally “Lord Yahweh.” Because “Lord the LORD” would be awkward, the KJV uses “Lord God,”

to preserve Jehovah's name (which appears over 150 times in Genesis) in order to help readers better see how this name was used anciently. Jackson also retains the syntax of the KJV in Genesis's famous opening line: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty" (Gen. 1:1–2). Many biblical scholars, including Latter-day Saints, have argued that this approach to translation rests on an assumption of creation *ex nihilo* and that the Hebrew is instead describing what the pre-existing universe was like *before* God created (or organized) it, as reflected in the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition: "When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos." The traditional translation is defensible,⁴ but it is interesting that Jackson did not incorporate this newer approach, which enjoys some overlap between biblical scholarship and Latter-day Saint theology.⁵

In other ways, Jackson diverges from the KJV. Units of measurement are spelled out rather than translated (for example, "seahs" instead of KJV's "measures"; "a beka" instead of "half a shekel weight"; or "qesitahs" instead of "pieces of money"), but the notes explain their value (see Gen. 18:6; 24:22; and 33:19 respectively in the Jackson translation and KJV). The Israelite name for the place where people go after death, Sheol, is spelled out and presented as a proper noun, rather than repeating the KJV's misleading term "the grave" (see Gen. 37:35; 42:38; and 44:29, 31). In places where the KJV describes a man "going in unto" a woman—the literal translation of a Hebrew phrase describing sexual intercourse—Jackson employs the modern euphemism "sleep with" (see Gen. 16:2, 4; 29:21, 23, 30; 30:3–4; and 38:2, 8–9).⁶ Sometimes Jackson's word choices avoid misunderstandings that might result from the KJV, such as when he writes that God "tested" Abraham rather than "tempt[ed]" him (Gen. 22:1). Similarly, rendering "in days to come" rather than "in the last days" (Gen. 49:1) avoids giving readers the impression that what follows are prophecies exclusively about the end times.⁷

with the capital letters shifting to "God." Jackson's choice is to use "Lord Yahweh" (see Gen. 15:2, 8).

4. See Benjamin Kantor, "The Origins of 'In the Beginning . . .': Genesis 1:1 in Light of the Biblical Hebrew Reading Traditions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 144, no. 4 (2025): 601–36.

5. See Avram R. Shannon, "The Genesis Creation Account in Its Ancient Context," *BYU Studies* 64, no. 3 (2025): 178–79.

6. Jackson does use "rape" instead of the KJV's softer-sounding "defile" (see Gen. 34:2).

7. As Jackson points out, "Most of what he [Jacob] foret[old]" in Genesis 49 "was fulfilled in Old Testament times" (119).

In sum, I believe Latter-day Saint readers will find this new translation of Genesis to be accurate and accessible. Elder Dale G. Renlund noted that while the KJV is “beautiful and powerful,” we can gain additional “insights from multiple translations [of the Bible].”⁸ Jackson’s translation is extremely insightful as an additional option to study alongside the KJV.

In addition to the translation itself, a major feature of this book is the inclusion of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST). Jackson is one of the foremost experts on the JST and has published numerous editions and commentaries that prepared him for this particular project.⁹ Lines from the JST, where they add to or differ from the traditional text of Genesis, appear as footnotes in a different typeface at the bottom of each page. Jackson clearly gave careful thought to the placement of each footnote to make the jump from Genesis, down the page, to the JST as smooth as possible. Because the record of Enoch found in the JST is so lengthy (some forty-five hundred words; compare Moses 6:26–7:69), it appears between Genesis 5:21 and 5:22 as a long series of footnotes spanning seven and a half pages. By contrast, the visions of Moses (compare Moses 1) are positioned before Genesis 1 and presented as a prologue. Because Jackson’s JST text is based on the edition published by BYU in 2022, and because that edition incorporates Joseph Smith’s latest revisions to the JST manuscripts, the wording sometimes differs from the text found in the Pearl of Great Price’s book of Moses, which is based on publications that did not always reflect Joseph’s final edits.¹⁰

8. As cited in “New Guidance on Bible Translations for Latter-day Saints,” *Newsroom*, December 16, 2025, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/holy-bible-translations-editions-church-of-jesus-christ>.

9. See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004); Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Religious Studies Center, 2005); Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: The Joseph Smith Translation and the King James Translation in Parallel Columns* (Religious Studies Center; BYU Press; Deseret Book, 2021); and Kent P. Jackson, *Understanding Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2022).

10. See Kent P. Jackson, “How We Got the Book of Moses,” in *By Study and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 136–47. Not everyone agrees that the most recent edits to the JST manuscripts should be prioritized. See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ryan Dahle, “Textual Criticism and the Book of Moses: A Response to Colby Townsend’s ‘Returning to the Sources,’ Part 1 of 2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 99–162.

Some may wonder why, in a Bible edition designed for Latter-day Saints, the JST is presented as footnotes rather than incorporated directly into the biblical text. However, while it does take some effort to compare the text with the footnotes, I believe this is exactly the right approach. In many instances, I have found, the inspiration and creativity manifested by the Prophet are only evident through comparison with the traditional text. We have to see what Joseph was looking at to fully understand what problem caught his attention and how his solution responds to it.

While I have often compared the Prophet's rendering to the KJV, which he used as his base text, when I began reading Jackson's book I did wonder how well the JST quotations would work when read alongside a new English translation.¹¹ In the end, I was surprised at how smooth the back and forth was. While there are certainly sentences where the JST doesn't perfectly fit into Jackson's rendering since the syntax is so different, I almost never found it difficult to figure out how the JST was intended to build on or respond to the biblical text. Even the shifts between the older style of English in the JST ("thou art") and the contemporary style of Jackson's translation ("you are") did not provoke the linguistic whiplash I had expected. This was encouraging to me because, among Latter-day Saints, one of the long-standing concerns over modern English Bibles is the fear that using them will sever our ability to read the Bible alongside the Joseph Smith Translation, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, all of which quote from and adopt the language of the KJV. Jackson's presentation of a modern English translation interacting almost seamlessly with the insights of the JST gave me hope that perhaps there are indeed ways to bridge the linguistic gap between our Restoration texts and modern Bibles.

The final major feature of Jackson's book is the commentary, which appears at the end of each scriptural block in a different, smaller typeface. As is typical in a study Bible, these notes are organized by verse and aim to be concise rather than exhaustive.¹² Jackson brings his considerable expertise to bear as he defines Hebrew names and terms, explains

11. Using JST footnotes to supplement a modern English translation of standard scriptural texts has also been done in Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints*, rev. ed. (Greg Kofford Books, 2022).

12. For a more in-depth discussion of study Bibles, see Joshua M. Sears, "Study Bibles: An Introduction for Latter-day Saints," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 20, no. 3 (2019): 26–57.

cultural background, points out literary features, and comments on alternate translations or textual variants. He includes perspectives from other books of scripture, as well as interpretive insights from the teachings of Joseph Smith. Maps of the ancient Near East (39), Canaan (43), and Egypt (99) are also helpful.

In the commentary, I appreciate Jackson's efforts to educate his readers about the nature of the book of Genesis. While fully affirming its scriptural status and inspired origin, the notes make it clear that Genesis could not have been written entirely by Moses; in its current form, it was written centuries after the events it describes, with different traditions and source materials edited into the book.¹³ Many of Genesis's more perplexing features can be more easily explained when readers are aware of this complex development.

I also appreciate that Jackson explained things that may run counter to expectations or may make some readers uncomfortable.¹⁴ The accounts of Creation "are not scientific but theological" (9). Hagar was not a servant but a slave (50). The characters in Genesis aren't always good "role models" (89). Just as important, I'm grateful that he was willing to point out gaps in our present knowledge, giving non-explanations like "we do not know" (12), "we are missing something in our understanding" (42), and "for reasons that are not made clear" (75). Too many

13. Jackson offers three pieces of evidence throughout his book to support these assertions. First, Jackson reminds us in the introduction that the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, a language that did not develop until after the time of Abraham and even Moses (xiv). Second, in the narratives about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (who probably lived in the Middle Bronze Age), Jackson points out that some details are anachronistic and reflect the perspective of narrators living centuries later (in the Iron Age). These include descriptions of how nations were related (36), references to the Philistines (62), and the use of the name Rameses (113). Third and finally, Jackson points out the possibility that certain stories are a composite of different source materials being merged together, such as the Flood narrative (30) or the report of Joseph's enslavement to the Midianites/Ishmaelites (95).

14. While Jackson obviously did not have the room to correct every bad take on Genesis, one topic I do wish he had addressed more directly is racist interpretations. Too many people still use Genesis to repeat harmful ideas like Cain and/or Ham being the ancestor of Black people, and this book could have been another good opportunity to actively discredit those incorrect readings. By way of comparison, at the same time Jackson's book came out, the Church released *Scripture Helps: Old Testament* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2026), which systematically and explicitly addresses racist interpretations. See its commentary on Genesis 4:7–15 and Moses 5:23–40 (12); Moses 7:5–8 (18 and also endnotes 5–6 on 21); Moses 7:22 (18–19); Genesis 9:20–27 (23–24); and Abraham 1:21–27 (26 and also endnote 9 on 29).

scripture study resources attempt to provide answers beyond what the data allow, and it's healthy for readers to be reminded that there are some things we cannot explain.

Genesis: A New English Translation brings together some of the best insights from academic scholarship and the rich resources of the Restoration. I recommend it as a helpful way to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

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