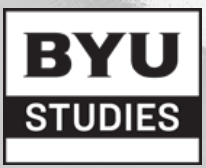

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From the Editor

W. Justin Dyer

For the past sixty-seven years, *BYU Studies* has published scholarly articles, books, personal essays, and poems with a lasting impact. The work of *BYU Studies* has richly shaped our conversations about, and conversion to, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of the important things we know about the Restoration and how to live it have come from *BYU Studies*—much of which is simply part of the air we breathe, though we may no longer recognize their provenance.

As the new editor in chief, it is immensely humbling to stand on the shoulders of so many who have dedicated themselves to creating work that blesses the world. Over the last several months in this new position, I have been continuously impressed with the top-quality professionalism and faith of all those involved.

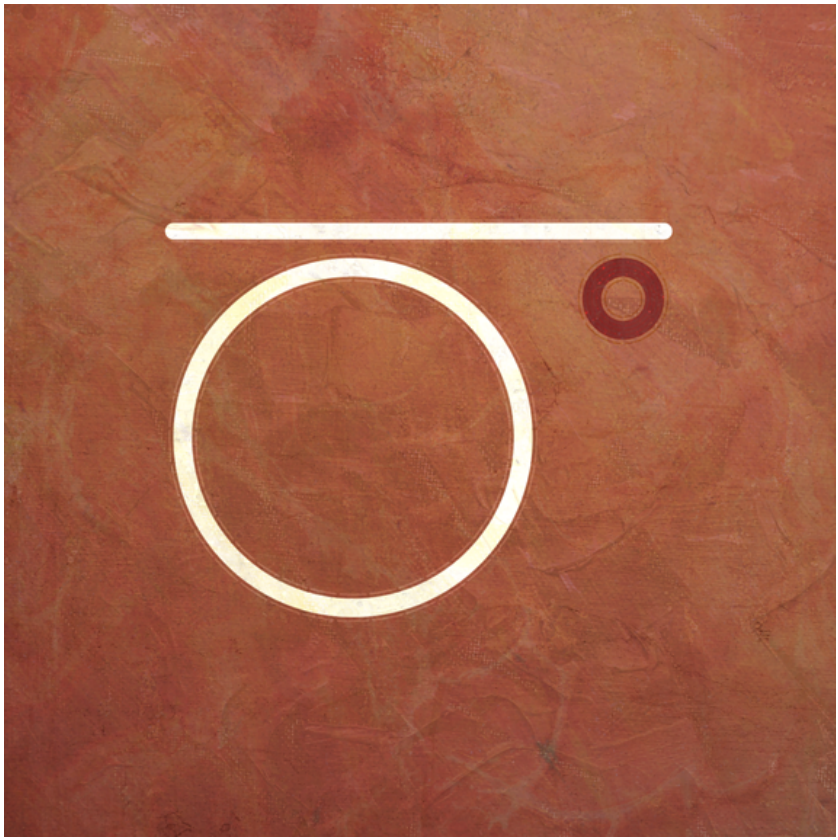
Readers of a *BYU Studies* article, book, essay, or poem enjoy the fruits of many months (sometimes years) of effort from the authors, peer-reviewers, editors, and production staff. Our team's focus is applying rigorous academic tools to serve our readers with the best and most recent scholarship on the teachings, scripture, and history of Christ's work.

So many deserve high praise—particularly Matt Christensen (editorial director), Katie Lewis (senior editor), Marny Parkin (production designer), Derek Gurr (digital media manager), Melanie von Bose (publications coordinator), and Leigh Ann Copas (publications coordinator). I owe a great debt to Steven C. Harper, who stepped down as editor in chief last year. He and his predecessors have been masterful in guiding *BYU Studies.* These colleagues, along with many others over the years,

have devoted their incredible talents to publishing. It is remarkable to be part of a team that endeavors to "publish peace" (Isaiah 52:7).

Looking ahead, our aim is to sustain the commitment to rigorous, accessible, and faithful scholarship—welcoming the best work that deepens understanding and strengthens discipleship. We hope to do so with intellectual honesty and Christian charity, engaging difficult questions in a spirit of faith.

It is an honor to continue the wonderful legacy of *BYU Studies*. To all those involved—past, present, and future—I say, thank you for dedicating your time and talents to work that blesses Christ's kingdom and each of us in it.



The useful yoke of Christ. *My Yoke Is Easy,* Ben Crowder, 2021, created with Figma, Affinity Designer, and Affinity Photo. Courtesy Ben Crowder.

Is Jesus's Yoke "Easy"?

Reconsidering the Translation of *Chrēstos* in Matthew 11:30

Lincoln H. Blumell

> Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
>
> Matthew 11:28–30 (KJV)

Matthew 11:28–30 forms a short sayings unit in which Jesus invites all who "labour" and are "heavy laden" to come and find "rest."[1] This unit, which is unique among the canonical Gospels,[2] has been

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Translations of ancient sources are my own unless otherwise noted. For abbreviations of ancient texts and modern sources and corpora, I have followed those given in *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines,* 2nd ed. (SBL Press, 2014).

1. The Greek text underlying the King James Version (KJV) is a Byzantine text, which came to be called "The Received Text" (*textus receptus*). The Textus Receptus (TR) for Matthew 11:28–30 has the following Greek text: [28] Δεῦτε πρός με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι κἀγὼ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς. [29] Ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ᾽ ἐμοῦ ὅτι πρᾷός εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ εὑρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν. [30] Ὁ γὰρ ζυγός μου χρηστὸς καὶ τὸ φορτίον μου ἐλαφρόν ἐστιν. See Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, comps., *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform 2005* (Chilton Book Publishing, 2005), 23. Compare the TR to the standard scholarly Greek version of the New Testament in the Nestle-Aland 28th edition (often abbreviated as NA[28]): [28] Δεῦτε πρός με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι, κἀγὼ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς. [29] ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ΄ ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ΄ ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πραΰς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ *εὑρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν·* [30] ὁ γὰρ ζυγός μου χρηστὸς καὶ τὸ φορτίον μου ἐλαφρόν ἐστιν. Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 28, emphasis added.

2. This saying is unique to Matthew; no parallel exists in Mark, Luke, or John. Non-canonical parallels will be considered later in this article.

traditionally viewed as the second half of a larger sayings cluster that begins in Matthew 11:25, where Jesus thanks the "Father" for his graciousness and revelation before issuing an invitation to the weary.[3] It stands in stark contrast to the woes pronounced upon the Galilean villages of Chorazin and Bethsaida in the immediately preceding verses (11:20–24).[4] It also differs from the following pericope about the dispute over Jesus's disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath day (12:1–8).[5]

In the King James Version of the Bible (hereafter referred to as the KJV), some essential elements about Jesus's invitation in Matthew 11:28–30 are obscured. This is partly due to the KJV's failure to render the Greek text accurately. For example, in 11:29, the KJV reads, "Learn of me," whereas the Greek is more specific and explicitly reads, "Learn *from* me" (emphasis added).[6] While learning "of" or "from" something can be similarly understood, Jesus's invitation is emphatic and personal. The hearer is not just to learn "of him" but directly "from him." In the second half of this verse, Jesus promises that those who come unto him "shall find rest unto [their] souls" (KJV).[7] While it is not noted in the footnotes for the Latter-day Saint version of the KJV,[8] this phrase is a partial quotation of Jeremiah 6:16.[9]

In Matthew 11:30, Jesus promises that "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (KJV). The rendering "my burden is light" accurately conveys the underlying Greek text.[10] However, the rendering "my yoke is easy" is not just inaccurate but even misleading. Jesus does mention the

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3. Hans Dieter Betz, "The Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest (Matt 11:28–30)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 1 (1967): 10–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/3263240.

4. See the parallel account in Luke 10:10–15. Mark 6:11 shares overlap with Matthew 11:24 only in a variant reading that includes a reference to Sodom and Gomorrah.

5. See the parallel accounts in Mark 2:23–28; and Luke 6:1–5.

6. The Greek phrase is μάθετε ἀπ᾽ ἐμοῦ. The preposition ἀπό ("from") is clear. F. W. Danker, W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 105 (hereafter cited as BDAG).

7. εὑρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν.

8. In the standard works, at Matthew 11:29, for the word "rest," the footnote directs the reader to Mosiah 2:41; Alma 37:33–34; Doctrine and Covenants 54:10; 59:23; and the entry "Comfort" in the Topical Guide. In both Alma 37:34 and Doctrine and Covenants 54:10, the near-verbatim phrase from Matthew 11:29 (KJV) is used: "[They] shall find rest to their souls."

9. The Hebrew version of Jeremiah 6:16 is rendered as follows in the KJV: "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*" (emphasis in original).

10. τὸ φορτίον μου ἐλαφρόν ἐστιν. The Greek noun φορτίον carries the meaning of "burden" or "load" and the accompanying adjective ἐλαφρός (-ά, όν) translates as

word "yoke" (ζυγός, *zugos*), but the Greek text does not say it is "easy." The Greek adjective underlying "easy" is *chrēstos* (χρηστός), which lexically never carries this meaning.[11] The KJV is not alone in mistranslating this adjective; the vast majority of English Bibles for the last four hundred years have rendered the phrase as "my yoke is easy." Although modern translations have generally retained this rendering, in recent years, studies have questioned it.[12]

If Jesus's yoke is not "easy," what exactly is he saying about his yoke to the weary whom he invites into fellowship? To clarify this phrase and provide an alternative translation that better reflects the Greek text's meaning, this article will adopt a twofold approach. First, it will demonstrate that the Greek word *chrēstos* in Matthew 11:30 cannot mean "easy" and will explain how this rendering became the received translation. Second, through a philological analysis of the Greek adjective *chrēstos,* this article will argue for a different rendering and understanding of the term. By presenting new insights and building on the work of others, this article seeks to advance the discussion of the most accurate rendering of the phrase "my yoke is easy" in Matthew 11:30.

Greek Variants in Matthew 11:30

Before delving into a philological study, it is necessary to ask whether any textual variants in this passage might shed light on the meaning of *chrēstos.* In my experience working with the New Testament and other ancient Greek texts, textual variants periodically arise when the meaning of a word or passage is unclear. These sometimes result from scribes or commentators attempting to improve the text's clarity.[13] The Greek

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"light," with the principal connotation "light in weight." See discussion of this adjective in BDAG, under "ἐλαφρός," 314.

11. This will be discussed in depth below.

12. Notable recent studies include Clark Bates, "The Paradox of the Easy Yoke: A Survey of χρητός in Greek Literature and the Interpretational Implications for Matthew 11:30," *The Expository Times* 131, no. 1 (2019): 9–19, https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524619848653; and Matthew W. Mitchell, "The Yoke Is Easy, but What of Its Meaning? A Methodological Reflection Masquerading as a Philological Discussion of Matthew 11:30," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 2 (2016): 321–40, https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1352.2016.3087.

13. Origen (c. AD 185–253), a notable ancient Christian commentator and interpreter of the Bible, while discussing variant readings, famously noted in his *Commentary on Matthew* (c. AD 240–50), "It is a recognized fact that there is much diversity in our copies [of Matthew], whether by the carelessness of certain scribes, or by some culpable rashness in the correction of the text, or by some people making arbitrary additions or omissions in their corrections." Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 15.14, in *Origenes Werke X:*

text of Matthew 11:30 is remarkably stable in the manuscript tradition, with only a few minor variants attested. Focusing on the phrase "my yoke is *chrēstos,*" nothing seems to be in doubt textually, as the Greek text underlying this phrase is secure based on the extant manuscript witnesses. In one late manuscript, the Greek verb "to be" (εἰμί; *eimi*) is added so that it is emphatic: "My yoke *is chrēstos*" (emphasis added). However, this addition is unnecessary, since the adjective *chrēstos* stands in the predicate position and the verb is already implied.[14]

Another variant, though secondary and orthographical, relates directly to the adjective. In a handful of manuscripts (none earlier than the eighth century AD), *chrēstos* (χρηστός) is replaced with *christos* (χριστός)—that is, "Christ."[15] While the phrase "my yoke is Christ" may have pastoral resonance, it does not cohere with the context of Matthew 11:30. The substitution of eta (η) with iota (ι) reflects a common phonetic phenomenon known as iotacism, in which the two vowels—pronounced similarly—are interchanged.[16] Therefore, this variant results from a transcriptional error.

Since the phrase appears textually secure,[17] we may now turn to the meaning(s) of *chrēstos.* A hermeneutically valuable approach, with roots in

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Matthäuserklärung, ed. Ernst Benz and Erich Klostermann, GCS 40 (J. C. Hinrichs, 1935), cols. 387–88: ὅτι μήποτε τὸ ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς ἑαυτὸν . . . ἀλλ᾽ ὑπό τινος τὴν ἀκρίβειαν μὴ νοήσαντος τῶν λεγομένων προστεθεῖσθαι . . . νυνὶ δὲ δῆλον ὅτι πολλὴ γέγονεν ἡ τῶν ἀντιγράφων διαφορά, εἴτε ἀπὸ ῥᾳθυμίας τινῶν γραφέων, εἴτε ἀπὸ τόλμης τινῶν μοχθηρᾶς <εἴτε ἀπὸ ἀμελούντων> τῆς διορθώσεως τῶν γραφομένων, εἴτε καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν τὰ ἑαυτοῖς δοκοῦντα ἐν τῇ διορθώσει <ἢ> προστιθέντων ἢ ἀφαιρούντων. Some portions of the Greek text are uncertain based on the manuscript. I supplemented from the Latin translation that is provided in a parallel column with the Greek text.

14. The added verb εἰμί appears in minuscule manuscript GA 157 of the early twelfth century (c. AD 1122), which is housed in the Vatican Library. On this manuscript, see Kurt Aland, Michael Welte, Beate Köster, Klaus Junack, eds., *Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments,* 2nd ed. (Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 56; and J. K. Elliott, *A Bibliography of Greek New Testament Manuscripts,* 3rd ed., Supplements to Novum Testamentum 160 (Brill, 2015), 153.

15. The manuscripts that contain this reading are E (GA 07), K (GA 017), L (GA 019), GA 13, GA 124, GA 2* (original hand), GA 579, and GA 1071. On these manuscripts, see Aland and others, *Kurzgefasste Liste,* 19–20, 47, 54, 81, 110. For digital images of each manuscript, see https://manuscripts.csntm.org/Manuscript.

16. On the phonetic change of η to ι, see a discussion with examples in Francis Thomas Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods,* vol. 1, *Phonology* (Istituto editoriale Cisalpino-La goliardica, 1976), 235–37.

17. While there are no significant textual variants in the manuscript evidence, a couple of ancient Christian authors read the phrase by applying the second adjective ("light" [*elaphros*; ἐλαφρός]) in Matthew 11:30 to the yoke so that it reads, "For my yoke is light" (ὁ γὰρ ζυγός μου ἐλαφρός). See Theodore of Heraclea (d. c. AD 355), in Joseph

ancient Judaism and Christianity, is to read and interpret scripture in light of other scripture. Applied here, when *chrēstos* appears elsewhere in the Greek Bible, what does it mean? Further, can that meaning inform the reading of Matthew 11:30?[18] Between the Greek New Testament and the Greek Old Testament (or the Septuagint, hereafter referred to as the LXX), the adjective appears forty-three times: seven times in the New Testament and thirty-six times in the LXX.[19]

Greek Old Testament (LXX) Usage

In the LXX, most attestations of *chrēstos* appear in the Psalms (fourteen times). There, it typically appears as an attribute to describe the "Lord," as in LXX Psalm 24:8a (Ps. 25:8a, KJV): "The Lord is *chrēstos* and upright."[20] In the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (*NETS*), *chrēstos* is rendered as "kind"—"Kind and upright is the Lord."[21] Notably, T. Muraoka's *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint,* which is the standard Greek lexicon of the LXX, gives the principal meanings of the adjective *chrēstos* as (1) "benevolent of character" and (2) "of good quality/morally good."[22]

Reuss, ed., *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche,* TUGAL 61 (Akademie, 1957), frag. 82: Ὁ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ζυγὸς ἐλαφρός ἐστι ("The yoke of Christ is light"); and Cyril of Alexandria (d. AD 444), in Joseph Reuss, ed., *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche,* frag. 150: Ἐλαφρὸς ἐστιν ὁ ζυγὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ("The yoke of Christ is light"). This unsupported reading does make sense as the trope of a "heavy yoke" (βαρὺς ζυγός) is attested in ancient literature: 2 Chronicles 10:11: καὶ νῦν ὁ πατήρ μου ἐπαίδευσεν ὑμᾶς ζυγῷ βαρεῖ, καὶ ἐγὼ προσθήσω ἐπὶ τὸν ζυγὸν ἡμῶν ("Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke"); *Sirach* 40.1: καὶ ζυγὸς βαρὺς ἐπὶ υἱοὺς Αδαμ ("And a heavy yoke upon the sons of Adam"); Callimachus (IV/III BC), *Aetia,* Fr. 4.1: καὶ νήσων ἐπέτεινε βαρὺν ζυγὸν αὐχένι Μίνως ("And Minos imposed a heavy yoke upon the necks of the islands"); Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.213: βαρὺν γὰρ ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ ζυγὸν αὐτοὺς ὑπενεγκεῖν ("Because they had borne a heavy yoke").

18. I would properly call this lexical or concordance exegesis.

19. This includes the masculine, feminine, and neuter forms: χρηστός, -ή, -όν. This number also includes its use in the Apocrypha.

20. Here, I refer to the LXX verse and then provide the corresponding KJV verse in parentheses, with "a" signifying the first portion of the verse. LXX Ps. 24:8a: χρηστὸς καὶ εὐθὴς ὁ κύριος.

21. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 558 (hereafter cited as *NETS*). See similar usage elsewhere in the LXX Psalms, with the corresponding KJV verse in parentheses. For example, LXX Ps. 33:9a (Ps. 34:8a); LXX Ps. 85:5a (Ps. 86:5a); LXX Ps. 99:5a (Ps. 100:5a); LXX Ps. 105:1a (Ps. 106:1a); LXX Ps. 106:1a (Ps. 107:1a); LXX 108:21b (Ps. 109:21b); LXX Ps. 118:68a (Ps. 119:68a); LXX Ps. 135:1a (Ps. 136:1a); LXX Ps. 144:9a (Ps. 145:9a). See also LXX Daniel 3:89; Jeremiah 40:11; Nahum 1:7; Song of Songs 2:40; 10:2.

22. T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Peeters, 2009), under "χρηστός," 736.

Outside of the Psalms, *chrēstos* is periodically used as an attribute of God and carries the same meaning: "kind," "good," and even "upright" or "benevolent."[23]

Similarly, *chrēstos* can also describe the judgments of God.[24] In LXX Psalm 111:5 (Ps. 112:5, KJV), based on context, it carries the sense of "uprightness," as in "the upright [*chrēstos*] man is the one who has compassion and lends: he will administer his affairs with justice."[25] In other cases, it takes on a more explicit connotation of kindness, as when it is paired with "beloved," such as in 1 Maccabees 6:11, where Antiochus IV Epiphanes claims that he governed with these virtues: "For I was kind [*chrēstos*] and beloved with my authority."[26] Outside of Psalms, in LXX Jeremiah 51:17 (Jer. 44:17, KJV), it is used to describe a state of general wellness for the people of Jerusalem: "And so we were filled with bread, and were well [*chrēstos*], and saw no evils."[27]

On other occasions in the LXX, *chrēstos* modifies inanimate objects, as it does with the word "yoke" in Matthew 11:30. In Ezekiel, it modifies "stone" on two occasions, where we read "*precious* stone" or "*priceless* stones" (emphasis added), referring to gems, diamonds, and rubies.[28] At other times, *chrēstos* is used to modify metals, such as "bronze" or "gold," and conveys the sense of a "fine" metal, superior to an ordinary kind.[29] It also appears in reference to "figs," where it distinguishes "good" or "exceptional" figs from ordinary or inferior ones.[30] Significantly, in none of the LXX examples does "easy" function as a viable lexical rendering for *chrēstos*: for example, "the Lord is upright and easy," "God is easy," "easy stones," "easy metals," or "easy figs." The passage or phrase would become incoherent if *chrēstos* were rendered "easy" in any of these instances in the LXX.

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23. LXX Ps. 51:11 (Ps. 52:9); Wisdom of Solomon 15:1; Psalms of Solomon 10:7; 2 Maccabees 1:24.

24. LXX Ps. 118:39b; Psalms of Solomon 8:32.

25. LXX Ps. 111:5: χρηστὸς ἀνὴρ ὁ οἰκτίρων καὶ κιχρῶν, οἰκονομήσει τοὺς λόγους αὐτοῦ ἐν κρίσει.

26. LXX 1 Maccabees 6:11: ὅτι χρηστὸς καὶ ἀγαπώμενος ἤμην ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ μου.

27. LXX Jeremiah 51:17: καὶ ἐπλήσθημεν ἄρτων καὶ ἐγενόμεθα χρηστοί, καὶ κακὰ οὐκ εἴδομεν.

28. LXX Ezekiel 27:22, 28:13 (Ezek. 27:22; 28:13, KJV).

29. LXX Daniel 2:32: καὶ ἦν ἡ κεφαλὴ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ χρυσίου χρηστοῦ ("And its head was of fine gold"); 1 Esdras 8:56: καὶ σκεύη χαλκᾶ ἀπὸ χαλκοῦ χρηστοῦ ("and the bronze vessel of fine bronze").

30. LXX Jeremiah 24:2: ὁ κάλαθος ὁ εἷς σύκων χρηστῶν σφόδρα ("The basket was full of exceptionally good figs"). See also LXX Jeremiah 24:3, 5 (Jer. 24:2–3, 5, KJV).

The underlying Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents in these LXX passages further confirm that "easy" is not an appropriate lexical rendering for *chrēstos.*[31] In the Psalms, every usage of the Greek adjective *chrēstos* is underlaid by the Hebrew adjective *ṭôb* (טוֹב), whose principal meanings include "good" (qualitatively or morally), "merry," "pleasant," "desirable," "usable," "efficient," "pleasing," "beautiful," "friendly," and "kind."[32] This is also true for most of the instances of *chrēstos* outside the Psalms where the underlying Hebrew word is *ṭôb.*[33] In the two instances of the use of *chrēstos* in Ezekiel 27:22 and 28:13, the underlying Hebrew word is *yāqār* (יָקָר). Its principal meanings include "scarce," "precious," "valuable," and "noble."[34] When it appears in LXX Daniel 2:32, the corresponding Aramaic term is *ṭāb* (טָב), which is a cognate of the Hebrew word *ṭôb* and carries the same general meaning. Thus, no Hebrew or Aramaic terms underlying the Greek word *chrēstos* in the LXX give any connotation for the English translation "easy."[35]

New Testament Usage

In the New Testament, *chrēstos* appears six additional times, though never again in the Gospel of Matthew. Sticking with the canonical order, the next occurrence appears in Luke 5:39. Here, Jesus speaks against the "scribes and Pharisees" (5:30, KJV) and uses an analogy of "new wine" and "old bottles" (5:37, KJV).[36] The vignette concludes in verse 39 with the

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31. Only twenty-six of the thirty-seven LXX attestations of *chrēstos* have a Hebrew or Aramaic subtext, as books like Maccabees or Wisdom of Solomon were originally composed in Greek.

32. Ludwig Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson, 5 vols. (E. J. Brill, 1994–2000), 2:370–71.

33. Nahum 1:7; Jeremiah 24:2–3, 5; 33:11 (= LXX Jer. 40:11); 44:17 (= LXX Jer. 51:17); 52:32.

34. Koehler and others, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* 2:432.

35. In a variant reading preserved in two Greek manuscripts of the LXX (Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus), LXX Proverbs 2:21a employs the variant reading *chrēstos,* instead of the standard reading *euthēs* (εὐθής). Proverbs 2:21a (Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus): χρηστοὶ ἔσονται οἰκήτορες γῆς ("The good will be the inhabitants of the earth"); compare Proverbs 2:21a (LXX): ὅτι εὐθεῖς κατασκηνώσουσι γῆν ("The upright will inhabit the earth"). The Hebrew word underlying *chrēstos* in the variant reading is *yāšār* (יָשָׁר); its primary meanings include "straight" (in both a moral and literal sense), "proper," "right," and "just." For these meanings, see Koehler and others, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* 2:450.

36. Though the KJV uses the term "bottles," this is a mistranslation. The Greek term underlying "bottle" is ἀσκός (*askos*), which is a "wineskin" or, more generally, "a leather bag," not a glass or ceramic bottle. On the meaning of ἀσκός, see BDAG, 143.

following statement: "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better [*chrēstos*]" (KJV). Although the comparative form is used, rendering it "easier" would be nonsensical.[37] In the next chapter, at Luke 6:35, this term appears again in the context of Luke's Sermon on the Plain. Jesus instructs the disciples to "love ye your enemies" (KJV),[38] and the verse concludes with a reference to "the Highest" (that is, God), who "is kind [*chrēstos*] unto the unthankful and to the evil" (KJV).[39] The sentiment here echoes the use of *chrēstos* as an attribute of God in the LXX.[40]

The next occurrence of the term is in Romans 2:4 in the context of Paul's exposition of the justice and righteousness of God. Though Paul insists that God will not overlook anyone's sins, he also emphasizes God's "longsuffering" and the fact that his *chrēstos* ("goodness") leads people to repentance.[41] In 1 Corinthians 15:33, Paul uses the term again. While urging the Corinthians to forsake sin and pursue righteousness, Paul warns them about corrupting influences and exhorts, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good [*chrēstos*] manners" (KJV).[42] A more precise—and idiomatic—rendering of the second half of the verse would be as follows: "Bad company ruins good [*chrēstos*] morals" (NRSVue). If one were to render it as "easy morals," it would contradict the whole point of Paul's admonition. Furthermore, as Paul is likely quoting (or at the very least echoing) the well-known maxim from the Greek comic dramatist Menander, the meaning here can only be something like "good."[43]

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37. In the Greek text underlying the KJV (the Textus Receptus), the reading is the comparative χρηστότερος (literally, "more good"; that is, "better"). In older Greek manuscripts, the reading is simply χρηστός ("good"); thus, "the old [wine] is good."

38. Compare Matthew 5:43–44.

39. TR: ὅτι αὐτὸς χρηστός ἐστιν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀχαρίστους καὶ πονηρούς.

40. See footnote 22 above. It may be noted that the corresponding material in Matthew 5:45 does not include this statement about God; instead, it focuses on how God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (ὅτι τὸν ἥλιον αὐτοῦ ἀνατέλλει ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθούς, καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους).

41. The second half of Romans 2:4 in the KJV reads, "Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" The rendering in the NRSVue is more precise: "Do you not realize that God's kindness [*chrēstos*] is meant to lead you to repentance?"

42. TR: μὴ πλανᾶσθε· φθείρουσιν ἤθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλίαι κακαί.

43. For Paul's use of Menander—although some have ascribed the quote to the Greek playwright Euripides (c. 480–406 BC)—see Theodorus Kock, ed., *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta,* vol. 3 (Lipsiae [Leipzig], 1888), fr. no. 218 from *Thaïs*: φθείρουσιν ἤθη χρήσθ' ὁμιλίαι κακαί. For a discussion of Paul's use of this aphorism, see Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians,* trans. James W. Leitch (Fortress Press, 1975), 278–79.

Two final attestations of this term appear in Ephesians and 1 Peter. In Ephesians 4:32, it is used as part of the culmination of a chain of personal exhortations (4:25–32). The first half of the final verse reads, "Be ye kind [*chrēstos*] one to another" (KJV).[44] The final attestation appears in 1 Peter 2:3, where it is quoting LXX Psalm 33:9a (Ps. 34:8a, KJV): "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious [*chrēstos*]."[45] While the KJV's translation "gracious" falls within the semantic range of *chrēstos,* several modern translations more closely reflect the LXX usage, opting for "good."[46]

To summarize, the evidence provided by the LXX and the New Testament (outside of Matt. 11:30) demonstrates that there is no instance where "easy" would be an appropriate rendering of the adjective *chrēstos*. Why, then, does "easy" appear in Matthew 11:30 to describe Jesus's yoke?

English Translations of Matthew 11:30

The first English translation of Matthew 11:30 appears in John Wycliffe's edition of the New Testament (c. 1382), where the phrase is rendered as "my yok is softe."[47] While "soft" is not among the lexical meanings of *chrēstos* discussed above, Wycliffe was not translating from the Greek text. Instead, his work was based on the Latin Vulgate, which reads, "*iugum enim meum suave est*." The Latin word *suavis* can mean "kind," "good," "sweet," "gracious," or "pleasant."[48] "Soft," which does not fall within this semantic range, appears to be an interpretive imposition[49] likely motivated by the juxtaposition of Jesus's yoke with the "light" burden (Matt. 11:30) and the common association of a yoke with hardship.[50] The later Wycliffe-Purvey revision (c. 1388), which sought to make the translation more idiomatic, retained the rendering "softe."[51]

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44. TR: γίνεσθε δὲ εἰς ἀλλήλους χρηστοί.

45. LXX: εἰ γεύσασθε καὶ ἴδετε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος.

46. For example, the NRSVue renders 1 Peter 2:3 as "if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."

47. John Wycliffe, trans., *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* [. . .] (London, 1731).

48. Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), under "suávis," 255.

49. The principal Latin adjective used for "soft" is *móllis, -is, -e*. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin,* under "móllis," 164.

50. See the discussion in footnote 121 below.

51. John Wycliffe, trans., *The New Testament in English According to the Version by John Wycliffe, About A.D. 1380, and Revised by John Purvey, about 1388,* ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford, 1879), 22.

The next major English translation of the New Testament came over 150 years later, in 1525, when William Tyndale, working from Erasmus's Greek edition of the New Testament rather than the Latin Vulgate, translated Matthew 11:30 as "my yoke is easy."[52] Thus, Tyndale became the first to introduce the now-standard English rendering of *chrēstos* as "easy." This choice, however, reflects interpretive liberty rather than lexical accuracy. The only other use of "easy" in Tyndale's New Testament appears in James 3:17: "But the wisdom that is from above is fyrst pure then peasable gentle and *easy* to be entreated" (emphasis added). Yet here too, "easy" is not present in the Greek; Tyndale has expanded *eupeithēs* (εὐπειθής, "compliant," "persuadable") with "easy to be entreated."[53] The King James translators later adopted this same interpretive insertion. Another occurrence of "easy" appears in the KJV at 1 Corinthians 14:9, where again there is no Greek equivalent—the word is added.[54]

Tyndale's translation as a whole was heavily influenced by Martin Luther's 1522 German New Testament, which in turn relied on Erasmus's Greek text of the New Testament.[55] Luther renders Matthew 11:30 as "mein Joch ist sanft" ("my yoke is soft/gentle").[56] While this rendering is closer in tone to *chrēstos,* Luther's rendering likely reflects the same theological motivation found in Wycliffe: a desire to counterbalance the image of a yoke with the promise of relief, aided by the phrase that

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52. For a facsimile edition, see William Tyndale, trans., *The First New Testament Printed in the English Language (1525 or 1526), Translated from the Greek by William Tyndale,* [. . .], ed. F. Fry (Bristol, 1862), image 78.

Beginning in 1516, Erasmus edited multiple printed editions of the Greek New Testament. His third edition, published in 1522, was used by Tyndale for his English translation of the New Testament: D. Erasmus, ed., *Novum Instrumentum omne,* [. . .] (Johann Froben, 1516; 2nd ed. Johann Froben, 1519; 3rd ed. Johann Froben, 1522). The second and subsequent editions carried the initial title *Novum Testamentum Omne.*

53. Tyndale, *First New Testament,* image 686. On the lexical meanings of εὐπειθής, see BDAG, 410.

54. 1 Corinthians 14:9 (KJV): "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?" (οὕτω καὶ ὑμεῖς διὰ τῆς γλώσσης ἐὰν μὴ εὔσημον λόγον δῶτε, πῶς γνωσθήσεται τὸ λαλούμενον). Compare to the NRSVue: "So with yourselves: If in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air."

55. Luther's German translation was based on the second edition of Erasmus's Greek New Testament published in 1519. For a modern edition of his translation, see Martin Luther, *Septembertestament von 1522, Faksimile der Originalausgabe: Das Newe Testament Deutzsch* (Edition Leipzig, 2005).

56. The English word "soft" is related to the German word "sanft," as both were derived from the Proto-Germanic root "samftijaz" or "samftaz." See Online Etymology Dictionary, "soft (adj.)," accessed January 27, 2026, https://www.etymonline.com/word/soft.

follows, "my burden is light." However, "gentle" or "soft" is not lexically warranted by *chrēstos* itself.

Subsequent sixteenth-century English translations—including the Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew Bible (1537), Great Bible (1539), Taverner's Bible (1539), Geneva Bible (1552), and Bishops' Bible (1568)—all followed Tyndale in rendering *chrēstos* as "easy," differing only in spelling ("easy" vs. "easie").[57] The one major exception was the Catholic Douay-Rheims Bible (1582), which translated the phrase as "my yoke is sweet," in line with the Latin word *suavis*.[58] While "sweet" better reflects the Vulgate, it still lies outside the core semantic range of the Greek.

The trend established in the sixteenth century continued into the seventeenth century. Although many of the early English Bibles were updated and republished, none altered the translation of *chrēstos* as "easy" in Matthew 11:30. The 1611 King James Version retained Tyndale's rendering with minor orthographic updates: for instance, "my yoke is easie." Despite the continued revision of the KJV throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the phrase remained unchanged.[59]

In the eighteenth century, the pattern largely persisted. Of eleven notable English translations published during this period—including those by Daniel Whitby (1703),[60] Daniel Mace (1729),[61] William Whiston (1745),[62] George Campbell (1789),[63] Gilbert Wakefield (1791),[64] Thomas Haweis (1795),[65] William Newcome (1796),[66] and Nathaniel

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57. See *Oxford English Dictionary,* under "easy (adj., adv., int., n.), Forms," accessed January 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4043705990.

58. *The Nevv Testament of Iesvs Christ, Translated Faithfvlly into English* [. . .] (Rhemes, 1582), 28.

59. When the New King James Version (NKJV) was released in 1982, which represented a significant overhaul of the translation of the KJV, "easy" was retained in Matthew 11:30.

60. Daniel Whitby, *A Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament, in Two Volumes*, vol. 1, *Containing the Four Gospels, and the Acts of the Holy Apostles* (London, 1703), 99.

61. [Daniel Mace], *The New Testament in Greek and English* [. . .], 2 vols. (London, 1729), 1:40.

62. [William] Whiston, *Primitive New Testament* [. . .] (Stamford and London, 1745), image 22.

63. George Campbell, *The Four Gospels, Translated from the Greek* [. . .], 2 vols. (London, 1789), 2:64.

64. Gilbert Wakefield, *A Translation of the New Testament,* 3 vols. (London, 1791), 1:39.

65. T. Haweis, *A Translation of the New Testament from the Original Greek* [. . .] (London, 1795), image 26.

66. William Newcome, *An Attempt Toward Revising Our English Translation of the Greek Scriptures* [. . .], 2 vols. (Dublin, 1796), 1:59.

Scarlett (1798)[67]—all render *chrēstos* as "easy."[68] Richard Challoner's 1750 Catholic revision of the Douay-Rheims Bible retained "sweet," following the Latin word *suavis* rather than the Greek word.[69] Edward Harwood's 1768 "liberal" translation of the New Testament is so paraphrastic that the words "easy" and "yoke" do not appear at all in Matthew 11:30; his rendering is too loose to determine how he understood the Greek.[70] The only deviation from "easy" comes from Anthony Purver's 1764 translation, which renders the phrase as "my Yoke is gentle."[71] John Wesley, in his 1755 annotated edition of the New Testament, retains "easy" in the text but adds a marginal note suggesting it could also be understood as "gracious, sweet, benign, [or] delightful."[72]

The nineteenth century witnessed numerous English translations of the entire Bible, the New Testament, or the Gospels.[73] Nearly all of these continued the tradition of rendering *chrēstos* as "easy" in Matthew 11:30. Notable exceptions include Alexander Greave's 1828 translation, which uniquely renders it as "profitable";[74] Samuel Davidson's 1875 version, which uses "good";[75] and Julie E. Smith's 1876 translation, which opts for "useful."[76] Despite these few alternatives, the overwhelming majority of translations retained "easy." Even the most significant English revision

67. Nathaniel Scarlett, *A Translation of the New Testament from the Original Greek* [. . .] (London, 1798), 20.

68. The only difference among them is a matter of spelling: "easy" versus "easie."

69. Richard Challoner, trans., *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Translated out of the Latin Vulgate* [. . .] (New York, 1885); "Challoner New Testament 1749," Original Bibles, accessed February 18, 2026, https://www.originalbibles.com/challoner-new-testament-1749-pdf/.

70. Edward Harwood, *A Liberal Translation of the New Testament* [. . .], 2 vols. (London, 1768), 1:37. Verse 30 reads, "For my doctrine is calculated for the felicity of mankind—its injunctions are not rigorous and oppressive to human nature—but the paths into which it introduces men, are unspeakably pleasant and delectable."

71. Anthony Purver, *A New and Literal Translation of All the Books of the Old and New Testament* [. . .], 2 vols. (London, 1764), 2:16.

72. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London, 1754), 60.

73. Dozens of English translations appeared in the nineteenth century, in addition to revisions and updated editions from previous centuries. See John V. Madison, "English Versions of the New Testament: A Bibliographical List," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 44, no. 3/4 (1925): 261–88.

74. Alexander Greaves, *The Gospel of God's Anointed,* [. . .] *in Two Parts, of the Greek Scriptures (Commonly Called the New Testament)* [. . .] (London, 1828).

75. Samuel Davidson, *The New Testament: Translated from the Critical Text of Von Tischendorf* [. . .] (London, 1875), 19.

76. Julie E. Smith, *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments* [. . .] (Hartford, Conn., 1876). This is the first complete Bible translation by a woman.

of the nineteenth century—the *English Revised Version* (1881–85),[77] authorized as an official revision of the KJV—made no change to Matthew 11:30, preserving the inherited reading.[78]

This pattern persisted into the twentieth century, during which over one hundred English New Testament translations were published.[79] Among major versions, the American Standard Version (ASV, 1901), Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1946), New International Version (NIV, 1973), New King James Version (NKJV, 1982), and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1990) all retained "easy." Only two of the principal translations from this period diverged: The New American Standard Bible (NASB, 1963) uses "comfortable," and the New English Bible (NEB, 1971) employs "good." In the twenty-first century, the tradition has continued: The New Living Translation (NLT, 2004), Modern English Version (MEV, 2014), Revised New Jerusalem Bible (RNJB; 2018), New English Translation (NET, 2019), and NRSV Updated Edition (NRSVue, 2021) all employ "easy."[80]

In short, since Tyndale's 1525 translation, the rendering of *chrēstos* in Matthew 11:30 as "easy" has been remarkably persistent across English versions of the Bible. Yet this uniformity stands in stark contrast to the broader lexical evidence. Nowhere else in the Bible is *chrēstos* translated as "easy." More importantly, no major ancient Greek lexicon offers "easy" as a standard meaning of the word.

The most authoritative classical Greek lexica—such as the Liddell, Scott, and Jones (LSJ) *Greek-English Lexicon*;[81] Powell's *Lexicon to*

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77. The New Testament translation was published in 1881, while the Old Testament translation was published in 1885. On the translation method of the *English Revised Version,* see *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Translated out of the Greek* [. . .], rev. ed. (London, 1881), v–xxi.

78. *New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Translated out of the Greek,* 18.

79. For a useful overview of these editions, see "Twentieth Century English Versions," Bible Research, Michael D. Marlowe, accessed January 22, 2026, https://www.bible-researcher.com/versbib10.html.

80. In addition, a Brigham Young University professor produced a private translation of the New Testament (first published in 2018 and then revised in 2022) and likewise employed "easy" in Matthew 11:30. See Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints; A Study Bible* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2018), 27; Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints,* rev. ed. (Greg Kofford Books, 2022), 27.

81. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, eds. and comps., *A Greek-English Lexicon,* 9th ed. with revised supplement (Clarendon, 1996), under "χρηστός," 2007 (hereafter cited as LSJ).

Herodotus;[82] Montanari's *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*;[83] and *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon*[84]—do not list "easy" among the meanings of *chrēstos.* The same holds for Muraoka's *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint,* which is the standard for LXX studies.[85] Only in a few New Testament–specific lexica does "easy" appear as a possible meaning, and typically only as an exception. Strong's *Concordance,* for example, lists "easy" among several options ("useful," "good," "gracious," "kind"), but this entry is known to prioritize concordance over nuance.[86] G. Abbott-Smith's *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* defines *chrēstos* as "good," "pleasant," "kind," and "gracious" and includes "easy" only as a special interpretation for Matthew 11:30—deriving it not from intrinsic meaning but from the influence of established translations.[87] Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* defines the term with reference to "good," "gracious," "excellent," and "virtuous" but does not discuss Matthew 11:30 at all.[88]

The current scholarly standard for New Testament Greek is BDAG (Frederick W. Danker and others, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*). BDAG lists four senses of *chrēstos*: (1) "pertaining to that which causes no discomfort,"

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82. J. Enoch Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus,* 2nd ed. (George Olms Publishing House, 1960), under "χρηστός," 381.

83. Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Brill, 2015), under "χρηστός," 2378–79 (hereafter cited as *DAG*).

84. J. Diggle, B. L. Fraser, P. James, O. B. Simkin, A. A. Thompson, and S. J. Westripp, eds., *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon,* 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 2021), under "χρηστός," 2:1509.

85. Muraoka, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, under "χρηστός," 736.

86. James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* [. . .] (New York, 1890; Cincinnati, 1890), Greek concordance number 5543. On the other hand, in Joseph Henry Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, which was the standard New Testament English lexicon in the late nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century, the entry on *chrēstos* never mentions "easy" as an interpretive option. Referencing its use in Matthew 11:30 in relation to "yoke," it claims that *chrēstos* takes the opposite meaning of "burdensome." But this is not so much a lexical definition as it is a declaration based on its interpretation of the verse. See Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [. . .] (New York, 1889), under "χρηστός," 671–72.

87. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), under "χρηστός," 484, wherein the entry mentions that the "EV" (English Versions) renders it as "easy."

88. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1929; repr., Hendrickson, 1997), 693. The only two examples they discuss are Luke 6:35 and 1 Cor. 15:33.

(2) "pertaining to meeting a relatively high standard of value," (3) "pertaining to being morally good and benevolent," and (4) "the quality of beneficence, kindness." Under the first sense, BDAG includes Matthew 11:30 and glosses *chrēstos* as "easy," citing Psalms of Solomon 8:32 and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.98 as parallels.[89] However, neither passage supports this meaning. Psalms of Solomon 8:32 (verse 38 in some editions) reads, "And we will not depart from you, Lord, for your judgments upon us are *chrēstos.*"[90] Here, as in LXX Psalm 118:39b (Ps. 119:39, KJV), *chrēstos* modifies "judgments," which would be incoherent if *chrēstos* were rendered as "easy." Even "comfortable," BDAG's broader gloss, fails to capture the sense that God's judgments are good and just—not soothing or painless.

Likewise, in *Jewish Antiquities* 3.98, Josephus recounts Moses's delayed return from Sinai and how the people continued to wait for him with an "expectation of some good [*chrēstos*] news."[91] The word here refers to hopeful or favorable news about Moses—not "easy" news, which would misrepresent the emotional tone. In both cases, BDAG's cited parallels do not substantiate its gloss of "easy" for *chrēstos* in Matthew 11:30.

Further weight is added by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (*TWNT*), which devotes seven pages to the term.[92] Their treatment traces *chrēstos* from its early usage in Herodotus, through the LXX, Philo, Josephus, the New Testament, and early Christian writings.[93] While their discussion of Matthew 11:30 is brief, they describe the term as expressing "the fullness of the kindness and friendliness of God manifested in His person and work" (German: "*Die ganze Fülle der in seiner Botschaft und Person*

89. BDAG, 1090.

90. See Psalms of Solomon 8:32, trans. R. B. Wright in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the "Old Testament"* [. . .], ed. James H. Charlesworth (Doubleday, 1985), 660: "For your judgments upon us are good." Compare *NETS Psalms of Solomon* 8:32: "For your judgments upon us are kind."

91. Εἴα τὸ προσδοκᾶν τι χρηστὸν περὶ τἀνδρὸς. Greek text and English translation taken from Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.98, trans. H. St. Thackeray, LCL 242 (Harvard University Press, 1930), 362–63.

92. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theologische Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament,* 10 vols. (W. Kohlhammer, 1932–1973), 10:472–78 (hereafter cited as *TWNT*). For the English version, see K. Weiss, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 9:483–89 (hereafter cited as *TDNT*).

93. *TWNT,* 10:472–78; *TDNT,* 9:483–89.

offenbaren Güte und Freundlichkeit Gottes gelegt").[94] Though somewhat general, this description again aligns *chrēstos* with kindness and beneficence rather than ease. The term "easy" (German: "*einfach*") is used nowhere in the entry.[95]

Finally, if additional confirmation is needed that *chrēstos* does not mean "easy," we may note that Greek has a distinct adjective that unambiguously means "easy": *eukopos* (εὔκοπος).[96] This word is used seven times in the New Testament—twice in Matthew, twice in Mark, and three times in Luke—and in every case, its meaning is unmistakably "easy." For example, in Matthew 9:5 (NRSVue; compare Mark 2:9; Luke 5:23), Jesus asks, "Which is easier [*eukopos*]: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'?"[97] Likewise, in Matthew 19:24 (NRSVue; compare Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25), Jesus declares, "It is easier [*eukopos*] for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." These examples demonstrate that the Gospel of Matthew employs *eukopos* in its natural and lexical sense to mean "easy."[98] If the author had intended to describe Jesus's yoke as "easy," he could have used this term.[99] The use of *chrēstos* demonstrates that a different meaning was intended.

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94. *TWNT,* 10.476; *TDNT,* 9:487.

95. While the discussion associates the *chrēstos* of Christ's yoke with the benefits (that is, "kindness and friendliness") of being yoked to him, it does not indicate that "ease" or "easiness" is one of them. In modern German translations of the Bible, such as the *Einheitsübersetzung* (2016) and *Schlachter* (2000), *chrēstos* is rendered "sanft" ("soft/gentle") in Matthew 11:30, following Luther. On the other hand, in the *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* (2011), *chrēstos* is rendered "drückt nicht" ("does not weigh down"). However, neither "soft/gentle" nor "does not weigh down" is a lexically acceptable meaning of *chrēstos*.

96. See BDAG, 407. Another adjective that carries a meaning like "easy" is εὔκολος, -ον. But it never appears in Matthew and appears only once in the Greek Bible at LXX 2 Samuel 15:3: καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ἀβεσσαλὼμ Ἰδοὺ οἱ λόγοι σου ἀγαθοὶ καὶ εὔκολοι, καὶ ἀκούων οὐκ ἔστιν σου παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως. *NETS* translates the passage as follows: "And Abessalom said to him, 'Behold, your claims are good and easy, and there is no one from the king to hear you.'"

97. Here, the adjective appears in its comparative state (εὐκοπώτερον; "easier"), but the essential meaning "easy" is readily apparent, since Jesus's question involves two options.

98. The seventh time this adjective appears in the New Testament is in Luke 16:17 (which has no parallel in Matthew and Mark), where Jesus states, "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail" (KJV). Greek Text: εὐκοπώτερον δέ ἐστι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν παρελθεῖν, ἢ τοῦ νόμου μίαν κεραίαν πεσεῖν.

99. That is, ὁ ζυγός μου εὔκοπος and not ὁ ζυγός μου χρηστός.

The Meaning of *Chrēstos* in Matthew 11:30

While it is now apparent that *chrēstos* should not be rendered as "easy" in Matthew 11:30, what, then, is the most appropriate translation? Early Christian commentary offers little substantive analysis of the meaning of *chrēstos* in the passage.[100] While a close parallel appears in the *Gospel of Thomas,* it adds little to clarify the term's precise meaning.[101] The *Pistis Sophia,* a third-century AD text claiming to preserve post-resurrection sayings of Jesus, renders the phrase using a Coptic word meaning "gentle" or "mild."[102] While this reading—"my yoke is gentle" or "mild"—is an improvement over "easy" and closer in tone to the Greek, the Coptic term used corresponds to a different Greek adjective. It, therefore, cannot serve as a direct interpretive witness to *chrēstos.*[103]

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100. For a helpful, albeit limited, discussion of the term *chrēstos* in early Christian literature, see Bates, "Paradox of the Easy Yoke," 14–15.

101. The *Gospel of Thomas* preserves 114 logia ("sayings") attributed to Jesus. Some of these sayings are unique, while others find parallels to sayings found in the canonical Gospels. Logion 90 of the *Gospel of Thomas* is remarkably close to Matthew 11:28–30. Sticking with just the material that overlaps with Matthew 11:30, it reads, "Jesus said: 'Come unto Me, for (*ouchrēstos*; ⲟⲩⲭⲣⲏⲥⲧⲟⲥ) is my yoke and my lordship is gentle, and you shall find rest for yourselves.'" Coptic text for translation is taken from A. Guillaumont, Henri-Charles Peuch, Gilles Quispel, Wilter Till, and Yassah 'Abd Al Masih, trans., *The Gospel According to Thomas* (E. J. Brill, 1959), 46: ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲓ̅ⲏ̅ⲥ̅ ϫⲉ ⲁⲙⲏⲉⲓⲧⲛ̅ ⲫⲁⲣⲟⲉⲓ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲭⲣⲏⲥⲧⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲛⲁϩⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲁⲙⲛ̅ⲧⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲟⲩⲣ̅ⲣ̅ⲁⲫ ⲧⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϩⲉ ⲁⲩⲁⲛⲁⲡⲁⲥⲓⲥ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̅. There are some noticeable differences between this saying and what appears in Matthew 11:30, but focusing on the decisive phrase regarding Jesus's yoke, the Coptic employs *chrēstos* (ⲭⲣⲏⲥⲧⲟⲥ), which is a Greek loanword. Thus, the *Gospel of Thomas* does not really help us clarify the meaning of *chrēstos* in Matthew 11:30. On the use of the Greek loanword χρηστός in Coptic, see Hans Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (Walter de Gruyter, 2002), under "χρηστός," 885, where the translation given is "Güte" ("good").

102. On the *Pistis Sophia,* see the discussion in Henri-Charles Puech, "The Pistis Sophia," in *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume 1: Gospels and Related Writings,* rev. ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson (James Clarke, 1991), 361–69. In book 2, section 95, the risen Jesus issues the following statement: "For this cause have I [Jesus] said to you aforetime: 'All ye who are heavy under your burden, come hither unto me, and I will quicken you. For my burden is light, and my yoke is gentle." Coptic text taken for translation is from Carl Schmidt, ed., *Pistis Sophia,* trans. Violet Macdermot (E. J. Brill, 1978), 438–40: ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲟⲉ ⲁⲓϫⲟⲟⲥ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̅ ⲙ̅ⲡⲓⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲱ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲧϩⲁⲣⲟⲟⲩⲱ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲧϩⲟⲥⲉ ϩⲁ ⲧⲉⲩⲉⲧⲡⲱ· ⲁⲙⲛ̅ⲧⲛ̅ ⲉⲣⲁⲧ ⲧⲁϯⲙ̅ⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̅ ϫⲉ ⲥⲁⲥⲱⲟⲩ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲛ̅ⲑⲓ ⲧⲁⲉⲧⲡⲱ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲣ̅ⲣ̅ⲁⲫ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲛⲁϩⲃⲉϥ. The Coptic adjective *rmrash* (ⲣⲙⲣⲁⲫ) carries the meaning "gentle" or "mild." See W. E. Crum, comp., *A Coptic Dictionary* (Clarendon Press, 1939), under "ⲣⲁⲫ," 308.

103. The Greek adjective typically associated with the Coptic *rmrash* (ⲣⲙⲣⲁⲫ) is *praus* (πραΰς), which means "gentle," "mild," or even "meek." See Crum, *Coptic Dictionary,*

In later patristic commentary, early Christian authors rarely comment on the phrase directly. Origen is among the earliest Christian authors to comment on the passage and offer insight. In a *catena* ("chain") on Matthew 11:30 attributed to Origen, he remarks, "The yoke is *chrēstos,* since it is not a punisher like the Law [of Moses]; and the burden light, since the rule of repentance lies in simple and easy efforts."[104] Thus, Origen views Jesus's yoke as something that does not bring punishment, chastisement, or torment. The term "easy" is not the opposite of these, but Origen defines it as something that will not harm. Thus, the apparent connotation of *chrēstos* in Origen's work carries a meaning something akin to "comfortable" or perhaps "gentle."[105]

Gregory of Nyssa (c. AD 335–394) provides some contextual remarks on Matthew 11:30, giving clarity for the meaning of *chrēstos.* He states, "Let us obey the one who commands; let us become Christ's yoke, binding ourselves with the bonds of love. Let us not shake off such a yoke; it is *chrēstos,* it is light, it does not bruise the neck of the one who bears it, but smoothens it."[106] Since the yoke "does not bruise the neck," Gregory seems to define *chrēstos* as "gentle" or perhaps "comfortable." A contemporary, Basil of Caesarea (c. AD 329–379), in a homily on baptism, invites the unbaptized to take on the yoke of Christ: "We invite you to life. . . . Why

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under "ρᾳ," 308; and *DAG,* under "πρᾶος" and "πραΰς," 1734–35. Since *praus* occurs in Matthew 11:29 ("Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am *meek* and lowly in heart" [KJV, emphasis added]), one wonders if the *Pistis Sophia* could have transposed the word so that it is applied to the yoke. Compare Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the *meek* [*praus*]: for they shall inherit the earth" (KJV, emphasis added).

104. Origen, *Catena on Matthew* [GCS 41.1] at Matthew 11:30: Χρηστὸς ὁ ζυγός, ἐπεὶ μή ἐστιν κολαστὴς ὡς ὁ νόμος· ἐλαφρὸν δὲ τὸ φορτίον, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἐν ἁπλοῖς ἐπιχειρήμασι καὶ εὐκόλοις ὁ τῆς μετανοίας ὑπογραμμός. Here, Origen contrasts *chrēstos* with *kolastos* (κολαστής), which means "punisher," or "chastiser." LSJ, under "κολαστής," 971.

105. In a second passage on Matthew 11:30, preserved only via a later Latin translation (Origen originally wrote in Greek), in his *Commentary on Romans,* Origen states the following: "But we must make provision that Christ should be that ruler whose yoke is *suave* and whose burden is light, and not the devil, whose dominion is burdensome. For it is wickedness that sits enthroned upon a leaden weight." (Origen, *Comm. Rom*. 5.7.8: sed hoc prouidendum est ut Christum regem habeat cuius iugum suave est et onus leue, et non diabolum cuius regnum graue est. Iniquitas enim est quae sedet super talentum plumbi.) Here, the Latin term for *chrēstos* is *suave,* which carries a range of meanings from "sweet" to "kind" to "pleasant." Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin,* under "suávis," 255.

106. *De pauperibus amandis ii.* See A. van Heck, ed., *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 9.1 (Brill, 1967), 122: Ὑπακούσωμεν τῷ κελεύοντι· γενώμεθα τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑποζύγιον, ταῖς ζεύγλαις τῆς ἀγάπης ἑαυτοὺς ἐνδήσαντες. μὴ ἀποσεισώμεθα τὸν τοιοῦτον ζυγόν· χρηστός ἐστιν, ἐλαφρός ἐστιν, οὐ τρίβει τὸν αὐχένα τοῦ ὑπελθόντος, ἀλλὰ λεαίνει.

do you fear the yoke, as a heifer that never has borne it? It is *chrēstos*: it is light: it does not hurt the neck; but it ornaments it: it is not a yoke put on forcibly: it must be cheerfully assumed."[107]

Finally, Ambrose of Milan (c. AD 339–397) gives a rather lengthy discussion of Jesus's yoke in his eulogy of the emperor Valentinian II (ruled AD 375–392). Although he is writing in Latin and uses the word *suave*, his remarks about the yoke are insightful for the present discussion.

> But perhaps you may say: How does Lamentations call the yoke heavy, when the Lord in the Gospel has said: "for My yoke is *suave*, and My burden light"? Now, first understand that the Greek has "yoke" only, and has not added "heavy." Notice this, also, that, although it was so in Lamentations, in the Gospel He said "*suave* yoke" and "light burden," not "light yoke." For the yoke of the Word can be heavy, yet *suave*; heavy to the youth, heavy to the young man whose age is in fuller flower, so that he is unwilling to offer the neck of his mind in subjection to the yoke of the Word. The yoke of the Word can seem heavy because of the burdens of discipline, the rigor of amendment, the weight of abstinence, and the curbing of lust, yet it is *suave* because of the fruitfulness of grace, the hope of eternal reward, the sweetness of a purer conscience. Still, He called the yoke of the Word "*suave*" and the burden of conscience "light," because for him who has taken up the yoke of the Word with a patient neck, the burden of discipline cannot be heavy.[108]

We also see that some ancient Christians interpreted Jesus's statement as a contrast between the law of Moses and the law of Christ (that is, his gospel), with the former understood as burdensome and the latter

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107. *Homily* 13 [PG 31.425]: Ἐπὶ ζωήν σε καλοῦμεν . . . τί φοβῇ τὸν ζυγὸν, ὥσπερ δάμαλίς τις ἀπειρόζυγος; χρηστός ἐστιν, ἐλαφρός ἐστιν· οὐ τρίβει τὸν αὐχένα, ἀλλὰ δοξάζει. Οὐ γὰρ δεσμεῖται ἡ ζεύγλη περὶ τὸν τράχηλον, αὐτεξούσιον ἐπιζητεῖ τὸν ὑφέλκοντα. See Basilii, "Homilia in Sanctum Baptisma" in *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca,* ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 31 (Paris, 1857), col. 425.

108. Ambrose, "De obitu Valentiniani consolatio 11," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina,* ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 16 (Paris, 1880), col. 1362C. The Latin reads as follows: tamen et illud adverte, quia, etsi ita esset in threnis, in evangelio "iugum suave" dixerit et "onus leve," non iugum leve. potest enim grave iugum verbi esse, sed suave: grave adulescenti, grave iuveni, cuius aetas est florulentior, ut nolit iugo verbi subiciendam animi praebere cervicem. potest et grave verbi iugum videri propter onera disciplinae, austeritatem correctionis, pondus abstinentiae restrictionem que lasciviae: suave tamen est fructu gratiae, spe remunerationis aeternae, purioris conscientiae suavitate. tamen iugum verbi suave dixit, onus oboedientiae leve, quoniam ei, qui iugum verbi patienti cervice susceperit, disciplinae onus grave esse non poterit.

as gracious.[109] Yet even in these discussions, the precise meaning of *chrēstos* is not clearly articulated and established.

Like many Greek adjectives, *chrēstos* has a broad semantic range shaped by its context. This is not unusual, as various Greek words can carry one meaning in one context and a different meaning in another.[110] A survey across literary, inscriptional, and documentary corpora reveals uniformly positive connotations—but never the meaning "easy." In funerary inscriptions, it frequently appears as part of a farewell formula. There, the best rendering is "excellent" or "virtuous," describing the praiseworthy character of the deceased.[111] A translation such as "my yoke is excellent," while closer than "easy," still misses the specific nuance, as Jesus does not appear to be speaking of the yoke's moral character. In broader usage, *chrēstos* frequently modifies food and drink (such as grains, olives, oil, and wine) to distinguish items of especially good or refined quality. In such cases, the most accurate rendering is "fine" or "high quality."[112] Yet again, the phrase "my yoke

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109. An insightful discussion outlining this reading of the passage among early Christian commentators can be found in Mitchell, "Yoke Is Easy, but What of Its Meaning?," 326–30. See also the discussion below.

110. For example, take the Greek word "yoke" (ζυγός; *zugos*). In Matthew 11:29–30, the clear meaning of the Greek *zugos* is "yoke"—an implement used to harness a draft animal or, perhaps in some instances, to bind two animals together at the neck to maximize their pulling force for plowing or for drawing a cart. "Yoke" is the dominant meaning when the term *zugos* appears in the New Testament (Matt. 11:29–30; Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1; 1 Tim. 6:1). But when *zugos* appears in Revelation 6:5, "yoke" no longer makes sense. In this verse, one of the Four Apocalyptic Horsemen, the rider on the "black horse," is carrying a *zugos* in his hand. Beyond the difficulty of trying to carry a yoke in one's hand, the next verse (Rev. 6:6) mentions that a monetary reckoning is being carried out: "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny" (KJV). The meaning of *zugos* in Revelation 6:5 is not "yoke" but rather a "balance" or a "scale," since this was how money and dry goods, like wheat and barley, were measured.

111. Lincoln H. Blumell, "A Jewish Epitaph from the Fayum," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 46, no. 2 (2015): 182–97, esp. 189–90. On the epigraphic use of this adjective, see Marcus N. Tod, "Laudatory Epithets in Greek Epitaphs," *Annual of the British School at Athens* 46 (1951): 185–86. See also Pieter W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE–700 CE)* (Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991), 62–64.

112. For example, BGU 16.2610.9–10 (9 BC): "For the wheat is high-quality" (ὁ γὰρ πυ[ρὸ]ς χρηστὸς ἐστίν); O.Krok. 2.282.9 (AD 98–117): "the fine olive oil" (τὸ ἔλαιον τὸ χρηστόν); P.Oxy. 17.2148.3–4 (AD 27): "I received the flour that was high-quality" (ἐκομισάμην τὴν σεμίδ[αλ]ιν χρηστὴν οὖσαν); P.Oxy. 14.1759.8–9 (second century AD): "of high-quality fish sauce" (γαρίου χρηστοῦ). For P.Oxy texts, see "The Oxyrhynchus Papyri," University of Oxford, accessed February 9, 2026, https://oxyrhynchus.web.ox.ac.uk/.

is high quality" does not adequately capture the sense of Matthew 11:30; Jesus is not making a claim about the material or aesthetic value of his yoke.

To refine the meaning further, one may consider antonyms of *chrēstos,* which help sharpen its semantic core. A commonly used opposite of *chrēstos* is *kakos* (κακός), meaning "bad," "ugly," or "wicked" depending on context.[113] In *Oedipus Rex,* Sophocles contrasts *chrēstos* and *kakos* to distinguish morally upright from morally corrupt individuals.[114] Similarly, in the maxim quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33 (likely from Menander), "Bad company corrupts good morals," *chrēstos* signifies ethical virtue in contrast to *kakos.*[115] Another near-synonym of *kakos* and a frequent antonym of *chrēstos* is *ponēros* (πονηρός), which can mean "evil," "harmful," or "worthless."[116] In Plutarch's *Life of Phocion,* the statesman distinguishes between himself and his rival—whom he accuses of aspiring to be called *chrēstos* while being *ponēros*—highlighting the term's connotation of "worthwhile" or "beneficial" as opposed to "worthless."[117]

This moral-qualitative sense points to the etymological root of *chrēstos.* The adjective derives from the Greek verbal root *chrē-* (χρη-), often associated with the notion of utility or use. The core verbal idea is to "use" or to make use of; *chrēstos* is thus a deverbal adjective meaning "useful" or

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113. *DAG,* under "κακός," 1016.

114. Sophocles, *Oedipus tyrranus* 609–10: οὐ γὰρ δίκαιον οὔτε τοὺς κακοὺς μάτην χρηστοὺς νομίζειν οὔτε τοὺς χρηστοὺς κακούς ("Both are unjust, wrongly to think bad men good and wrongly to think good men bad").

115. See footnote 43. In Menander's sayings, the theme of "bad" is treated: φασὶν κακίστους οἱ πονηροὶ τοὺς κακούς ("The wicked call the very worst people bad").

116. *DAG,* under "πονηρός," 1721. See also J. Diggle et al., *Cambridge Greek Lexicon,* under "χρηστός," 2:1509; and LSJ, under "χρηστός," 2007.

117. Plutarch, *Phocion* 10.2: "'Put down Aristogeiton, too, as lame and worthless.' So that one might wonder how and why a man so harsh and stern got the surname of The Good" ("Γράφε καὶ Ἀριστογείτονα χωλὸν καὶ πονηρόν." ὥστε θαυμάζειν ὅπως καὶ ὁπόθεν τραχὺς οὕτως ἀνὴρ καὶ σκυθρωπὸς ἐκτήσατο τὴν τοῦ χρηστοῦ προσηγορίαν). See Plutarch, *Lives: Sertorius and Eumenes, Phocion and Cato the Younger,* trans. Bernadotte Perrin, LCL 8 (Harvard University Press, 1919), 166–67.

Turning to the Gospel of Matthew, the word πονηρός appears twenty-three times and typically connotes "wickedness" or "evil" (5:11, 37, 39, 45; 6:13, 23; 7:11, 17–18; 9:4; 12:34–35, 39, 45, 49; 15:19; 16:4; 18:32; 20:15; 22:10; 25:26). It is once used for "evil" or worthless fruit (7:17–18), and in one instance, it is used as an epithet for the devil—that is, "the wicked one" (13:19; compare 13:38–39). On the other hand, the word κακός appears three times in Matthew: 21:41; 24:48; and 27:23. In 21:41 and 24:48, it refers to "wicked" or "bad" people; in 27:23, it refers to the concept of "evil" or "wickedness."

serviceable.[118] From this primary sense arises the more general notion of something being "good." This nuance is clearly in play in Philemon 1:11, where Paul makes a wordplay on the name Onesimus ("useful")[119] using the related adjectives *achrēstos* (ἀχρηστός, "useless")[120] and *euchrēstos* (εὔχρηστος, "useful," "serviceable").[121] It reads, "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me" (NRSVue).[122] The contrast between *achrēstos* and *euchrēstos* reinforces the root idea of practical benefit and suitability for service.

Such a sense fits the context of Matthew 11:30 far better than "easy." Jesus's statement "my yoke is *chrēstos*" speaks to the character of the yoke, not as morally excellent or aesthetically refined, but as something useful and even beneficial to the one who bears it. A contemporary parallel comes from a first-century AD letter from Egypt, roughly contemporaneous with the Gospel of Matthew, in which the writer requests a specific material: "If you find a *chrēstos* tree trunk . . . , I will take it."[123] The request is not merely for a "good" tree trunk in an abstract sense but for one that is "useful"—that is, serviceable for the sender's practical purposes.

In light of this evidence, the most accurate rendering of *chrēstos* in Matthew 11:30 is likely "useful" or "serviceable" and may even extend to "profitable" or "beneficial." Each of these terms conveys the functional value of Jesus's yoke. The phrase "my yoke is good," while lexically possible, is probably too general. Renderings such as "kind," "gentle," and "comfortable" are interpretive, often driven by the juxtaposed statement,

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118. Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek,* Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary series 10, 2 vols. (Brill, 2010), under "χρη," 2:1648–49; see also Georges Redard, *Recherches sur Χρή, Χρῆσθαι,* Étude sémantique (Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1953).

119. This is a simple Greek name (that is, directly derived from an adjective or noun) based on the Greek adjective ὀνήσιμος, -ον. On the meaning of the name and adjective, see BDAG, 711.

120. BDAG, 160.

121. BDAG, 417.

122. Philemon 1:11 (KJV) reads, "Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me." This is the only time this term appears in the New Testament. However, it occurs ten times in the LXX: *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:21; 3:11; 4:5; 13:10; 16:29; Sirach 16:1; 37:19; Hosea 8:8; 2 Maccabees 7:5; 3 Maccabees 3:39. Its meaning in these passages is either "useless" or "worthless."

123. O. Berenike 2.195.12–13 (dated AD 50–75): τὸ μονόξ[υλον ἐὰν(?)] | χρηστὸν εὕρητε . . . λαμβάνο (*l.* λαμβάνω). See Papyri.info, The Duke Collaboratory for Classics Computing and the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, accessed February 6, 2026, https://papyri.info/apis/berenike.apis.195.

"my burden is light." These translations attempt to soften the idea of the yoke, assuming it must be made less severe to match the second half of the verse.[124] Yet *chrēstos* does not primarily mean "gentle" or "comfortable." Instead, the yoke Jesus offers is useful; it accomplishes what it is intended to do.

Jesus's "Useful" Yoke and Matthew 11:28–30

The sayings cluster that concludes in Matthew 11:30 begins in verse 28 with Jesus's invitation to those who "labor and are heavy laden" (KJV).[125] This is a general call to the weary and burdened, promising that those who come to him will find "rest."[126] Thematically, this resembles other promises made in the Gospels where Jesus invites the hungry or thirsty into fellowship and assures them that they will be filled.[127]

In verse 29, a second invitation is extended: Jesus urges his hearers to take his yoke upon themselves and "learn from" him. In antiquity, the yoke symbol often connoted submission, oppression, or humiliation.[128]

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124. See the discussion in footnote 125.

125. Matthew 11:28: οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι. Compare NRSVue, which says, "Who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens." Literally, the Greek πεφορτισμένοι (from φορτίζω) just means to "bear a load" or to "carry a burden." This phrase literally translates as follows: "who toil and are burdened."

126. The words for "rest" are ἀναπαύω and ἀνάπαυσις (v. 29). BDAG, 69, meanings 1 and 3.

127. For example, see Matthew 5:6; John 4:6–15; 6:48–58; and 7:37–39.

128. Both Herodotus and Aeschylus equate the image of the yoke with slavery: Herodotus, *Histories* 7.8: οὕτω οἵ τε ἡμῖν αἴτιοι ἔξουσι δούλιον ζυγὸν οἵ τε ἀναίτιοι ("Thus both those who are guilty toward us and those who are innocent will have a servile yoke"); Aeschylus, *Septem contra Thebes* 71, 471: ζυγοῖσι δουλίοισι μὴ δῶτε σχεθεῖν ("Do not allow [them] to be bound by slavish yokes"). Rome periodically made defeated enemy combatants pass "under the yoke" (*sub iugum missi*) when they were defeated as a sign of humiliation and future servitude. For the first example, see Livy 3.28.10, where in 457 BC the Roman military commander Cincinnatus forced the conquered Aequi to pass under a spear serving as a yoke. This motif is also present in certain biblical and extrabiblical sources: Psalms of Solomon 17:30: Καὶ ἕξει λαοὺς ἐθνῶν δουλεύειν αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τὸν ζυγὸν αὐτοῦ ("He will make the peoples of the nations serve him beneath his yoke"); Zephaniah 3:9: τοῦ δουλεύειν αὐτῷ ὑπὸ ζυγὸν ἕνα ("in order to serve him under one yoke"); Galatians 5:1: Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε ("For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" [NRSVue]); 1 Timothy 6:1:Ὅσοι εἰσὶν ὑπὸ ζυγὸν δοῦλοι, τοὺς ἰδίους δεσπότας πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους ἡγείσθωσαν, ἵνα μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία βλασφημῆται ("Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed" [NRSVue]). Early Christian authors likewise spoke of the yoke as synonymous with servitude and slavery: Clement, *Miscellanies* 2.5.22.5: ἡ γραφή φησι,

However, it could evoke other meanings. One such meaning was discipleship, as in a teacher-student relationship in which the student metaphorically assumed the teacher's yoke.[129] Another meaning evokes the image of close association and mutual participation; thus, a yoke also symbolized partnership.[130]

It is unclear from Matthew 11:29 which kind of yoke metaphor is intended. In antiquity, both single and double yokes existed. A single yoke was used to harness a single draft animal; a double yoke bound two draft animals together to generate greater pull. If Matthew 11:29 indicates a single yoke, the verse may be issuing a call to discipleship, with Jesus clearly positioned as the teacher (or master). On the other hand, if it means to evoke the image of a double yoke, then there is an invitation to discipleship where one is yoked side by side with Jesus. In either case, the yoke symbol in Matthew 11:29 is not intended to represent oppression or humiliation. Jesus follows the imperative to put on his yoke with his self-description that he is "meek and lowly in heart" (KJV)[131] and the promise, citing Jeremiah 6:16, that his yoke will bring "rest unto your souls" (KJV).[132]

Matthew 11:30, which completes this sayings unit, reads, "For my yoke is useful, and my burden is light." The first phrase, traditionally

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καθάπερ καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ «δούλειον» καλοῦσι «ζυγόν» ("Scripture says, just as also the poets call the yoke 'servile'"); see also Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 2.35: Λακεδαιμονίοις δούλειον ὑπεισῆλθεν ζυγὸν Ἀπόλλων ("Apollo placed a servile yoke upon the Lacedaemonians").

129. This connotation appears in Sirach 51:23–26, especially in verse 26: τὸν τράχηλον ὑμῶν ὑπόθετε ὑπὸ ζυγόν, καὶ ἐπιδεξάσθω ἡ ψυχὴ ὑμῶν παιδείαν· ἐγγύς ἐστιν εὑρεῖν αὐτήν ("Place your neck under the yoke [of Wisdom] and let your soul receive instruction; it is to be found close by"). A similar meaning also appears in Didache 6.2: εἰ μὲν γὰρ δύνασαι βαστάσαι ὅλον τὸν ζυγὸν τοῦ Κυρίου, τέλειος ἔσῃ· εἰ δ' οὐ δύνασαι, ὃ δύνῃ, τοῦτο ποίει ("If you are able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able, then do what you can"). See also Jared Marcum, "First-Century Interpretations of Christ's Yoke," *BYU Studies* 65, no. 1 (2026): 37–57.

130. Spouses were sometimes described as "yoke-fellows." The Greek word συζύγος (*suzugos*), a compound word incorporating the preposition σύν (*sun,* "with, together with") and ζύγος (*zygos,* "yoke"), is periodically used for "spouse," since it signifies that you are "yoked together." BDAG, 954; LSJ, under "συζύγέω," 1670. This term appears in Philippians 4:3, where Paul addresses a member of that congregation as "true yokefellow" (KJV; σύζυγε γνήσιε). Some early Christians, like Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 3.6.53) and Origen (*Comm. Rom.* 1.3), believed that Paul is addressing his spouse in this verse by using this title. Compare 2 Corinthians 6:14.

131. Matthew 11:29: ὅτι πραΰς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ. Compare NRSVue: "For I am gentle and humble in heart."

132. Compare footnote 9.

rendered as "my yoke is easy," is better translated as "my yoke is useful," as established above. In this context, *chrēstos* denotes utility and benefit, not effortlessness. Jesus is not claiming that following him is easy in the modern sense of comfort or simplicity. Instead, he is promising that discipleship is useful and ultimately beneficial.

The widespread rendering of *chrēstos* as "easy" in English Bibles is almost certainly influenced by the second half of the verse, which reads, "and my burden is light." Translators from Tyndale onward seem to have inferred that if the "burden is light," the yoke of necessity must also be "easy." However, the parallel statements "my yoke is *chrēstos*" and "my burden is light" are not conditioned on each other and can operate independently. Just because Matthew 11:30 states that Jesus's "burden is light" does not necessitate that *chrēstos* must be interpreted as "easy"—a meaning the term never carries. Based on the meaning of the adjective, the focus in Matthew 11:30 is that Jesus's yoke has positive value because it benefits those who take it upon themselves. Furthermore, Jesus directs the promise that his "burden is light" to those who already "labour and are heavy laden" (11:28, KJV); Jesus's yoke offers something better.

A secondary reason for the rendering "easy" might be found in a particular hermeneutical approach to the larger passage (11:28–30), which views it as a contrast between the law of Moses and the gospel. According to this view, the Mosaic law is heavy and oppressive, whereas Christ's yoke is the opposite. The interpretive framework for this view dates to antiquity and persists through the medieval and early modern periods.[133] One of the most explicit ancient examples of this approach can be found in Didymus the Blind's (c. AD 313–398) *Commentary on*

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133. Similar Christian examples can be found in Athanasius (c. AD 296–373), *Expositions in Psalmos* (PG 27.65); and Gregory of Nazianzus (c. AD 329–390), *Oratio in laudem Basilii*, 45 (PG 36.648). See also the discussion given in Mitchell, "Yoke Is Easy, but What of Its Meaning?," 322–30.

Moving into the Early Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica,* reads the passage as contrasting the *lex Iudaica* with the *lex evangelica* (*Summa Theologica* 1/2 q.107, a.4). Erasmus, in the second edition (1519) of his *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum,* interprets Matthew 11:30 as contrasting the burdens of the Jewish law (and implicitly Catholic ritualism) with the liberating gospel. See Erasmus, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (1519), 43–44. Regarding Catholicism, Erasmus discusses the burdens and hardships the church placed upon its members. In the subsequent editions (1522, 1527, and 1535), the notes on the passage are slightly enlarged. In the first edition (1516), the note on Matthew 11:30 does not contain this discussion. Here, it may be added that Erasmus preferred the Latin *commodus* ("suitable, fitting, appropriate") to *sauvis* ("kind, good, sweet, gracious, or pleasant") that appeared in the Vulgate.

Zechariah (3.142), where he contrasts Jesus's yoke in Matthew 11:30 with the yoke of the Mosaic law: "In addition to this interpretation, both peoples [Jews and Christians] that are called are implied by the text: one from the circumcision, saddled according to the letter and shadow with the yoke of the Law, referred to as a heavy yoke. . . . After all, it was not logical for the disciples of the Gospel to submit themselves any further to the burden and heavy yoke after having come to faith in the one who said, 'my yoke is *chrēstos*.'"[134]

Tyndale, the first to render *chrēstos* as "easy," does not offer an explicit interpretation of the passage's context. However, in his comment on Matthew 11:30, he remarks, "The cross is an easy thing to them that perceive the gospel."[135] Although the verse does not mention the "cross," Tyndale appears to associate it with the yoke, interpreting both as "easy" when viewed through the lens of grace.[136] In another passage, Tyndale describes the covenant of Christ as "a more easy and kind testament," clearly contrasting it with the law.[137] Such statements suggest that this broader theological contrast likely informed his rendering of Matthew 11:30. This interpretive tradition persists into current scholarship and even some modern biblical translations.[138] For example, the *Amplified Bible* (2015) renders Matthew 11:28 as follows: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavily burdened [by religious rituals that provide no peace]." The bracketed addition introduces a polemical reading of the passage as a critique of Jewish legalism, framing Jesus's yoke as a foil to religious rituals.

Despite this longstanding interpretation, there is no evidence in Matthew 11:28–30 that Jesus is offering an "easier" alternative to the Mosaic law or, as is often assumed, that this passage is a tirade against oppressive

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134. [Πρὸς τῇ] νοήσει ταύτῃ, σημαίνονται διὰ τῆς λέξεως ἀ[μφότε]ροι οἱ κληθέντες λαοί, ὅ τε ἐκ περιτομῆς, ὑ[πεζευγ]μένος τῷ ζυγῷ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ γράμμα καὶ τὴν σκ[ιὰν] νόμου, καλουμένῳ βαρεῖ ζυγῷ, . . . οὐ γὰρ ἔτι ἀκόλουθον ὑπῆρχεν ὑποκεῖσθαι τῷ ἄχθει καὶ τῷ βαρεῖ ζυγῷ τοὺς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου μαθητάς, πεισθέντα[ς] τῷ εἰρηκότι· «Ὁ ζυγός μου χρηστός.» See Robert C. Hill, trans., *Didymus the Blind: Commentary on Zechariah,* The Fathers of the Church, vol. 111 (Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 216.

135. William Tyndale, *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of the Holy Scriptures Together with the Practice of Prelates* (Cambridge, 1849), 232.

136. With this note, was Tyndale thinking about Jesus's injunction in Matthew 16:24 to take up the cross (compare Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23) and likening that metaphor to having a yoke placed upon oneself?

137. William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures* (Cambridge, 1848), 364.

138. See the discussion in Mitchell, "Yoke Is Easy, but What of Its Meaning?," 322–23.

Jewish legalism. In Matthew, there are instances where Jesus expressly enjoins his auditors to obey the law (such as Matt. 8:4). The Matthew 11 passage does not appear, therefore, to be an antinomian invective. Jesus's invitation is addressed to "all . . . that labour and are heavy laden" (Matt. 11:28, KJV)—not to those wearied by legal observance but to the weary in general. The quotation from Jeremiah 6:16, which promises "rest" (KJV) to the soul, further supports this reading. Moreover, within the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus consistently affirms the value of the law. In fact, only Matthew records Jesus's declaration to "think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17, KJV).[139] Nowhere in Matthew's Gospel does Jesus explicitly position his teachings as antithetical to the law's value or moral demands. Furthermore, in Matthew 5:21–48, Jesus expands on the law by requiring more than what is written in the law.

Conclusion

The promise that "my yoke is *chrēstos*" should be understood as an invitation to a kind of discipleship that is useful and brings benefit, not merely relief. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus explains the benefits of aligning with his teachings. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, he compares the "wise man," who hears and does Jesus's words, to one who "built his house upon a rock," which house withstands the rain, floods, and winds (Matt. 7:24–25, KJV). The parable highlights the durability and reliability of a life of discipleship built on Jesus's instruction. Likewise, the declaration in Matthew 11:30 that "my yoke is useful" assures the follower that discipleship in Christ is efficacious. It brings stability, relief, and ongoing transformation.

The translation of *chrēstos* as "easy" in Matthew 11:30 has shaped centuries of interpretation, but a close philological, lexical, and contextual analysis reveals that this rendering is misleading. The word *chrēstos,* as used in both biblical and extra-biblical Greek, never connotes ease in the sense of effortlessness or comfort. Rather, its core meaning centers on utility, suitability, and beneficence. When applied to Jesus's yoke, the best renderings are "useful," "profitable," or perhaps even "beneficial." This interpretation better reflects the term's etymology, contextual usage, and the function of the yoke metaphor itself. Jesus is not promising an absence of hardship but rather a form of beneficial discipleship.

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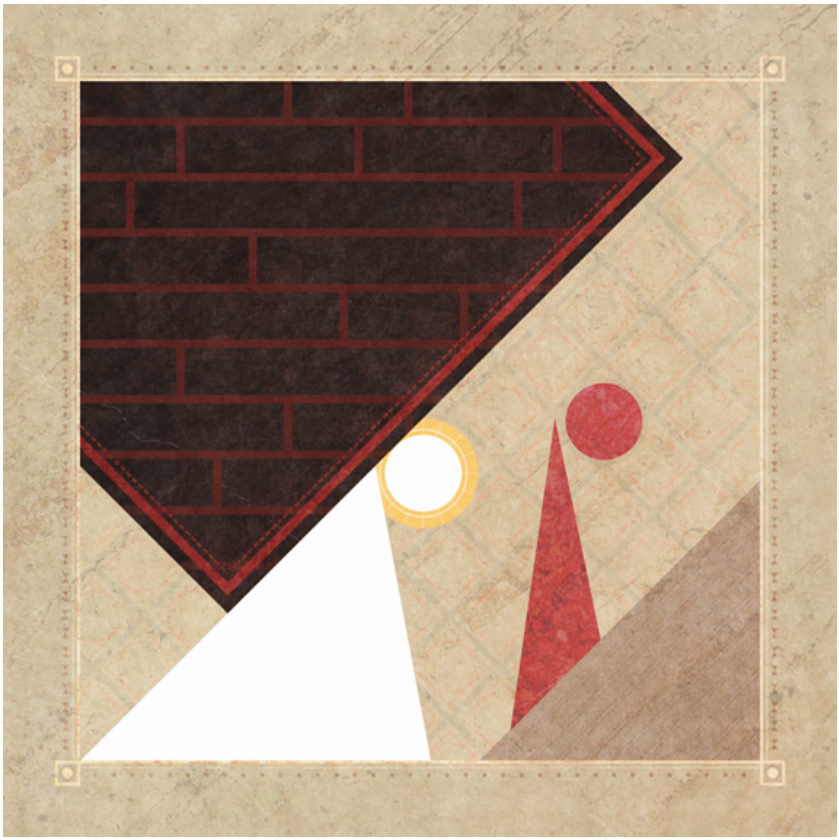
139. Matthew 5:17: μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας· οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι. See also Matthew 8:4.



The grace of Christ. *I Will Give You Rest IV,* Ben Crowder, 2023, created with Figma and Affinity Photo. Courtesy Ben Crowder.

Postscript

Over the last fifteen years, Matthew 11:30 has been periodically referenced in general conference. While every mention has quoted the first part of the verse as it is rendered in the KJV ("my yoke is easy"), it is noteworthy that in discussions of the passage, commentators have taken a wide range of approaches. Still, none have argued for the meaning that discipleship (that is, his yoke) is "easy." Furthermore, some have even understood Christ's yoke in terms of a strengthening or uplifting power that he offers to those in close fellowship with him. Such an interpretation reverberates with the rendering of the phrase as "my yoke is useful."

In the October 2022 general conference, Sister J. Annette Dennis gave a talk titled "His Yoke Is Easy and His Burden Is Light." Despite the title,

Matthew 11:30 is quoted only once. The focus of the talk is on eliminating the heavy burden of judgment and fostering charity, as Dennis enjoins her listeners to "pick up the Savior's yoke of love and compassion."[140] One main point she makes is that possessing the love of the Savior will make things "easier": "His love will flow through us and make all that He asks not only possible but eventually much easier and lighter and more joyful than we could ever imagine."[141] Thus, though her talk mentions the way love and compassion can lessen our burdens, the talk does not directly deal with the meaning of "my yoke is *chrēstos*" in Matthew 11:30.

A year earlier, in the October 2021 general conference, Elder Gary E. Stevenson cited the verse in his talk "Simply Beautiful—Beautifully Simple." Matthew 11:30 is quoted in passing as part of the larger purpose of the talk—to emphasize that living the gospel of Jesus Christ is not complicated.[142] Immediately after quoting the verse, he states, "We should all strive to keep the gospel simple—in our lives, in our families, in our classes and quorums, and in our wards and stakes."[143] Thus, Matthew 11:30 is cited as part of a larger argument that the essential tenets of the gospel are straightforward and simple. A discussion of the specific meaning of "my yoke is *chrēstos*" is never offered.

A couple of years earlier, in the October 2019 general conference, Elder Ulisses Soares gave a talk entitled "Take Up Our Cross." In the talk, he teaches that following Jesus Christ requires personal sacrifice, self-denial, and steadfast faith in the face of hardship, temptation, and discouragement. But he reminds his listeners that the Savior offers strength, grace, and healing both before and during our struggles.[144] As he concludes, he alludes to Matthew 11:29–30, stating, "I testify to you that following our Master's footsteps and waiting on Him who is the ultimate healer of our lives will provide rest to our souls and make our burdens easy and light."[145] It is worth noting that he never mentions "yoke" but instead speaks about burdens being made easy and light (compare Mosiah 24:15). Furthermore, the entire tone of the talk is that although discipleship comes with challenges, Christ will empower us

140. J. Anette Dennis, "His Yoke Is Easy and His Burden Is Light," *Liahona,* November 2022, 80–82.

141. Dennis, "His Yoke Is Easy and His Burden Is Light," 81.

142. Gary E. Stevenson, "Simply Beautiful—Beautifully Simple," *Liahona,* November 2021, 47–50.

143. Stevenson, "Simply Beautiful—Beautifully Simple," 47.

144. Ulisses Soares, "Take Up Our Cross," *Ensign,* November 2019, 113–16.

145. Soares, "Take Up Our Cross," 116.

as we steadfastly move forward. Here, the idea of Christ's yoke being "useful" resonates.

Some years earlier, in the April 2014 general conference, Elder David A. Bednar spoke at some length on Matthew 11:28–30 in his talk "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease." He teaches that the burdens we carry in life are not merely obstacles but essential sources of spiritual traction that help us move forward on the covenant path. As we remain close to the Savior in times of hardship, we gain divine strength and direction.[146] When he quotes Matthew 11:28–30, it appears in a section of the talk titled "The Strengthening Power of the Atonement." In his discussion of Matthew 11:28–30, he retains the KJV language, but throughout, he emphasizes that the yoke of Christ provides strength.

> A yoke is a wooden beam, normally used between a pair of oxen or other animals that enables them to pull together on a load. A yoke places animals side-by-side so they can move together in order to accomplish a task.
>
> Consider the Lord's uniquely individual invitation to "take my yoke upon you." Making and keeping sacred covenants yokes us to and with the Lord Jesus Christ. In essence, the Savior is beckoning us to rely upon and pull together with Him, even though our best efforts are not equal to and cannot be compared with His. As we trust in and pull our load with Him during the journey of mortality, truly His yoke is easy and His burden is light.
>
> We are not and never need be alone. We can press forward in our daily lives with heavenly help. Through the Savior's Atonement we can receive capacity and "strength beyond [our] own" ("Lord, I Would Follow Thee," *Hymns,* no. 220). As the Lord declared, "Therefore, continue your journey and let your hearts rejoice; for behold, and lo, I am with you even unto the end" (D&C 100:12).[147]

Though retaining the traditional KJV translation ("my yoke is easy") throughout, Bednar's main point is that Christ's yoke provides divine strength. Certainly, such a yoke is "useful."

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146. David A. Bednar, "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease," *Ensign,* May 2014, 87–90.
147. Bednar, "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease," 88.

"Take My Yoke upon You"

Recovering a First-Century Metaphor of Submission

Jared T. Marcum

In the King James Version of the New Testament, Matthew 11:28–30 reads, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Modern Christian interpretations for these verses—particularly those in devotional settings—often imagine the yoke as a double animal yoke, which partners two beasts of burden together to increase their effective working power. The resulting exegesis proposes that an omnipotent Jesus Christ is offering to pull our burdens along with us, side-by-side, like two oxen yoked together to bear a load.

It may surprise many Christians that the popular interpretation of partnership is likely a recent development, at least when considering the whole of Christian history. A partnership interpretation is difficult to find among early, medieval, and even Protestant Christan writers. After scouring scores of Christan commentaries on Matthew 11, the earliest partnership interpretation that I discovered was written by Alphonsus Rodriquez, a Jesuit priest in sixteenth-century Spain. He wrote,

> We must not believe that God leaves us to our own strength, in time of mortification and suffering. No! he bears the greatest part of the burden himself; and for this reason the law is called a yoke, which is to be borne by two. For Jesus Christ joins himself to us, to help us to support it; and with his assistance who can be discouraged? Wherefore let nothing in the law appear to you too hard, since you will have nothing but the

> easiest part of it to bear. It is for this reason also, that he calls it a yoke and a burden; when he says, "my yoke is easy, and my burden light."[1]

Even after Rodriquez, the partnership interpretation remained scarce among clergy and academics and only grew in popularity during the second half of the twentieth century.

While most of Christian history has not interpreted Matthew 11:28–30 as a partnership, this does not mean such an interpretation is unreasonable. Identifying Christ's yoke with a double animal yoke is certainly not anachronistic. Double animal yokes are described in both the Old and New Testaments (see Deut. 22:10; 1 Sam. 11:7; 1 Kgs. 19:21; 2 Cor. 6:14), portrayed in Egyptian hieroglyphics (fig. 1)[2] and Early Bronze Age rock carvings,[3] and have been discovered in archaeological digs.[4]

The yoke as a metaphor for partnership is also doctrinally supported. Christ willingly condescending as yokemate in Matthew 11 is akin to statements made by Christ elsewhere. For example, in John 15:15, Jesus stated, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends." Paul taught that even though he labored much, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). Additionally, Paul taught, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philip. 4:13).

For Latter-day Saints, there is an additional confirmation of legitimacy. In recent decades, the partnership metaphor has repeatedly been taught by Apostles and other Church leaders in various venues, including general conference. In a personal favorite of mine, Elder David A. Bednar added depth to the metaphor by comparing the yoke to binding covenants. "Entering into sacred covenants and worthily receiving priesthood ordinances yoke us with and bind us to the Lord Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father. This simply means that we trust in the Savior as

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All scripture references are taken from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise noted.

1. V. F. Alphonsus Rodriguez, *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection,* trans. M. L'Abbe Regnier Des Marais, 3 vols. (Dublin, 1861), 2:70.

2. Norman de Garis Davies, *Publications of the Metropolitans Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition: The Tomb of Nakht at Thebes,* ed. Albert M. Lythgoe, vol. 1 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1917), 199.

3. Thomas Huet and Nicoletta Bianchi, "A Study of the *Roche de l'Autel's* Pecked Engravings, Les Merveilles Sector, Mont Bego Area (Alpes-Maritimes, France)," *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 5 (2016): 105–18.

4. "A Rare 3,300-Year-Old Wooden Yoke Found in Northern Italy," Arkeonews, October 30, 2023, https://arkeonews.net/a-rare-3300-year-old-wooden-yoke-found-in-northern-italy/.

Figure 1. The double animal yoke is depicted in these hieroglyphics at Thebes. From Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Nakht at Thebes* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1917), 199, color plates by L. Crane, Norman de G. Davies, and F. S. Unwin. Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

our Advocate and Mediator and rely on His merits, mercy, and grace during the journey of life. As we are steadfast in coming unto Christ and are yoked with Him, we receive the cleansing, healing, and strengthening blessings of His infinite and eternal Atonement."[5]

Interestingly, as the partnership interpretation of Matthew 11:28–30 has grown in popularity among Christians, it has not found a prominent place among biblical scholars, though a few are open to the

5. David A. Bednar, "But We Heeded Them Not," *Liahona*, May 2022, 15. See also Howard W. Hunter, "Come Unto Me," *Ensign*, November 1990, 18; Russell M. Nelson, "The Mission and Ministry of the Savior: A Discussion with Elder Russell M. Nelson," *Ensign*, June 2005, 18; Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, November 2022, 97; David A. Bednar, "Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease," *Ensign*, May 2014, 88; Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Jesus Christ Is the Strength of Youth," *Liahona*, November 2022, 9.

interpretation.[6] This lack of support among scholars does not mean the partnership interpretation is without merit. The Savior sometimes revealed the intended meaning of the imagery within his teachings (see Matt. 13). Other times he took a more heuristic approach, leaving the meaning-making between the learner and the Holy Spirit. This gives his teachings needed flexibility, able to fit the needs of disciples across time and place. Matthew 11:28–30 may be an example of the heuristic approach since Jesus does very little explaining. He does not state which type of yoke he refers to (double or single), nor does he say where he is in relationship to the yoke. Is he the partner in a double yoke with us, or is he the master guiding the yoke? This heurism leaves the door open to multiple plausible and reasonable interpretations, much like other imagery-intensive lessons from Christ.

The main reason for scholarly hesitancy toward the partnership metaphor is that this may not be how the text was primarily understood at the time it was given. Recovering a first-century context requires a closer look at the metaphor's established meanings in biblical and extrabiblical sources from that time. As Jeff Lindsay noted, the partnership analogy "may be a fair perspective to add, but it may not be clearly intended in the scriptures."[7] The purpose of this paper is to explore biblical and extrabiblical sources in hopes of answering two questions: First, what kind of relationship would Christ's listeners likely have assumed from his yoke metaphor? Second, what insights can we gain by seeing the yoke from the perspective of those who first heard Christ's invitation?

Relationship of Submission

In the time of Jesus, the yoke was well-established and widely used in describing relationships of submission and subjugation, not necessarily partnership. This includes all metaphoric usages in the Old and New

6. Douglas Hare wrote that perhaps Jesus is saying "Become my yoke mate, and learn how to pull the load by working beside me and watching how I do it. The heavy labor will seem lighter when you allow me to help you with it." Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew,* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (John Knox Press, 1993), 129. See also Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary,* vol. 1, *The Christbook, Matthew 1–12,* rev. ed. (Eerdmans, 2004), 541; Shelley D. Best, "Matthew 11:25–30: Homiletical Perspective," in *Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew,* vol. 1, *Chapters 1–13,* A Feasting on the Word Commentary, ed. Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 299, 301.

7. Jeff Lindsay, "The Yoke of Christ: A Light Burden Heavy with Meaning," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 18 (2016): 172, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/interpreter/vol18/iss1/15.

Testaments, as well as extrabiblical usage. In the Old Testament, two Hebrew words describe an animal yoke: the *ʿōl* (a piece of wood that encompassed the animal's neck) and the *môṭâ* (a bar or pole attached to the *ʿōl* with reins or fastenings to control the animal).[8] Over time this concrete object was imbued with figurative ideas. "In all of the earliest applications of the yoke concept, the yoke was seen as a symbol of control, ownership, or service. Consequently, the yoke became a symbol of the owner-owned, master-slave, lord-subject relationship."[9]

Jeremiah depicts this type of relationship in the Old Testament. In a confrontation with the false prophet Hananiah, Jeremiah donned a yoke as a visual demonstration of Judah's servitude to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Hananiah condemned Jeremiah's dire prediction as false, snatched the *môṭâ* from Jeremiah, broke it, and boldly stated, "Thus saith the Lord; Even so will I break the yoke [*môṭâ*] of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" (Jer. 28:11). Jeremiah responded, "Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes [*môṭâ*] of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes [*môṭâ*] of iron. . . . I have put a yoke [*ʿōl*] of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" (Jer. 28:13–14).

In the New Testament, the Greek word for yoke found in Matthew 11:28–30, ζυγός (*zygos*), refers to a frame or pole "which bound animals—singularly, in pairs, or in groups—to a mechanism of production."[10] Outside of Matthew 11:28–30, the New Testament contains three yoke metaphors. Paul used the yoke twice as a metaphor for slavery (Gal. 5:1; 1 Tim. 6:1). Peter compared the Mosaic law (particularly the law of circumcision) to a yoke, asking why the non-Jews should submit to the law as "a yoke upon the neck . . . which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). In all three cases, the yoke was an image of oppression or submission.

Extrabiblical usage follows the same pattern. The Gospel of Thomas contains a modified version of the Savior's invitation in Matthew

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8. Francis Brown, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Snowball Publishing, 2010), עֹל, *ʿōl,* 5923, p. 760; מוֹטָה, *môṭâ,* 4133, p. 557; see also Georges Raepsaet, "Land Transport, Part 2: Riding, Harnesses, and Vehicles," in *The Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology in the Classical World,* ed. John Peter Oleson (Oxford University Press, 2008), 580–605.

9. Charles L. Tyer, "Yoke," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman (Doubleday, 1992), 6:1026, hereafter cited as *ABD.*

10. Tyer, "Yoke," 6:1026; see also Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 429 (hereafter cited as BDAG).

11:28–30. The text reads: "Jesus said, Come unto me, for my yoke is easy and my *lordship* is mild, and you will find repose for yourselves."[11] Notice the change of "burden" in Matthew 11:30 to "lordship" in the apocryphal text. The Gospel of Thomas seems to present Jesus's invitation as a call to submit.

The ending poem in the apocryphal Book of Sirach is also similar to Matthew 11:28–30. Sirach is a compilation of wisdom literature written by Joshua ben Sirach nearly two centuries before Jesus lived.[12] We know very little about this Jewish sage. He likely lived in Jerusalem, where he may have operated a school for aspiring scribes.[13] Sirach's book shows that he was dedicated to the Hebrew scriptures. He wanted all Jews to become educated in the law and live by its teachings so that they could "become better and wiser Jews."[14] The historical and archaeological records show that Sirach's writings were still influential at the time of Jesus; they likely held a sacred status similar to other biblical proverbial texts.[15] This status may explain why Jesus quoted or drew from Sirach elsewhere in his teachings.[16]

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11. Thomas O. Lambdin, trans., "The Gospel of Thomas (II, 2)," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English,* ed. James M. Robinson, 3rd ed. (HarperSan Francisco, 1988), 136, emphasis added.

12. Sirach is known by several other names, including simply Ben Sira, Ben Sirach, Jesus ben Sirach. Joshua ben Sirach is used here for readability so that the reader does not confuse the sage with Jesus Christ. The book of Sirach also goes by different titles, including *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach* and *Ecclesisticus* (the Latin title). The latter is the title found in the KJV Apocrypha. See Jeremy Corley, "Sirach," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Apocrypha,* ed. Gerbern S. Oegema (Oxford University Press, 2021), 284–305; Paul McKechnie, "The Career of Joshua Ben Sira," *Journal of Theological Studies,* n.s., 51, no. 1 (2000): 3–26; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Michael Glazier, 1988), 254–57.

13. Alexander A. Di Lella, "Wisdom of Ben-Sira," in *ABD,* 6:933.

14. Daniel J. Harrington, *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem: A Biblical Guide to Living Wisely* (Liturgical, 2005), 8; Corley, "Sirach," 286.

15. For many years, it was believed that Sirach was first written in Greek by Joshua Ben Sirach's unidentified grandson. However, beginning in 1896, Hebrew fragments of Sirach have been found at Cairo, Masada, and Qumran. Scholars now conclude that Sirach was originally a Hebrew text. Even though the Masoretes did not include Sirach in the Hebrew scriptures, its inclusion in the Septuagint (LXX), its apparent widespread use, and the Hebrew manuscripts' stichometric style (a style usually reserved for sacred works) add credence to the book's sacred status among Jews at the time of Christ. Di Lella, "Wisdom of Ben-Sira," 6:934–35. The King James version of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) is based upon the Greek translations. The Hebrew versions vary from the Greek in a few noteworthy places. This paper uses the NRSVue translation published in the Society of Biblical Literature Study Bible, which draws on both the Hebrew and Greek texts.

16. See Matthew 6:7 and Sirach 7:14; Matthew 6:12 and Sirach 28:2; Matthew 7:16 and Sirach 27:6; Mark 4:5 and Sirach 40:15; Luke 1:52 and Sirach 10:14.

Many scholars have concluded that Jesus was intentionally building on or modifying Sirach, since the similarities are too many to be coincidental.[17] If so, the Savior's listeners may have interpreted Jesus' words in the context of Sirach 51:25–26, which reads, "Acquire wisdom for yourselves without money. Put your neck under her yoke, and let your soul receive instruction." Sirach wanted his readers to imagine a submissive relationship, where God's people would submit to instruction.

Figure 2. Being sent under the yoke was the ultimate symbol of a defeated forces subjugation to their conquerers. *Les Romains passant sous le joug* [The Romans passing under the yoke], by Charles Gleyre, 1858, oil on canvas.

The yoke as a symbol of submission was not just prevalent among the people of Judea and Galilee (fig. 2). This figurative use of the yoke was widely applied to subjugation practices, noted in the Anchor Bible Dictionary as follows:

> Indeed, even as animals were frequently marked with the symbol of the owner either through branding or through the fastening of a cord or chain to which was affixed an ownership tag, so owners, masters, or lords came to mark their human property either with actual brands (i.e., Cain) or with fastened tags (i.e., at the ear hole). *These practices are frequently characterized as or designated by the term "yoke."* There is a significant relationship between the continuing development of

17. See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, trans., *Matthew,* The Anchor Bible, vol. 26 (Doubleday, 1971), 146; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13,* Word Biblical Commentary vol. 33A (Word Books, 1993), 323; Celia Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke: Wisdom, Torah and Discipleship in Matthew 11.25–30,* Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series 18 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1987): 114–39; Matthew W. Mitchell, "The Yoke is Easy, but What of Its Meaning? A Methodological Reflection Masquerading as a Philological Discussion of Matthew 11:30," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 2 (2016): 335–39; Hans Dieter Betz, "The Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 1 (1967): 11–20.

> ornamental pieces such as necklaces, anklets, bracelets, earrings, and the like, and the use of these "slave tags" fastened to cords or chains.[18]

Even though slavery law and practice varied from one ancient culture to another, the yoke became the go-to metaphor for subjugation across cultures. For example, rather than kill more Italians, Roman conquerors were known to send other Italians *sub iugum* (Latin: under the yoke) as a form of humiliation and capitulation. "Festus explained that in the field spears were used to form a door and the captives stripped and disarmed and passed through it. . . . The yoke itself is highly symbolic in a number of ways, not the least of which is its representation of burden and subjugation . . . the emotive action of passing under the yoke was often used to convey a sense of entering submission and experiencing humiliation."[19]

The historical record shows that most Christian writers and biblical scholars have interpreted Matthew 11:28–30 with a submission relationship in mind. Early Christian commentators typically viewed Matthew 11:28–30 as an invitation to trade the yoke of legalistic prescriptions or the crushing weight of sin for Christ's yoke of humility and repentance before God. Cyril of Alexandria (AD 376–444) typifies an exegesis in the early centuries of Christianity. He summarized Matthew 11:28–30 as an invitation for the Jews to "obtain the profit of my coming to you. Bow down to the truth. Acknowledge your Advocate and Lord. I set you free from bondage under the law, bondage in which you endured a great deal of toil and hardship, unable to accomplish it easily and accumulating for yourselves a very great burden of sins."[20]

In the eleventh century, the Byzantine biblical exegete Theophylact wrote, "By those 'that labour' understand the Jews, who follow the strict observances of the law. . . . Those who are 'heavy laden' are those Gentiles, who are oppressed by the burden of sins. . . . For to believe, to confess, and to be baptized, what labor is it? Is it not, rather, rest? For here in this life you are unburdened of the things which you did before your baptism, and there in the next life rest awaits you."[21]

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18. Tyer, "Yoke," 6:1027, emphasis added.

19. Jason Paul Wickham, "The Enslavement of War Captives by the Romans to 146 BC" (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 2014), 35–36, https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/17893/1/WickhamJ_May2014_17893.pdf.

20. Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Julian* frag. 149, quoted in Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1–13,* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 1a (IVP Academic, 2001), 232.

21. Theophylact, *The Explanation by Blessed Theophyact of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, trans. Christopher Stade (Chrysostom, 1992), 98–99.

Reformers continued the trend of submission during the sixteenth century. Calvin wrote, "They may also *take his yoke upon them,* and that, being free in spirit, they may restrain the licentiousness of their flesh. . . . It is not at all intended to exempt the disciples of Christ from the warfare of the flesh, that they may enjoy themselves at their ease, but to train them under the burden of discipline, and keep them under the yoke."[22]

Some nineteenth-century reformers often placed particular emphasis in Christ as lord and master in the yoke relationship. Matthew Henry wrote, "We are here invited to Christ as our priest, prince, and prophet, to be saved; and, in order to that, to be ruled and taught by him. . . . To take Christ's yoke upon us, is to put ourselves into the relation of servants and subjects to him."[23] Thomas Scott thought similarly, though he used different titles: "But coming to Him, they must take his yoke upon them, and submit to his authority, as their Lord and Master: they must also learn of him, as their Teacher and Counsellor, all things relating to their acceptance, comfort, and obedience."[24]

Modern biblical scholars tend to follow the reasoning of these early Christan writers. Albright and Mann noted that Christ was likely offering an "easy yoke and a light burden . . . in exchange for the arbitrary demands of the Pharisaic legalism."[25] France also recognized that the Savior likely wanted his listeners to trade in the "unreasonable demands of the scribes." But France argued, "the wording in this passage does not make that application explicit, and a wider reference to life's difficulties cannot be ruled out."[26]

As to the likelihood of a partnership analogy, France continued, "The animal yoke is the basis of two NT metaphorical uses which focus on joining two people together (2 Cor 6:14; Phil 4:3), but here, as in most Jewish usage, it is more likely the single human yoke which is in view. However appealing the idea of being 'in double harness with Jesus' may be, that is

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22. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke,* trans. William Pringle, 3 vols., repr. (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 2:44.

23. Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* [. . .], 3 vols. (London, 1848), 3:65.

24. See notes on Matthew 11:28–30 in Thomas Scott, trans., *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* [. . .], vol. 1 (New York, 1816).

25. Albright and Mann, *Matthew,* 146.

26. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 448. Over time, writers expanded the scope to include burdens like "hunger, poverty, shame, or other affliction." Luther's sermon quoted in Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew,* trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester (Fortress Press, 2001), 175.

not the point. He is offering those who are finding their loads too hard to carry a new yoke which, far from adding to their oppression, will ease the burden and, paradoxically, will bring not further toil but 'rest.'"[27]

Type of Submission

A subjugation context creates unique metaphoric possibilities as we consider Christ's invitation. Christ invited his followers into a relationship where he is the master, but what kind of master is he? In biblical and extrabiblical texts, we see the yoke used as a metaphor to describe several types of lord-subject relationships, including sovereign-subject (1 Kgs. 12:4–14), master-slave (1 Tim. 6:1), and teacher-student (Sir. 51:23–30). All three seem doctrinally reasonable. Jesus is known as the King of Kings (Rev. 19:16) and the Son of David (Luke 1:32–33). The Savior often used the master-slave relationship in his parables, with the master as a representation of himself (Matt. 18:23–32; 24:44–51; 25:14–30; Luke 17:7–10) or the Father (see Matt. 21:33–39). Jesus was also a teacher, and his disciples recognized him as such (John 6:25).

As noted above, the heuristic nature of the text likely allows us to explore each of these relationships for gospel understanding and insight, as each potentially bears interesting metaphoric implications. It may even be likely that the Savior intended all three relationships.

Sovereign-Subject

Matthias Konradt makes the case for the kingship analogy. He argues that, first, "in the literature of the Old Testament and early Judaism, the image of the 'yoke' occurs in the overwhelming number of attestations with a political orientation as a metaphor of rulership."[28] Second, "in Jewish antiquity and in the rest of the ancient Hellenistic world," χρηστός (*chrēstos,* KJV: "easy") indicates "a positive trait of rulers."[29] Third, there is the "Matthean emphasis on the *royal-Davidic* messiahship of Jesus."[30] Fourth, in Matthew 11, Jesus speaks of his authority to reveal the Father, a Christological claim that makes Jesus a mediator, not just a teacher. In addition, Jesus appeals to King David and asserts lordship in Matthew 12:1–8, causing the people to wonder if he was the son

27. France, *Gospel of Matthew,* 449.

28. Matthias Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew,* trans. Wayne Coppins (Baylor University Press, 2022), 167.

29. Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics,* 169.

30. Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics,* 6, emphasis in original.

of David (12:23). Fifth, Matthew specifically mentions Christ as meek during the triumphal entry (see Matt. 21:5), where he quotes Zechariah 9:9 and refers to the attribute of meekness that "characterizes the king in Zechariah."[31] Sixth, the promise of rest is "a way of expressing well-being or positive life conditions," which Ezekiel promised will be accomplished by the Davidic Shepherd Messiah (see Ezek. 34:15, 23).[32]

Teacher-Student

Even though Konradt makes a strong case for the sovereign-subject metaphor, the teacher-student metaphor also has significant merit and has received extensive attention from scholars.[33] This paper argues that teacher-student is a better match than the sovereign-subject relationship. In making the case for the teacher-student relationship, scholars tend to focus on several key points.

First, the teacher-student relationship is a sound match with the surrounding text. In the text leading up to Matthew 11:28–30, we see that Jesus rebukes "this generation" for not accepting him or John the Baptist as their teachers. Instead, they judged John as one who "hath a devil" (Matt. 11:18) and rejected the "Son of man," accusing him of being "a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). Luke's parallel account specifies that those who rejected John and Jesus were particularly among the Pharisees and lawyers (see Luke 7:30). Then, Jesus says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25), showing that some of the unlearned classes had accepted both John and Jesus as their rabbi. However, Pharisaic opposition—including rumors spread by them—prevented widespread acceptance of John or Jesus among more educated Judaeans. Thus, Matthew 11:28–30 appears to be a call to transfer allegiance toward Jesus as teacher. Matthew 12 controversies "continue to illustrate the [anti-Pharisaic] polemic"[34] and will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

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31. Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics,* 174.

32. Konradt, *Christology, Torah, and Ethics,* 175–76.

33. Examples include the following: Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke,* 42–44, 114–16; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13,* 324–25; France, *Gospel of Matthew,* 447–48; Luz, *Matthew 8–20,* 173.

34. Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke,* 43.

Second, scholars note that in Jewish literature the yoke was an established metaphor for Torah and God's wisdom, placing those who wear the yoke as students of Torah or wisdom. This signals the posture of a student—humble, teachable, and committed to practice. Ulrich Luz observes, "Sirach speaks of the 'yoke of wisdom' (Sir. 6:24; 51:26). Since in Sirach 24 wisdom was identified with the Torah, that means nothing more than the 'yoke of the commandments,' or of the Torah."[35] Similar yoke language appears in the apocryphal texts of 2 Baruch (41:3) and 2 Enoch (34:1–2), both of which were likely written around the time of Christ. Though the Mishnah was compiled in the late second and early third centuries, it continues the yoke metaphor. These later rabbis taught that any Jew who believed and recognized that "the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4) needed to accept the "yoke of Heaven" and "the yoke of the mitzvot [commandments]."[36] Reading Matthew 11:28–30 in teacher-student terms, Jesus's yoke is marked by gentleness—"didactic qualities of Jesus the teacher who, unlike the rabbis, is patient with his pupils and does not punish quickly and harshly."[37]

A third rationale for the teacher-student relationship is explained by the literary relationship between Matthew 11:28–30 and the book of Sirach. Though Sirach is typically placed in the early second century BC, about a century apart from when Christ taught, the Savior's words bear striking resemblance to Sirach.[38] Modern scholarship often notes that Sirach is the likely source material for Matthew 11:28–30, but further extrapolation is usually limited to one or two similarities or differences.[39] When we embark on a comprehensive comparison, we begin to see that Jesus may have intentionally tied his words to Sirach to set up a contrast

35. Luz, *Matthew 8–20,* 171.

36. See *m. Berakhot* 1:1; 2:2. The Pirkei Avot retains the same idea. "Whoever takes upon himself the yoke of the Torah, they remove from him the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concerns, and whoever breaks off from himself the yoke of the Torah, they place upon him the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concerns" (Pierkei Avot 3:5).

37. Luz, *Matthew 8–20,* 173.

38. See Corley, "Sirach," 284–85.

39. Albright and Mann, *Matthew,* 147, state, "Verses 28–30 are accepted as dependent on Ecclus li [Sirach 51] 23–27." Hans Dieter Betz largely addresses contentions over Matthew's source in "The Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest (Matt 11:28–30)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 1 (1967): 10–24. Luz notes a literary relationship but compares the yoke only to Sirach's wisdom in *Matthew 8–20,* 171. Donald Hagner goes into greater depth, noting some similarities and differences. Both Hagner and France note that Jesus calls the yoke his own (instead of Wisdom's). Hagner, *Matthew 1–13,* 323; France, *Gospel of Matthew,* 447.

between his teaching and the teaching of the Pharisees, thus continuing the polemic contained in the prior verses.

Leave the Pharisaic Yoke

We will look at the verses in Sirach 51 that directly encourage its readers to submit to the wisdom of sages, or to receive authoritative instruction. Even though the similarities between the two passages certainly establish a strong literary relationship, they bear some striking differences. It is in these contrasts that we may better understand how Jesus's listeners may have interpreted the Savior's invitation. To assist in a comparative analysis, I placed the text side by side and sectioned each text into corresponding parts as follows:

Sirach 51:23, 26–27 (NRSVue)	Matthew 11:28–30 (KJV)
Draw near to me,	Come unto me,
you who are uneducated,	all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and lodge in the house of instruction.	and I will give you rest.
"Put your neck under her yoke,	Take my yoke upon you,
and let your souls receive instruction;	and learn of me;
it is to be found close by."	for I am meek and lowly in heart:
See with your own eyes that I have labored but little and found for myself much serenity.	and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The first stark difference between these two versions is found in the second and third lines. Joshua ben Sirach beckoned to those who were uneducated to come to the sage's house of learning.[40] In Christ's time, the Pharisaic houses of learning—the two most famous being those of Hillel and Shammai—sought diligently to recruit and educate Judaeans in daily religious observances. The rabbis at these schools strictly held that such observances would keep the Jews in line with the commandments.[41] Instead of targeting the uneducated, as Sirach does, Christ seems more concerned with the "wise and prudent" (Matt. 11:25) who rejected him and John. Thus, when Jesus calls out to those that "labour

40. See Celia Deutsch, "The Sirach 51 Acrostic: Confession and Exhortation," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94, no. 3 (1982): 400–9.

41. For more information on Hillel and Shammai, see Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Michael Glazier, 1988), 204–7.

and are heavy laden" (Matt. 11:28), his listeners likely understood that he was addressing those who had donned the "yoke" of the Pharisees. This idea is further reflected in Matthew 23, where Jesus criticizes the Pharisees because they "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matt. 23:4).

The next difference is more subtle. Sirach identified the yoke as belonging to "her." The Savior identified the yoke as his own. We learn that "her" in Sirach 51:26 represents wisdom (see Sir. 24, 51:13–25). To understand what Sirach meant by wisdom's yoke, it is worth reviewing a related passage in Sirach chapter 6, where Sirach began this yoke of wisdom imagery.

18 My child, from your youth choose discipline,
and when you have gray hair you will find wisdom.
19 Come to her like one who plows and sows,
and wait for her good harvest.
For when you cultivate her you will toil but little,
and soon you will eat of her produce.
20 She seems very harsh to the undisciplined;
fools will not remain with her.
21 She will be like a heavy stone to test them,
and they will not delay in casting her aside.
22 For wisdom is like her name;
she is not readily perceived by many.
23 Listen, my child, and accept my judgment;
do not reject my counsel.
24 Put your feet into her fetters
and your neck into her collar.
25 Bend your shoulder and carry her,
and do not become angry with her bonds.
26 Come to her with all your soul,
and keep her ways with all your might.
27 Search out and seek, and she will become known to you,
and when you get hold of her, do not let her go.
28 For at last you will find her rest,
and she will be changed into joy for you.
29 Then her fetters will become for you a strong defense,
and her collar a glorious robe.
30 Her yoke is a golden ornament
and her bonds a purple cord.
31 You will wear her like a glorious robe
and put her on like a splendid crown.
32 If you are willing, my child, you can be disciplined,
and if you apply yourself you will become clever.
33 If you love to listen you will accept discipline,
and if you pay attention you will become wise.

34 Stand in the company of the elders.
Who is wise? Attach yourself to such a one.
35 Be ready to listen to every godly discourse,
and let no wise proverbs escape you.
36 If you see an intelligent person, rise early to visit him;
let your foot wear out his doorstep.
37 Reflect on the statutes of the Lord,
and meditate at all times on his commandments.
It is he who will give insight to your mind,
and your desire for wisdom will be granted.

Where are this wisdom and instruction to be found? According to Sirach, they are found in the elder's company and at sage's doorsteps (see Sir. 6:34–36). Throughout the later second temple period, the Pharisees sat in "Moses' seat" (Matt. 23:2) as the elders, even calling their own prescriptions the "traditions of the elders" (Matt. 15:2). The Savior's invitation to take on his yoke and learn from him, and only him, is a subtle but likely understood opposition to the prevalent Pharisaic yoke. By claiming sole ownership of the yoke, Christ is subtly condemning the other rabbis as incapable of providing the true "yoke of Heaven."[42] Christ, and only Christ, has the divine authority to provide such a yoke.

Hanger noted that "when Jesus invites people with the words . . . 'take my yoke upon you,' he invites them to follow his own teaching as the definitive interpretation of the law."[43] This claim of divine authority for his teachings melds well with the surrounding text, where Jesus is often making claims to such authority in his condemnations of the Pharisees. He does this four times. First, in the verses directly preceding Matthew 11:28–30, Christ states, "All things are delivered unto me of my father" (Matt. 11:27). In chapter 12, he makes three more such statements during contentions with the Pharisees (see Matt. 12:6; 12:41–42).

Sirach teaches that the yoke of the elders possesses two important characteristics. First, the yoke of the elders is initially both heavy and harsh (see Sir. 6:20–21), especially for the undisciplined. It requires "all your might" (Sir. 6:26) to keep. Second, though heavy and laborious, the Lord will eventually bless those who obey the elders with the serenity that comes from success and riches. "For at last you will find her rest, and she will be changed into joy for you" (Sir. 6:28), and in the end you will "see with your own eyes that I have labored but little and found for myself much serenity. Hear but a little of my instruction, and through me you

42. *m. Berakhot* 1:1.
43. Hanger, *Matthew 1–13,* 324.

will acquire silver and gold" (Sir. 51:27–28). These temporal blessings are emphasized in Sirach 11, where the sage wrote,

17 The Lord's gift remains with the devout,
and his favor brings lasting success.
18 A person becomes rich through diligence and self-denial,
and the reward allotted to him is this:
19 when he says, "I have found rest,
and now I shall feast on my goods!"

Such ideas are not without biblical precedence. Sirach's conclusions agree with the ideas in Deuteronomy 28:1–14. Thus, in Jesus's day, the students of Shammai and Hillel felt justified in seeking "the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi" (Matt. 23:6–7). It is in this temporal context that we must understand the metamorphosis from burden to joy in Sirach 6:28, where the yoke changes into a "glorious robe," "purple cord," and "splendid crown" (Sir. 6:29–31). It is worth noting that as part of his imagery Sirach mentions the *tzitzit* vestment that was often altered by the elders to show off their righteousness. The Savior was critical of this showy practice. "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders [the *tzitzit*; purple chords in Sirach] of their garments" (Matt. 23:5; see Sir. 6:30).[44] For Sirach, diligent observance under the wise yoke of the elders would bring the rest that comes from worldly honor and material blessings.[45] Christ would present a very different kind of yoke.

Christ's Yoke

Unlike the burdensome yoke of the Pharisees, Christ's yoke is light. Later, in Matthew 23, we get a sense of how the Savior's yoke was of a different weight. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:23–24). The yoke of the Pharisees had focused so much on outer performances that they had neglected the

44. Numbers 15:38–39 prescribes the color of the *tzitzit* as a "ribband of blue."

45. See also Benjamin G. Wright III with Claudia V. Camp, "'Who Has Been Tested by Gold and Found Perfect?' Ben Sira's Discourse of Riches and Poverty," in *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (Brill, 2008), 71–96.

important purposes of the law. Thus, the heft of Christ's lighter yoke is ironically made up of the "weightier matters."[46]

This irony is likely explained by Christ's use of the term χρηστός [*chrēstos*], which is translated as "easy" in the KJV. A better translation might be something like a "high standard," "kind, loving," "morally good and benevolent," or as one who exhibits "usefulness."[47] Thus, Christ's yoke is not easy in the antinomian sense, where commandments are not binding upon believers, but it is made up of higher and holier attitudes and behaviors—including loving God and others (see Matt. 22:36–39) and the attitudes Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5–7).[48]

Christ described his rest as different than the serenity supposed by Sirach. Instead of enjoyment in worldly comfort and possessions, Christ offered rest to the soul. In John we read, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). Jesus emphasized that he does not offer Pharisaic position and power when he clarified what kind of rabbi he is: "I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matt. 11:29). The Greek term translated as meek, πρᾶος (*praos*), is often associated with gentle leaders who are not "overly impressed by a sense of [their] self-importance."[49] An antonym for *praos* would be

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46. Peter and James followed this example when "there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them [Gentile converts], and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). Peter responded, "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). James agreed and proposed an alternative: send messengers with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch with a decision that read, "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well." (Acts 15:28–29). It is worth noting that these "necessary things" would have drawn the Gentile converts away from idol worship, as well as allowed them to interact freely with observant Jews. Thus, James's regulations are likely an effort to encourage devotion to the one true God and help Gentiles and Jews love one another as fellow followers of Christ.

47. BDAG, 1090; see Lincoln Blumell, "Is Jesus's Yoke 'Easy'? Reconsidering the Translation in Matthew 11:30," *BYU Studies* 65, no. 1 (2026): 6–36.

48. Some scholars have seen direct relationships between Matthew 11:28–30 and the Sermon on the Mount. See Betz, "Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest," 24; Mary F. Foskett, "Matthew 11:25–30: Exegetical Perspective," in *Matthew,* vol. 1, *Chapters 1–13,* Feasting on the Gospels, ed. Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (John Knox Press, 2013), 297–301.

49. BDAG, under "πραΰτης," 861. Christ is referred to as the meek King in Matthew 21:5. In 1 Peter 3:4, Peter teaches that as the leader of the household, the father should rule with a "meek and quiet spirit." In Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 3.71, the king of Syracuse is

ὑποκριτής (*hypokritēs*), a "pretender" or play-actor.[50] The Contemporary English Version aptly translates *hypokritēs* as "show-off." The Savior repeatedly called the Pharisees *hypokritēs* in Matthew 23. The sixth time, he stated, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). By claiming meekness, the Savior was likely condemning the Pharisaic emphasis on status and community position.

The Greek word for lowly, ταπεινός (*tapeinos*), further emphasizes that the Savior does not offer high rank or status to his followers. *Tapeinos* means "being of low social status," or "lowly," "undistinguished, of no account."[51] By adding "heart" to "lowly" in Matthew 11:29, Jesus may have been commenting on the intention of the Pharisees. Not only did his opponents hold positions of high status but they had also let those positions elevate and corrupt their hearts. Consequently, the Savior later commented on the state of their hearts. "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matt. 23:25).

It is perhaps not coincidental that Jesus continues his polemic against the Pharisees in Matthew 12. Immediately following Matthew 11:28–30 are two stories dealing with Pharisaic prescriptions for the day of rest, a day set aside for God's people to find "rest unto their souls" (Matt. 11:29). The Pharisees complained that Christ's disciples gleaned grain on the Sabbath, claiming that it was "not lawful." Moses had given the general rule that "six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest" (Ex. 34:21). The Mishnah, a rabbinic effort to preserve the traditions of the Pharisees in the second century AD, lists thirty-nine agrarian categories of work that the sages prohibited on the Sabbath—one of which was removing grain from the husk.[52]

By listing thirty-nine categories of work prohibitions, the Pharisees had transformed the Sabbath into a day that restricted almost any activity, including activities of doing good. Jesus gave two examples to show how the Pharisaic yoke prevented the Sabbath from fulfilling its intended purpose. First, Jesus pointed to David and his companions

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described as someone who is meek. See William H. Race, ed. and trans., *Pindar: Olympian Odes and Pythian Odes,* LCL 56 (Harvard University Press, 1997), 259.

50. BDAG, 1038.

51. BDAG, 989.

52. See *m. Shabbat* 7:2.

who did what would have been considered against Jewish law while on the Lord's errand (Matt. 12:3–5). Second, Jesus demonstrably disagreed that healing should not be done on the Sabbath. Out of concern that healers might need to perform work (such as grinding herbs and cooking medicines), the Pharisees thought it better that no healing should be done on the Sabbath. When they asked Jesus whether "it is lawful to cure on the Sabbath," Jesus answered, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matt. 12:11–12, NRSVue).

Matthew 12, then, serves as a confirmation that Christ's yoke is lighter and more fit by focusing readers on how God's laws are supposed to help us fulfill the great commandments of loving God and others. The intent of God's Sabbath laws is not to encourage believers to avoid work altogether—as the Pharisees had dictated—but to avoid worldly work so one can do God's work. Only then can one find rest for the soul.

Conclusion

This paper sought to answer two questions. First, what kind of relationship would Christ's listeners likely have assumed from his yoke metaphor? Second, what insights can we gain by seeing the yoke from the perspective of those who first heard Christ's invitation? The answer to the first question is that the yoke was a well-established metaphor for submission generally. Drawing on Sirach in Matthew 11:28–30 within a broader polemic against Pharisaic teaching, Jesus may have been juxtaposing the teacher-student relationship he offers with the kind the Pharisees demanded.

In answer to the second question, we see how Jesus used the metaphor to demonstrate that Pharisaic schools of instruction unnecessarily overburdened the people. The Pharisees were willing to bear a heavy yoke of legalism because, like Sirach, they believed that such discipline would eventually lead them to wisdom, status, position, and even wealth. Christ, on the other hand, offered a lighter yoke that was intended to focus God's people on "weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23) that befit God's true disciples. This yoke does not lead to worldly position or power or money but promises rest to the soul.

Today, disciples of Christ are vulnerable to the same mistakes as the Pharisees. Like them, our commandment-keeping may stray from a focus on the two great commandments of loving God and his children. At times, we may feel inclined to lengthen the prescriptions that

God has given. In the Latter-day Saint tradition, recent modifications to ministering,[53] *For the Strength of Youth,*[54] home-centered and Church-supported learning, and others are all efforts to simplify and do things in a "holier way."[55] For Sabbath-day observance, we can choose to move away from "lists of things to do and things *not* to do," and instead ask, "'What *sign* do I want to give to God?'"[56] Such simplification and focus helps us remove the burdensome yoke of legalism and wear the lighter and holier yoke of Christ.

A second insight may be found as we consider how Christ's listeners understood his position in relation to the yoke. Instead of partner, they likely understood him as the teacher or master who guides the yoke. Based on my observation, some today emphasize Jesus as friend above other descriptions of our relationship with him. It is true that he invites his disciples to become his friends and even calls them as much (see John 15:15; D&C 84:63, 77; D&C 93:45). However, Jesus calling us friends is part of his condescension. Even though Christ promises to "draw near unto" us, that familiarity is a gift that he grants as we "seek him diligently" (D&C 88:63). It is not a friendship that we are entitled to, inherit, or can presume to demand. The Savior of humankind is so much more than the kind of friend we hang out with on the weekends. He is our Teacher, our King, our Lord, our Savior, our Advocate, and our Judge. All these titles communicate an unequal relationship. He is deserving of our veneration and worship.[57]

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53. Russell M. Nelson, "Ministering," *Ensign,* May 2018, 100; Jeffrey R. Holland, "Be with and Strengthen Them," *Ensign,* May 2018, 101–3; Jean B. Bingham, "Ministering as the Savior Does," *Ensign,* May 2018, 104–7.

54. "For the Strength of Youth: A Guide for Making Choices," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 24, 2026, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/for-the-strength-of-youth.

55. Russell M. Nelson, "Opening Remarks," *Ensign,* November 2018, 6.

56. Russell M. Nelson, "The Sabbath Is a Delight," *Ensign,* May 2015, 130, emphasis in original.

57. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, "We occasionally hear some members refer to Jesus as our Elder Brother, which is a true concept based on our understanding of the premortal life with our Father in Heaven. But like many points of gospel doctrine, that simple truth doesn't go far enough in terms of describing the Savior's role in our present lives and His great position as a member of the Godhead. Thus, some non-LDS Christians are uncomfortable with what they perceive as a secondary role for Christ in our theology. They feel that we view Jesus as a spiritual peer. They believe that we view Christ as an implementer for God, if you will, but that we don't view Him as God to us and to all mankind, which, of course, is counter to biblical testimony about Christ's divinity. Let me help us understand, with clarity and testimony, our belief about Jesus Christ. We

After this life, will we rush to him in a warm embrace, like long-lost friends, or will we have a different reflex? The Nephites may exemplify a more likely response. When the resurrected Lord visited them, the Nephites did not rush to embrace him. Instead, they "did fall down at the feet of Jesus and did worship him" (3 Ne. 11:17). Even the prophet Nephi "went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet" (3 Ne. 11:19).[58] The Nephites recognized the true nature of their relationship with Jesus. After their humble submission in 3 Nephi 11:12 ("the whole multitude fell to the earth"), the Savior then condescends and invites the Nephites to arise and touch him—or receive authority, in Nephi's case (3 Ne. 11:14, 20). Through this example, we might surmise that submission and partnership are not mutually exclusive; rather, the former precedes the latter.

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declare He is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Creator, the Savior, the Captain of our Salvation, the Bright and Morning Star." M. Russell Ballard, "Building Bridges of Understanding," *Ensign,* June 1998, 66.

58. Elder Bruce R. McConkie echoed these sentiments in his final general conference address. "I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears." Bruce R. McConkie, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign,* May 1985, 11.

After the Rain

Rain filling up the clay cisterns and the dog howling.
Rain cleansing hackberry, maple, and oak.

Covering the river stones.
Stout boulders scattered in the watery, black flow—
rooted in their own age past time.

This morning the sky opens in a rattle and song.

I'm reading Montag's *After the Flood,*

Studying the disasters of water.

Mastering its terms: high level, crest, sandbag, power, light—
and the importance of liquids
in turning air to drops.

Outside, the Pawnee of hard rain dance past—
head dress tall, eager and strong.

This poem was a finalist in the 2025 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.

Will this really help you
puddle your way out of a cool evening walk?
the horizontal rain—

Des Moines, then west,
Skillet Creek burial grounds pop out, dampened—

into bookmarks,
simple lies and the plotting of birds seeking a way out.

It won't even help you to use a bail bucket now.

I think of repairing the roof next summer; now too late.

Forget this and that
when I'm here alone,
interim silence is the language the rain and I speak clearly.
I have the grammar down by heart.

Words fall easily, drop by drop, in its own time.

Tomorrow,

a morning fire smoldering in the grate, now flaps its wings,
wind rocking,
the window sashes and sills in a loose rhythm.

And on the plains, lightning divides the sky from the pending sun.

—Will Powley

Breath of Life (From the Dust) by J. Kirk Richards; 2011; 80 × 98″; oil, acrylic, and dirt on linen; private collection. Courtesy J. Kirk Richards.

In God's Image

Associations Between Religiosity and Body Esteem

Talise Hirschi, Lauren A. Barnes, Kyla Yetter, and Sarah M. Coyne

Introduction

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have a unique and beautiful theology regarding the body. Many Christian religions share teachings such as "people are made in the image of God, that the body is a gift from God or a temple of God, and that God is loving and forgiving and merciful—presumably regardless of one's appearance or weight."[1] For many religions, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the body is essential to progression and development throughout life. Members of the Church have additional beliefs, such as being created in the image of embodied divine parentage (namely, in the image and likeness of God) and that individuals will one day be resurrected with a perfect body. These beliefs may embolden and protect some members from forming negative body esteem. Indeed, female members of the Church generally experience greater body satisfaction compared to those who are not of the faith.[2]

In contemporary society, many people have a complicated relationship with their body, with many individuals wishing they looked different.

1. Chris J. Boyatzis, Sarah Kline, and Stephanie Backof, "Experimental Evidence that Theistic-Religious Body Affirmations Improve Women's Body Image," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 4 (2007): 553.

2. "LDS females were found to have more positive body image than non-LDS females generally." But note that "LDS females in Utah have less positive body images than LDS females residing in other states." Monika Sandberg, "Eating and Substance Use: A Comparison of Latter-day Saint and Non-Latter-day Saint College-Age Females" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2008), abstract, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/1394.

In fact, in the 1980s, body dissatisfaction was so pervasive among women in the United States, it was deemed "normative discontent";[3] meaning, it was typical for individuals to struggle with body image.[4] Members of the Church of Jesus Christ are unfortunately not exempt from this experience. Though some of their beliefs may help relieve some of the worldly pressures of unhealthy weight loss or unhealthy body modifications, those striving for a misconceived and misunderstood notion of perfection may still feel dissatisfaction with their body and self.[5] While religious affiliation alone does not protect one from forming a negative body image, how doctrines are taught and how highly they are valued by an individual (for example, religious salience) influence the extent to which religion plays a part in the formation of one's body image and esteem.

Despite divine and empowering teachings, members of the Church are still surrounded by the many messages of the world. It may often feel like an uphill battle as popular media intensifies a makeover culture and shows the many ways one could change their body, eating habits, or exercise habits to conform to "the thin ideal" and other contextual trends for bodies.[6] Messages indicating the necessity of altering one's body to meet painfully high standards may often leave members of the Church grappling with the contradictory religious and cultural expectations. A religion's doctrine may teach body acceptance while the same religion's culture may foster body perfection and comparison.[7]

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3. Judith Rodin, Lisa Silberstein, and Ruth Striegel-Moore, "Women and Weight: A Normative Discontent," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1984,* vol. 32, *Psychology and Gender,* ed. Theo B. Sonderegger (University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 267–307.

4. April E. Fallon and Paul Rozin, "Sex Differences in Perceptions of Desirable Body Shape," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 94, no. 1 (1985): 102.

5. Sarah M. Coyne and Lauren A. Barnes, "Bodies at Church: Latter-day Saint Doctrine, Teaching, and Culture as Related to Body Image," *Research & Policy Brief,* no. 58 (August 1, 2024), https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/58-bodies-at-church-latter-day-saint-doctrine-teaching-culture-body-image.pdf.

6. Kathryn Graff Low and others, "Internalization of the Thin Ideal, Weight and Body Image Concerns," *Social Behavior and Personality* 31, no. 1 (2003): 81–89; see also Bonnie Leadbeater, Kara Thompson, and Vincenza Gruppuso, "Co-occurring Trajectories of Symptoms of Anxiety, Depression, and Oppositional Defiance from Adolescence to Young Adulthood," *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 41, no. 6 (2012): 719–30.

7. M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall and Chris J. Boyatzis, "God in the Bod: Charting the Course of Research on Religiosity and the Body," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 19, no. 1 (2016): 1–7; Sarah L. Weinberger-Litman, Yael Latzer, Leib Litman, and Rachel Ozick, "Extrinsic Religious Orientation and Disordered Eating Pathology Among

Religious Factors

Though, generally, religion can be viewed as a protective factor in helping an individual develop a healthy body image,[8] taking a more nuanced look at religious influences reveals that there are potentially both protective and risk factors involved—even within the same religious tradition.[9] Individuals within the Church of Jesus Christ are taught to love and respect their bodies from a young age. However, despite the fact that members of the Church generally have greater body satisfaction compared to individuals who aren't members,[10] one study conducted with only members of the Church within the United States found that 14% of members had received cosmetic surgery and 20% had received cosmetic enhancement.[11] Though cosmetic surgery does not necessarily indicate body dissatisfaction, studies show mixed results on whether it actually improves self-esteem.[12] Therefore, while Church members generally may have higher body satisfaction, there are still a significant percentage of members who struggle to accept their appearance or body as is.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that religiosity does not exempt individuals from the influences and pressures of body ideals in a person's surrounding culture. The amount of pressure an individual feels to acquire or keep a specific body ideal often corresponds to risk factors

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Modern Orthodox Israeli Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Adherence to the Superwoman Ideal and Body Dissatisfaction," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 1 (2018): 209–22.

8. See Jessica Coblentz, "Catholic Fasting Literature in a Context of Body Hatred: A Feminist Critique," *Horizons* 46, no. 2 (2019): 215–45; Sarah Demmrich, Sümeyya Atmaca, and Cüneyt Dinç, "Body Image and Religiosity Among Veiled and Non-Veiled Turkish Women," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 30, no. 2 (2017): 127–47; Leonie Wilhelm, Andrea S. Hartmann, Julia C. Becker, Melahat Kişi, Manuel Waldorf, and Silja Vocks, "Body Covering and Body Image: A Comparison of Veiled and Unveiled Muslim Women, Christian Women, and Atheist Women Regarding Body Checking, Body Dissatisfaction, and Eating Disorder Symptoms," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57 (2018): 1808–28.

9. Cindel J. M. White, Adam Baimel, and Ara Norenzayan, "How Cultural Learning and Cognitive Biases Shape Religious Beliefs," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 40 (2021): 34–39.

10. Sandberg, "Eating and Substance Use," abstract.

11. Sarah M. Coyne, Megan Gale, Jane Shawcroft, Emilie Davis, and Chenae Christensen-Duerden, "Plastic Piety: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Connection Between Religiosity, Cosmetic Surgery, and Body Image," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 15, no. 3 (2023): 454; see also Corinne Clarkson, Kolene Anderson, and Susan R. Madsen, "Cosmetic Surgery and Body Image Among Utah Women: A 2025 Update," *Utah Women Stats: Research Snapshot,* no. 63 (October 23, 2025), https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/63.pdf.

12. Clarkson, Anderson, and Madsen, "Cosmetic Surgery and Body Image."

such as body dissatisfaction from social comparison and engaging in disordered eating.[13] Notwithstanding the Church's pro-body teachings, such as "the body is . . . a sacred gift from God,"[14] that members should "be more accepting of . . . [their] body shape," and that "there is no universal optimim size,"[15] many members still feel pressured by cultural body ideals, especially when misinterpreting the need for self-discipline and perfection regarding one's body.[16] Recent studies illustrate that youth and young adult members of the Church may be lower in high toxic perfectionism compared to those who have never been part of a religion, which could act as a protective factor in helping members form a more positive body image.[17]

Given these many influences and pressures, the purpose of the current study was to investigate which aspects of religiosity (including beliefs, practices, and culture) are most impactful in predicting body esteem among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[18] This was done through a mixed-method sequential exploratory design, starting with a qualitative study followed by a quantitative study, to draw a more holistic picture of how religion may be associated with body esteem.

Methods

Qualitative Study

Sample. Qualitative interviews were conducted between March and July 2020. Participants included 111 individuals (75% female) who were active

13. Hall and Boyatzis, "God in the Bod," 1–7; Jennifer Ann Harriger and J. Kevin Thompson, "Hollywood and the Obsession with the Perfect Body," *Sex Roles* 66 (2012): 695–97.

14. Diane L. Spangler, "The Body, a Sacred Gift," *Ensign,* July 2005, 16.

15. Jeffery R. Holland, "To Young Women," *Ensign,* November 2005, 29.

16. AnnMarie Carroll and Diane L. Spangler, "A Comparison of Body Image Satisfaction Among Latter-day Saint and Non-Latter-day Saint College-Age Students," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy* 26, no. 1 (2001): 9; Monika Sandberg and Diane L. Spangler, "Eating, Substance Use, and Body Image: A Comparison of Latter-day Saint and Non-Latter-day Saint College Age Females," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy* 31, no. 1 (2007): 2–3.

17. W. Justin Dyer, "Latter-day Saints and Perfectionism," *BYU Studies* 63, no. 4 (2024): 163; Michael A. Goodman, "Religion and Perfectionism," *BYU Studies* 63, no. 4 (2024): 100–102.

18. Sarah M. Coyne and others, "Beliefs, Practices, or Culture? A Mixed-Method Study of Religion and Body Esteem," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 15, no. 3 (2023): 437–48.

members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Participants were recruited through digital flyers on social media (Instagram and Facebook) and by word of mouth through members of the research team. Participants qualified if they (a) were currently an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (b) lived in the United States, and (c) did not currently meet the criteria for a diagnosable eating disorder. Seventeen participants were not included in the sample because they currently met the criteria for a diagnosable eating disorder, which was assessed using a series of questions with a 100% sensitivity rate for detecting an eating disorder.[19] However, eight female participants were included who had suffered from an eating disorder at some time prior but no longer met criteria for a diagnosable eating disorder. To increase diversity in the sample, quotas were set based on age [18–29 (n = 51; 46%); 30–49 (n = 29; 26%); 50+ (n = 31; 28%)] and the geographic location where participants spent their adolescent years [Utah (n = 38; 34%); United States but outside of Utah: "Broad U.S." (n = 40; 36%); and outside of the United States: "International" (n = 33; 30%)]. Regarding race/ethnicity, 84% of the sample reported as White, 8% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 3% multiethnic, and 1% unknown.

Procedure and questions. Interviews were semistructured and included questions regarding personal religiosity, body esteem, religious beliefs and practices, and Church culture. This study was approved by the authors' Institutional Review Board (IRB), and each participant was asked to take an initial survey to prove eligibility for the study and to provide consent. Due to how vulnerable the topic of body esteem and religion can be, each interview was conducted via Zoom with one participant at a time and two research assistants (who were also members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

Questions included the following:

1. How does Church doctrine influence how you feel about your body? (By doctrine, we mean our core beliefs, such as eternal families, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, or heavenly parents.)
2. How do specific Church practices (for example, Word of Wisdom, modesty) influence your body esteem positively and/or negatively?

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19. Mary-Anne Cotton, Christopher Ball, and Paul Robinson, "Four Simple Questions Can Help Screen for Eating Disorders," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 18, no. 1 (2003): 53–56.

3. How do you feel Church culture might have impacted the positive and/or negative way you feel about your body? (By culture, we mean perceived expectations or attitudes found within the Church.)

3a. Church culture sometimes changes based on location. How do you feel the places you've lived, including the [congregations] you've been in, impacted the way you feel about your body?

Interviews lasted between 25 and 100 minutes with an average time of 53 minutes. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and reviewed by the interviewer. Data was stored on a secure cloud file that only research personnel had access to. Participants received a forty-dollar Amazon gift card and resources pertaining to healthy body image at the conclusion of the interview. All participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms.

Analyses and coding. Using qualitative grounded theory, codes and categories were created from the transcribed interviews.[20] Analysis of the interviews consisted of two stages. The first stage, initial coding, involved six trained research assistants who coded two transcriptions using NVIVO 12 to find consensus identifying overarching themes. Once 100% consensus was found (which is higher than the recommended 80%[21]), the 111 interviews were split up among the six coders. Each coded an average of eighteen transcripts following the agreed upon categories. Three main categories emerged: beliefs, practices, and Church culture. To ensure that there was no drifting and that themes emerged from participant data and not from the researchers' preconceived beliefs, a qualitative code book was created.

In the second stage of analysis, four additional coders were added and used selective coding to identify the main overarching themes from stage one. Based off our research questions, coders examined subthemes within the three categories. All coders met frequently throughout the process to discuss theme development and assure rigor and validity.

Quantitative study

Participants. The second part of this study took place through an online survey in February 2021. Participants were recruited through announcements on several Church-specific social media pages on Facebook and Instagram (for example, Happy Latter-day Saints, Aspiring Mormon

20. Kathy Charmaz and Linda L. Belgrave, "Grounded Theory," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology,* ed. George Ritzer (Wiley, 2015), 479–83.

21. John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 5th ed. (SAGE, 2017), 276.

Women). Participants qualified if they were (a) 18 years old or older, (b) active members of The Church of Jesus Christ, and (c) currently living in the United States. Quotas were set for age, gender, and race to diversify the sample as much as possible.

Of the total sample (N = 1,333), 1,094 were women (86.07%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80 years old (M = 32.9, SD = 10.2). In terms of ethnicity, approximately 83% of participants identified as White, 6% as Black, 3% as Hispanic, 1% as Asian, and 8% as multiracial or other. Approximately 73% of participants were married, 25% were single, and 2% were divorced or widowed. In terms of religion, 75% of participants were raised in the Church.

Measures. Measures for beliefs and practices were based on the qualitative interviews that had previously taken place. Measures assessed for nine beliefs (Atonement of Jesus Christ, Divine Heritage, Perfection, Embodied Heavenly Father, Embodied Heavenly Mother, Physical Bodies in Plan of Salvation, Body as a Temple, Priesthood, Law of Chastity) and five practices (Modesty, Word of Wisdom, Multiply and Replenish, Calling of Parenthood, Wearing of Garments).

Body esteem was measured using *The Body Esteem Scale* (BES) for adolescents and adults.[22] It included statements such as "I like what I see when I look in the mirror" and "I am satisfied with my weight," and responses were measured on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Higher scores indicated a more positive body esteem, and reliability was acceptable, α = .91. Lastly, perceived Church culture was measured using twelve different aspects: some considered positive (for example, acceptance, diversity) and others negative (for example, comparison, pressure to conform). Participants were asked to rate how much each item reflected their perception of their current congregation culture using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (none) to 5 (extreme amount).

Analyses. There was overlap between the qualitative and quantitative data collected and similarity of themes. Researchers analyzed the data in a way to provide systemic context, and qualitative quotes were pulled out to highlight themes related to quantitative findings.

Initially, descriptive statistics and a series of bivariate correlations were conducted on body image and a variety of aspects of congregation culture as identified in the qualitative reports. See table 1 for all correlations. Table 2 shows the means for all Church culture variables.

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22. Beverley K. Mendelson, Morton J. Mendelson, and Donna R. White, "Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 76, no. 1 (2001): 90–106.

Table 1: Quantitative Beliefs and Practices Result Frequencies

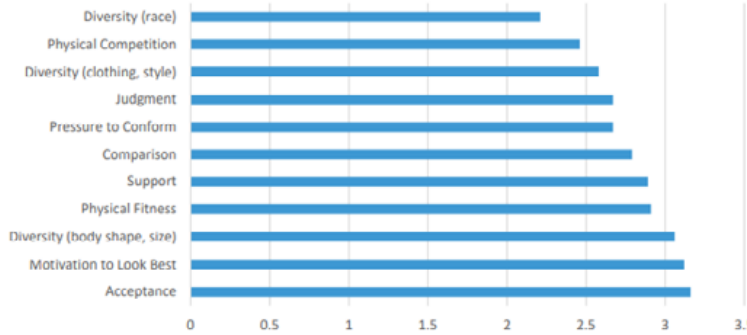
Beliefs and Practices	*Extremely negative*	*Negative*	*Neutral/ no influence*	*Positive*	*Extremely positive*
Beliefs					
Divine Heritage	1.98	5.40	23.82	46.19	22.60
Embodied Heavenly Father	1.83	6.17	34.81	43.26	13.94
Embodied Heavenly Mother	2.13	6.25	30.62	38.54	22.47
Physical Body in Plan of Salvation	2.21	7.76	29.60	43.76	16.67
Body Is a Temple	3.05	15.08	23.84	43.72	14.32
Jesus Christ's Atonement	1.90	4.49	32.72	38.81	22.07
Perfection	13.00	4.45	32.85	15.06	4.64
Priesthood	6.01	18.02	52.32	16.43	7.22
Law of Chastity	9.44	26.41	26.94	27.55	9.97
Practices					
Modesty	16.01	31.33	22.71	23.86	6.10
Word of Wisdom	3.12	13.40	27.04	44.25	12.19
Multiply and Replenish	8.09	23.97	32.82	26.56	8.55
Calling of Parenthood	4.95	16.59	27.78	39.67	13.01
Wearing of Garments	8.24	22.27	28.60	27.23	13.65

Note: Frequency percentages note how specific doctrine and teachings influence body satisfaction.

Source: Sarah M. Coyne and Lauren A. Barnes, "Bodies at Church: Latter-day Saint Doctrine, Teaching, and Culture as Related to Body Image," *Research & Policy Brief,* no. 58 (August 1, 2024): appendix 1.

Table 2: Does Ward Culture Affect Body Image?

Participants were asked to rate how much each item reflected their current congregation culture using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = none to 5 = extreme amount). Averages are shown below in various categories.



Source: Sarah M. Coyne and Lauren A. Barnes, "Bodies at Church: Latter-day Saint Doctrine, Teaching, and Culture as Related to Body Image," *Research & Policy Brief,* no. 58 (August 1, 2024): appendix 2.

For our main analyses, an exploratory factor analysis using Varimax rotation was conducted on the culture items to examine whether any meaningful factors emerged from the data. An examination of the screen plot and individual factor loadings suggested two factors—one suggestive of more negative cultural practices (such as judgment, competitiveness) and one suggestive of more positive cultural practices (such as acceptance, diversity in clothing). These distinctions were confirmed by estimating a measurement model with the maximum likelihood method using Mplusversion8.4,[23] where positive and negative culture items were modeled as latent variables. The measurement model showed adequate fit, $\chi 2(51) = 268.03$, $p < .001$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .943, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .926, Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .057, with all factor loadings above .40. A structural equation model was created by modeling positive and negative cultures on body esteem (as displayed in fig. 1). Age and sex were controlled for in the model. Model fit was acceptable,[24] $\chi 2(85) = 384.09$, $p < .001$, CFI = .918, TLI = .900, RMSEA = .053.

Positive culture was significantly and positively associated with body esteem (in that the more positive the culture was, the better the body esteem), $\beta = .12$, $p = .003$. Negative culture was negatively

23. Linda K. Muthén and Bengt O. Muthén, *Mplus: Statistical Analysis with Latent Variables; User's Guide,* 8th ver. (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

24. Todd D. Little, *Longitudinal Structural Equation Modeling,* 2nd ed. (Guilford Press, 2024), 140–70.

associated with body esteem (in that the more negative the culture was, the worse the body esteem), $\beta = -.13$, $p < .001$. Additionally, positive and negative cultures were negatively related, $\beta = -.36$, $p < .001$. In terms of controls, participant gender was positively related to body esteem, with males having better body esteem, $\beta = .15$, $p < .001$ (0 = female, 1 = male); age was negatively related, with older participants having better body esteem, $\beta = -.10$, $p < .001$.

Results

Though these results cannot represent every member of the Church in every situation, researchers sought diverse sampling to represent as many as was possible. Many digital interviews were conducted via Zoom due to worldwide procedures surrounding caution and COVID-19 implications. We use both the qualitative and quantitative studies to show the most representative aspects.

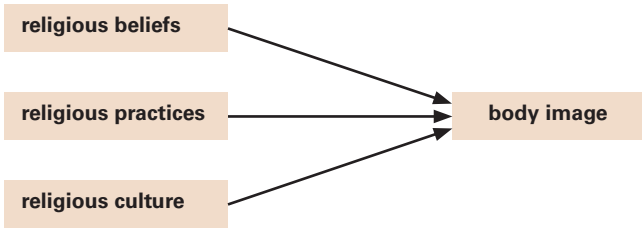


Figure 1

Beliefs

Overall, religious beliefs were most highly related to positive body esteem (49.69%). Many participants rated the following beliefs as having a positive or extremely positive impact on their body image: belief in Divine Heritage (68.79%), Embodied Heavenly Mother and Father (59.1%), Jesus Christ's Atonement (60.88%), and the Plan of Salvation (60.43%). In contrast, beliefs surrounding perfection had the highest percentage (13%) of being rated as having an extremely negative influence on body image among beliefs (see table 1 for all percentages). When participants discussed the teaching of perfection, they often described how their understanding (or lack thereof) regarding the topic related to body esteem.

Heather, a young international woman, explained her misunderstanding of perfection having a negative effect on the way she felt about her body: "I didn't understand the point of perfection very well. I felt like I need to be perfect inside and outside. So 'perfect me' is being a good student, being a good member of the Church, and taking care of my body by

eating the right things, not overeating. So, I wanted to be perfect. And it felt like whenever I overdid it, I was getting out of that path to perfection."

Practices

There was a much wider variability in answers regarding religious practices (see table 1 for all percentages). For example, 29.96% felt modesty had a positive impact on their body image while 47.34% felt it was negative and 22.71% reported modesty practice as neutral. Practices around the Word of Wisdom (56.44% positive) and the "calling of parenthood" (52.68% positive) tended to be related to better body esteem in both quantitative and qualitative data. Several women shared how they came to appreciate their bodies during pregnancy and the postpartum period, acknowledging the spiritual significance of their bodies in bringing children into the world.

As one participant, Jan, shared, "It's a miracle. I think that having children is just a miracle with your body, so I didn't ever think it as a negative thing at all, I just felt like that was just the process and the purpose of a body actually as being a woman. It was more of a positive for me."

However, for others, like Tiffany, it was a different experience. "I think as far as being a woman, like my experience having a woman's body is . . . (and this comes from family background too, and Church culture) that there's so much pressure put on women as their bodies are only to have children, and so the body is only viewed as useful and worthy if it's having babies. So, I think that's also very negative and harmful because I think the body is for so much more than that."

Attitudes and experiences toward modesty and the wearing of temple garments varied greatly, with some participants valuing these practices and others reporting that modesty and garments had a distinctly negative effect on their body image. For example, Camille, a young woman from Utah, described how she was taught about modesty. She explained, "It's your fault if someone else is looking at you. The whole analogy and influence of, 'If you roll around in mud, then you're gonna attract pigs.' If you wear provocative clothing, you're asking for it. I was taught that."

Culture

Similarly, both the qualitative and quantitative samples showed that each congregation tends to develop its own localized culture—a set of implicit norms and expectations—that can shape how individuals in that congregation feel about their bodies. In congregations where the prevailing culture was perceived to place a more negative emphasis on

physical appearance—characterized by competition, pressure to conform, high levels of comparison, and judgment—participants often reported lower body esteem compared to those in congregations with a more body-affirming climate. During qualitative interviews, participants frequently mentioned a culture centered on "looking your best," "competition," and "judgment," noting that a lack of diversity in terms of race, clothing, and body shape and size might contribute to lower body esteem. One participant, Ellie, shared,

> Obviously, we have doctrine on becoming perfect, but it's the act of making improvements, right? . . . I think what a lot of people see as the definition of being perfect, [as being] without flaw. I feel like perfection in the Church . . . is taken to an extreme. I think people don't understand the difference between the two. And I think that's where culture starts. . . . So there is this underlying pressure to literally be perfect. The perfect mom, what is that? I'm not entirely sure. But everyone's striving for it. The perfect house, and the perfect body. . . . And that, I feel like is more the idea of being perfect, but it's the cultural implication of it and not the doctrinal.

Discussion

Religion is one of the many facets of contemporary life that may influence perceptions, treatment, and parameters of one's body. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not unique in this aspect; many other religions also have guidelines around one's relationship with and treatment of the body.[25] Religion, in general, tends to be protective of body image. In fact, individuals who report being more spiritual or religious tend to have much more positive body image.[26] As shown by both the qualitative and quantitative responses in this study, religious beliefs, practices, and culture can contribute to the development of body image (see fig. 1), with each part playing a unique role in the journey of an individual. We use this framework as a guide to discuss each of the major themes that came up in the research.

Beliefs

Religious beliefs were most highly related to more positive body esteem. Discussion and depth in some beliefs (such as Embodied Heavenly

25. Carroll and Spangler, "Comparison of Body Image Satisfaction," 9.

26. See Coblentz, "Catholic Fasting Literature," 215–45; Demmrich and others, "Body Image and Religiosity Among Veiled and Non-Veiled Turkish Women," 127–47; Wilhelm and others "Body Covering and Body Image," 1808–28; Weinberger-Litman and others, "Extrinsic Religious Orientation," 209–22.

Father and Mother and Christ's Atonement) might encourage people to be more accepting of their bodies, while other beliefs had a potentially negative influence (such as Perfection) on body esteem. The correlation between these beliefs and their perceived effects on an individual depended partly on their understanding of that belief and how much they considered these beliefs in their daily decision-making process.

For example, some individuals may internalize a different definition of grace than the one the gospel teaches. While Church doctrine teaches that "grace is a gift from Heavenly Father,"[27] some individuals believed that they must earn salvation by making themselves perfect rather than by relying on grace. This may be true of the 6% that viewed Jesus Christ's Atonement as having a negative impact on their body image. The message of earning salvation can be harmful for individuals with a negative body image. Helping individuals understand the real meaning of grace, "the divine help or strength extended to us through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ,"[28] may be beneficial to all within the faith. Adam Miller taught, "A grace-filled partnership with Christ *is* the original plan, full stop—not an unfortunate intervention necessitated by my failure to save myself."[29] Indeed, people who believe they must win or deserve salvation and who have higher socioeconomic status may be more likely to consider receiving cosmetic enhancements based on this limited sample. In the study, the belief in earning grace was consistently related to a more negative body image and the desire for cosmetic enhancements or surgery.[30]

Many participants highlighted the significance of understanding the Atonement of Jesus Christ in relation to their own body acceptance. This was especially evident among those recovering from eating disorders, who frequently expressed that belief in Christ's Atonement was healing and empowering. As many participants explored their belief on a deeper and personal level, it helped them better understand the purpose of their body and led to greater acceptance and patience with themselves. Therefore, it is not just the belief itself but also the individual's perspective and experiences with Christ's Atonement that could promote a more positive body image.

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27. "Grace," Topics and Questions, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 11, 2026, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/grace.

28. "Grace."

29. Adam Miller, *Original Grace: An Experiment in Restoration Thinking* (Deseret Book, 2022), 22, emphasis original.

30. Coyne and others, "Plastic Piety," 449.

To help individuals form a healthier body image, the authors suggest focusing on the doctrines of divine nature, the role of the body in the plan of salvation, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and embodied heavenly parents. These doctrines can be taught and emphasized when discussing the body (or soul) in classes, starting from nursery age, and reemphasized in other circumstances as conversations allow. Congregation leaders, teachers, and members could ask questions such as, How is this lesson/talk/activity helping members feel more secure in their relationship to God?[31] and How does knowing I'm a beloved son or daughter of God give me meaning and purpose?[32]

Practices

Similar to beliefs, how practices are taught within congregations and demographic areas may influence their potential effect on individuals, as well as how individuals might internalize and act upon different religious practices. Modesty was rated by 47% of participants as having a more negative influence on their body image. In line with current Church practices, parents, leaders, and members might consider focusing on principles as opposed to practices when teaching about modesty. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, "The doctrines of Jesus Christ are so powerful that any one of these doctrines, having been broken away from the rest, goes wild and mad. . . . The principle of love without the principles of justice and discipline goes wild. Any doctrine, unless it is woven into the fabric of orthodoxy, goes wild. The doctrines of the kingdom need each other just as the people of the kingdom need each other."[33] In other words, when modesty is framed primarily in terms of visible inches of skin, we may overlook the deeper principles at its foundation.

For example, discussions around respect, humility, and empowerment will be more impactful than those that focus on specific practices.[34] Individuals might consider eliminating discussions or ideas that focus on women dressing modestly in order to protect men's thoughts and prevent their inappropriate and derogatory actions. When women become responsible for men's thoughts, this shift in responsibility shames and

31. See also Mike Madsen, "Planning Activities—Take the Lead," *New Era,* October 2015, 20–23.

32. See Brian K. Taylor, "Am I a Child of God?" *Liahona,* May 2018, 12–14; Gregorio E. Casillas, "God Loves All His Children," *Liahona,* November 2024, 21–22.

33. Neal A. Maxwell, "Spiritual Ecology," *New Era,* February 1975, 35–36.

34. See Becky Craven, "Careful Versus Casual," *Liahona,* May 2019, 9–11; Holland, "To Young Women," 28–30.

objectifies women. Such practice was universally viewed as negative in these studies.

In addition, instead of enforcing a strict dress code, congregation leadership and parents can encourage youth to wear what the youth feel is appropriate and respectful to themselves and others given the activity, as instructed in the new *For the Strength of Youth*: "As you make decisions about your clothing, hairstyle, and appearance, ask yourself, 'Am I honoring my body as a sacred gift from God?'"[35] This question helps individuals develop a personal relationship with their Savior and allows them to expand modesty beyond simple clothing into a more accurate and broad definition.

Additionally, members can have open conversations around how Church practices (such as wearing temple garments, obeying the Word of Wisdom, and modesty) are related to body image and healthy living. The participants had much to say on these topics, but they often mentioned that they struggled to talk about their own feelings in a larger setting for fear of being judged poorly and rejected by others. Open and honest conversations around certain practices might be healing and let others know that they are not alone in their wonders and struggles. Often, Word of Wisdom conversations tend to err on the side of things not to do, but it would be beneficial for discussions to also focus on encouraging good health practices such as adequate sleep, eating a wide variety of foods, eating with moderation, and incorporating daily movement and exercise. Indeed, research has found that focusing on aspects like intuitive eating and self-compassion can help individuals have a more positive body image and potentially protect against forming an eating disorder.[36] Conversations surrounding these topics may be best between same-sex individuals and classes (such as elders quorum or Relief Society) where individuals may share the positive impacts these practices have on their body esteem.

Culture

Though it can be difficult to objectively measure the culture of one's congregation, our findings indicate that how members treat and view one

35. "Your Body Is Sacred," For the Strength of Youth: A Guide for Making Choices, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 24, 2026, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/for-the-strength-of-youth/06-body.

36. Jake Linardon, "Positive Body Image, Intuitive Eating, and Self-Compassion Protect Against the Onset of the Core Symptoms of Eating Disorders: A Prospective Study," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 54, no. 11 (2021): 1967–77.

another, as well as the perceived culture in a congregation, may play a crucial role in individuals developing a positive or negative body image (see table 2). For instance, the commonly taught practice of wearing one's Sunday best to services might be implicitly or explicitly taught in a harmful way that prioritizes physical appearance over spiritual principles and doctrine. The problematic impact on body esteem of focusing too much on our physical appearance at church could be exacerbated by a competitive atmosphere where congregants compare their physical appearances (such as makeup, clothing, shoes, accessories) to one another. Although social comparison and a need for belonging are natural human drives, when physical appearance is repeatedly scrutinized and compared, the body becomes an object to perfect rather than a sacred vessel given to enjoy our mortality. Religious leaders and community members may want to closely examine their personal and congregational culture to identify any negative practices or attitudes that could increase the risk of members developing low body esteem.[37]

Likewise, individual members can focus on celebrating and encouraging diversity of not only skin color but also body size, style, ability, and shape.[38] Where visible racial diversity does not exist in a congregation, wards could consider displaying artwork that celebrates and includes other cultures, body sizes and shapes, clothing styles, various skin tones, and abilities or functions. Celebrating diversity might also apply to discussions around body shape and size or dress (both inside and outside of a Church meeting). Wards and branches can foster flexibility and embrace diversity while maintaining the gospel principles of respect and reverence appropriate for the occasion. Individuals can concentrate on choosing to create a Church culture that emphasizes acceptance, love, and warmth. Congregation leaders may take a careful look at their culture and engage in honest dialogue with members around current practices, paying particular attention to divisions or implicit and explicit standards around homogeneity. Seeking to improve connection within the membership encourages all individuals to come together as sons and daughters of heavenly parents regardless of external differences. More practical applications that leaders,

37. See "Developing a Healthy Body Image," Life Help, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 22, 2026, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/life/physical-health/developing-healthy-body-image; Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," *Liahona,* May 2023, 98–101.

38. See Bryant Jensen, "The Blessings of Diversity," *Ensign,* July 2019, 28–31; Russell M. Nelson, "Let God Prevail," *Ensign,* November 2020, 94.

teachers, and members can use to improve body image and create a more inclusive environment are listed below the article.

Overall, participants rated their current ward congregations as generally accepting and supportive, yet they also perceived moderate pressure to look their best and to fit in and reported engaging in comparison. Appearance-related norms such as fitness, clothing style, and body-shape expectations were not extreme in the congregations of study participants. Warm and accepting congregations may still carry subtle cues that could influence body image and self-presentation.

Conclusion

Many beliefs, practices, and aspects within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints help individuals develop a healthy body image. While there may also be some harmful or damaging aspects—especially when understood incorrectly—there are slight changes that can be made, and some have already been made. For example, the latest *For the Strength of Youth* focuses on principle-based learning and actions individuals can take, rather than checklists of do's and don'ts. We encourage all to think about how religiosity might be currently affecting the way they feel about their body and how they might utilize their beliefs to cultivate more positive momentum in their body image. Ultimately, every person is on a journey with their own body image.

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Sarah M. Coyne is a professor of human development in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University. She studies media, mental health, gender, and body image.

For Educators: Practical Applications for Improving Body Image Doctrines in Latter-day Saint Contexts

Teach Church Doctrine Clearly and Compassionately

- Emphasize the eternal significance of the body in lessons (for example, divine parentage, divine embodiment, resurrection).
- Use doctrinal language that affirms the worth of all bodies, regardless of size, skin, or ability (for example, body as temple).

Differentiate Between Perfection and Progression

- Help differentiate between "being perfect" and striving to progress.
- Integrate teachings about grace, atonement, divine help, repentance, and patience.

Reframe and Broaden Modesty

- Center discussions around respect, dignity, and self-worth rather than shame- or fear-based discussions of appearance.
- Frame modesty as an act of honoring divine identity; avoid framing modesty as protection for others' thoughts and actions.

Foster Open Conversations

- Create opportunities in classroom and ward settings to discuss body image, media pressures, and body esteem for all individuals.
- Model nonjudgmental, inclusive dialogue, especially when discussing topics like health, appearance, and ability.

Celebrate Diversity

- Include varied representations that affirm diversity in race, body shape and size, ability, and dress.
- Discourage competitive or appearance-based comparison cultures.

Focus on the Do's of the Word of Wisdom

- When teaching health principles, include guidance on sleep, mental health, joyful movement, connection, and self-compassion.
- Focus on the guidance in Doctrine and Covenants 89 and incorporate research-based practices that support these principles.

Support Agency and Self-Reflection

- Encourage students to ask, How does this belief help me see my body as sacred?
- Reinforce that spiritual growth includes learning to love and care for one's body without comparison or perfectionism.

The Week of the Cancer Diagnosis

wooden balls bumped around the Bingo cage
at the family party. I bumped against strangers
in a crowded mall and, against the odds,
into a woman I'd dearly missed.

The week I pictured breast ducts dammed with cancer,
I got a note that my newest book

will come alive in spring. Sometimes news
arrives with pop music or a polka,
but Chausson or a certain hymn
will brood beside you in the dumps.

One morning the wings of a hawk
wiped the dark sky clean, the sun licked my skin,

and a woman fought against the wind's vigor
to crest the top of a hill. On the news,
there was no misunderstanding:
money can buy power in this world. But

fat-bellied ducks without it waddled in a row that week,
99-year-old Dick Van Dyke danced on YouTube,

and the grandfather clock slogged with worry.
Our youngest, a father of three, turned 47,
and I thought why
should it not be me as well as anybody else.

A Bosc pear lay on the kitchen counter, its white flesh
beyond the peak of ripeness. Burlap-wrapped pines
stood stoic in the cold.

I rose and fell on memories of milk and desire.

—Marilyn Bushman-Carlton

This poem was a finalist in the 2025 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.

Joseph's School

A Prophet's Vision for Education in Zion

Justin Collings

This article is based on an address given on August 25, 2025, at the annual Brigham Young University Conference, general faculty session.

Dear friends, beloved colleagues: Welcome back! It is a thrill to be with you and an honor to be one among you. There is no other university like this university, and there is no other faculty like this faculty. Thank you for your inspiring response to our campus-wide student success initiative, which we discussed in our all-faculty meeting back in April.[1]

Something special is happening at Brigham Young University, and it is happening in no small measure because of you. As President C. Shane Reese and Elder Clark G. Gilbert both noted this morning, eighty-seven percent of our most recent graduating class reported that their time at BYU strengthened their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This reflects remarkable growth in recent years—growth of a kind that you simply do not see in organizations of our size over so short a span. We still have room to grow, but I anticipate similar growth in the years to come. There might always be a few students we don't quite reach, but it is increasingly difficult to pass through our portals and under the influence of our faculty without being transformed by the experience. Thank you

1. See "Helping Students Succeed at BYU," Brigham Young University, accessed February 3, 2026, https://success.byu.edu/.

for allowing our students to stretch their minds on the expanse of your learning and to "warm their hands by the fire of your faith."[2]

Seven score and ten years ago, a living prophet brought forth in these valleys a new academy, conceived in revelation and dedicated to the proposition that the glory of God is intelligence (D&C 93:36).[3] "This institution," said President Gordon B. Hinckley, "is unique. It is remarkable. It is a continuing experiment on a great premise that a large and complex university can be first class academically while nurturing an environment of faith in God and the practice of Christian principles. You are testing whether academic excellence and belief in the Divine can walk hand in hand. And the wonderful thing is that you are succeeding in showing that this is possible—not only that it is possible, but that it is desirable, and that the products of this effort show in your lives qualities not otherwise attainable."[4]

Colleagues and friends, I see in your lives irrefutable evidence of qualities unattainable without the unique combination of reason and revelation, discipline and discipleship, and capacity and consecration that are the hallmark of this university—of our storied past and our inspiring present, of our "double heritage" and our prophetic destiny.[5] Thank you for being who you are and doing what you do.

I confess that I think about these university conference messages all year long. For today's talk, I felt that I had received my "errand from the Lord" sometime around last September (Jacob 1:17). Never in my life have I done as much to prepare for a talk as I have this year for this one. Even so, I am afraid that the product has fallen far short of my aim. But I pray that the Holy Ghost will make up the vast difference between what today's topic deserves and what I will be able to deliver. I pray for the language and Spirit and strength to communicate the deep feelings of my heart regarding the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and regarding this university, the Good Ship BYU,[6] to whose towering mast we have resolutely nailed the Restoration's colors.

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2. Boyd K. Packer, "The Golden Years," *Ensign,* May 2003, 84.

3. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "Response: The Idea of Brigham Young University," Inaugural Addresses, Brigham Young University, November 14, 1980, 12; Jeffrey R. Holland, BYU annual university conference address, August 22, 1988, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/a-school-in-zion/. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, "At Their Most Enlightened and Alert," devotional, Brigham Young University, September 6, 1988, BYU Speeches, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/enlightened-alert/.

4. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Trust and Accountability," devotional, Brigham Young University, October 13, 1992, BYU Speeches, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/gordon-b-hinckley/trust-accountability/.

5. Spencer W. Kimball, "Second Century Address," *BYU Studies* 16, no. 4 (1976): 446.

6. Jeffrey R. Holland, "'Abide in Me,'" *Ensign,* May 2004, 32.

On May 12, 1844, just forty-six days before he was murdered by a Carthage mob, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared, "It is the testimony that I want, that I am God's servant, and this people his people. . . . I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the Kingdom of Daniel, by the word of the Lord, and I intend to revolutionize the whole world. . . . I never told you I was perfect, but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."[7]

Seven weeks earlier, Joseph observed that his influence among the Saints came "in consequence of the power of truth in the doctrines which I have been an instrument in the hands of God of presenting unto them."[8]

My purpose today is to bear precisely the witness that Joseph said he wanted—that he is God's prophet, and we are God's people—and to highlight "the power of truth" in Restoration doctrine, which will in time "revolutionize the whole world" and herald the glorious advent of the millennial Prince of Peace.

In this sesquicentennial year, we are rightly concerned with honoring our BYU founders and forebears. Today, I honor our first and foremost founder, the Prophet Joseph Smith. I hope to underscore Joseph's vision for learning and teaching, knowledge and intelligence, light and truth, and study and faith. I hope to encourage us all—in our teaching, scholarship, and citizenship—to drink deeply from the Restoration's fountain and to radiate its light into the academy and into the world.

Along the way I hope to highlight interconnected themes from the Prophet's remarkable ministry: the character of God and the divinity of Christ, knowledge and intelligence, light and truth, revelation and Zion, temple and school. I hope our tongues will taste these truths—that our minds will stretch and our spirits soar. I hope we can join in "the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13)—that we can savor Joseph's witness of the Resurrected Christ; that our hearts will rise in worship as we "shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel" (2 Ne. 31:13).

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7. "Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," in *Documents, Volume 14: 1 January–15 May 1844,* ed. Alex D. Smith, Adam H. Petty, Jessica M. Nelson, and Spencer W. McBride, The Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2023), 482, 485. Throughout this article, quotations from the Joseph Smith Papers have been standardized and modernized for clarity and readability. The sources of the originals will be provided.

8. "Discourse, 24 March 1844–B," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 282.

The Character of God

"My first object," Joseph declared, "is to find out the character of the true God."[9] "I want you all to know God," he said, "to be familiar with him,"[10] and early Church elders were exhorted to comprehend "the excellencies in his character."[11] That character comprises "glory, honor, power, majesty, might, dominion, truth, justice, judgment, mercy, and an infinity of fulness" (D&C 109:77). Before the earth was made—before the Creation or the Fall or even the Council in Heaven—our Heavenly Father surveyed his spirit children and, in an effusion of mercy and grace, resolved to lift us all as high as we might be willing to rise. "God himself," Joseph said, "finding himself in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was greater, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself."[12] Our Father pledged this purpose with an adamantine vow. "Everlasting covenant," Joseph taught, "was made between three personages before the organization of this earth . . . [:] God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the Witness or Testator."[13] "God is gratified," Joseph said, "in the salvation and exaltation of his creations."[14] He "made provisions before the world was for every creature in it"[15]—including "provision that every spirit in the eternal world can be ferreted out and saved."[16] "God is good," Joseph taught, "and all his acts are for the benefit of" his children.[17] "He doeth not anything save it

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9. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 317.

10. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Published in *Times and Seasons,*" in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 345.

11. "Doctrine and Covenants, 1835," 40, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 21, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/48.

12. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by William Clayton," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 332; see also "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," 323.

13. "Discourse, Circa May 1841, as Reported by William Clayton," 10, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 21, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-circa-may-1841-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1.

14. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Willard Richards," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 334.

15. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Willard Richards," 335.

16. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Published in *Times and Seasons,*" 349.

17. "Discourse, circa 28 March 1841," in *Documents, Volume 8: February–November 1841,* ed. Brent M. Rogers, Brett D. Dowdle, Mason K. Allred, and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2019), 86.

be for the benefit of world; for he loveth the world" (2 Ne. 26:24, 33). In a similar spirit, everything we do on this campus should be for the blessing of our students and the benefit of the world. We understand that "education is a part of being about our Father's business."[18] Our declared mission "is to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life."[19] That is the essence of our student success initiative. It is the animating purpose of everything we do.

The Divinity of Christ

The quest for perfection and eternal life depends indispensably on "the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Ne. 2:8). Joseph declared that the apostolic witness of the Savior's Atonement and Resurrection constitutes "the fundamental principles of our religion," and that "all other things are only appendages to these, which pertain to our religion."[20] "Through the atonement of Christ," Joseph taught, "and the resurrection, and obedience to the gospel, we shall again be conformed to the image of [God's] Son, Jesus Christ; then we shall have attained to the image, glory, and character of God."[21]

At BYU, we are unalterably committed to character education in this thick, theological sense. "To succeed in [our] mission the university must provide an environment . . . sustained by those moral virtues which characterize the life and teachings of the Son of God." "Any education is inadequate which does not emphasize that His is the only name given under heaven whereby mankind can be saved."[22]

Joseph's revelations explain that Jesus forged his peerless character by growing "from grace to grace, until he received [his Father's] fulness" (D&C 93:13, 16–17). Stunningly, the revelation then invites us all to do the same (D&C 93:19–20).

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18. Kimball, "Second Century Address," 455.

19. John S. Tanner, ed., "The Mission of Brigham Young University," in *Envisioning BYU,* vol. 1, *Foundations and Dreams* (Brigham Young University, 2022), 65.

20. "Questions and Answers, 8 May 1838," in *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839,* ed. Mark Ashurst-McGee, David W. Grua, Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Alexander L. Baugh, and Brenden W. Rensink, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2017), 145.

21. "Discourse, between 11 June and 23 July 1843," in *Documents, Volume 12: March–July, 1843,* ed. David W. Grua, Brent M. Rogers, Matthew C. Godfrey, Robin Scott Jensen, Jessica M. Nelson, and Christopher James Blythe, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2021), 499.

22. Tanner, "Mission of Brigham Young University," 65.

The restored gospel is a gospel of growth. Its revelations trumpet "the power to become" (D&C 11:30; 39:4; 42:52). "Man also was in the beginning with God," the Lord told Joseph. "Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also. . . . The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D&C 93:29–30, 36).

Knowledge and Intelligence, Light and Truth

Knowledge. Intelligence. Light. Truth. These exalting watchwords suffuse the Prophet's teachings. "It is impossible," Joseph said, "for a man to be saved in ignorance" (D&C 131:6).

"Knowledge is necessary to life and godliness."[23] "The principle of knowledge is the principle of salvation."[24] "Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection" (D&C 130:18–19).

Intelligence, in Joseph's theology, meant more than cognitive capacity. It denoted the purpose and potential of all the children of God. "The mind of man," said Joseph, "is as immortal as God himself."[25] "All mind is susceptible of improvement. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. God has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences that they may be exalted with himself. This is good doctrine," he added. "It tastes good."[26]

By divine design, the quest for knowledge is stretching and expansive. "The things of God," said Joseph, "are of deep import, and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate . . . the darkest abyss, and . . . the . . . eternal expanse. [Thou] must commune with God."[27]

Joseph promised the faithful: "Your minds will expand wider and wider until you can circumscribe the earth and the heavens and reach forth into eternity [to] contemplate the mighty acts of Jehovah in all

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23. "Discourse, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray," in Grua and others, *Documents, Volume 12,* 325.

24. "Discourse, 14 May 1843," in Grua and others, *Documents, Volume 12,* 302.

25. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Published in *Times and Seasons*," 348.

26. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 339.

27. "Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents, Volume 6,* 368.

their variety and glory."[28] "God has created man with a mind capable of instruction," Joseph taught, "and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and . . . the nearer man approaches perfection, the more conspicuous are his views, and the greater his enjoyments."[29]

Joseph loved the taste of truth, and he "loved knowledge for its righteous power."[30] "Truth is mighty," he wrote, "and will prevail."[31] "The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is . . . to embrace all and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed . . . by the creeds or . . . notions of men."[32] "One of the grand fundamental principles of [the restored gospel] is to receive truth, let it come from where it may."[33]

In this sesquicentennial year, I pray that the quickening spirit of the Restoration will energize our labors with a buoyant, brilliant yearning. May we seek and savor truth in all its dimensions and all its domains.

Revelation

For the Prophet Joseph, the consuming quest for truth was inseparable from the spirit of revelation. Revelation formed the bedrock of the true and living Church. "Upon this rock I will build my Church," Jesus said. "What rock?" Joseph asked. "Revelation," he answered.[34] Describing the Church's core beliefs, Joseph reflected "that all other considerations were

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28. "Letter to Orson Hyde and John E. Page, 14 May 1840," in *Documents, Volume 7: September 1839–January 1841,* ed. Matthew C. Godfrey, Spencer W. McBride, Alex D. Smith, and Christopher James Blythe, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2017), 282.

29. "Letter to the Church, Circa February 1834," in *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834,* ed. Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2014), 417.

30. George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, 1888), 189.

31. "Letter to James Arlington Bennett, 13 November 1843," in *Documents, Volume 13: August–December 1843,* ed. Christian K. Heimburger, Jeffrey D. Mahas, Brent M. Rogers, Mason K. Allred, J. Chase Kirkham, and Matthew S. McBride, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2022), 262.

32. "Letter to Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents, Volume 6*, 384.

33. "Discourse, 9 July 1843," in Grua and others, *Documents, Volume 12,* 455.

34. "Discourse, 22 January 1843, as reported by Wilford Woodruff," in *Documents, Volume 11: September 1842–February 1843,* ed. Spencer W. McBride, Jeffrey D. Mahas, Brett D. Dowdle, and Tyson Reeder, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2020), 360.

contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost."[35] "Salvation cannot come without revelation," he said. "It is in vain for anyone to minister without it."[36] I submit that the same applies to teaching and research and learning at this university. "And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach" (D&C 42:14). Joseph spent his life receiving the Spirit, and in the process produced more pages of scripture than any prophet before or since.[37] Of the Book of Mormon, Joseph told the Twelve (who were joined on that occasion by my third great-grandfather, Joseph Fielding, who had just returned from a mission to England) that it was "the most correct of any book on earth and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than [by those of] any other Book."[38] I pray that the Book of Mormon will become increasingly the keystone of our campus.

Joseph loved to learn, and he loathed every limit on learning's domain. "I want to come up into the presence of God and learn all things," he said. "But the creeds set up stakes and say, 'Hitherto shalt thou come and no further.'"[39] All his life, Joseph resolutely strove to go further. "If we have or can receive a portion of knowledge from God by immediate revelation," he said, "by the same source we can receive all knowledge."[40] "One truth revealed from heaven," he added, "is worth all the sectarian notions in existence."[41] The quest for truth demands diligent labor. Joseph's revelations command the Saints to "seek . . . out of the best books words of wisdom," to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith," "to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of the laws of God and man" (D&C 88:118; 93:53). Saints must "study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people" (D&C 90:15). They must teach and learn "of things both in

35. "Letter to Hyrum Smith and Nauvoo High Council, 5 December 1839," in Godfrey and others, *Documents, Volume 7,* 73.

36. "Discourse, Between Circa 26 June and Circa 4 August 1839—A," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents, Volume 6,* 545.

37. A simple count of the 2013 editions of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price is 873 pages.

38. "Remarks, 28 November 1841," 112, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 23, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/remarks-28-november-1841/1.

39. "Discourse, 15 October 1843," in Heimburger and others, *Documents, Volume 13,* 187.

40. "Discourse, 21 January 1844," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 105.

41. "Discourse, 10 March 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 259–60.

heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, and things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations" (D&C 88:78–79). For Joseph, learning from books was necessary but not sufficient. Revelation remained the corollary and capstone of diligent study. "I thank God I have got this book," he said, referring to an old, multilingual Bible, "and I thank him more for the gift of the Holy Ghost."[42] Joseph prized books but warned that "reading the experience of others, or the revelations given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God."[43] "Could you gaze into heaven for five minutes," he mused, "you would know more than . . . by reading all that ever was written on the subject."[44]

Joseph insisted that revelation is for everyone. "No [one]," he said, "can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator."[45] "God is not a respecter of persons. We all have the same privilege. Come to God. Weary him until he blesses you."[46] "God hath not revealed anything to Joseph," he promised, "but what he will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to hear them."[47] "Could we all come together with one heart and one mind in perfect faith, the veil might as well be rent today as next week or any other time."[48]

Thankfully, Joseph provided practical guidance on growing into the principle of revelation. He described the Spirit's influence as "pure intelligence . . . expanding the mind, enlightening the understanding, and storing the intellect with present knowledge."[49] "A person may profit," he observed, "by noticing the first intimations of the spirit of revelation. For

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42. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Published in *Times and Seasons*," 321.

43. "Discourse, 9 October 1843, as Reported by Gustavus Hills," 331, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 23, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-october-1843-as-reported-by-gustavus-hills/1.

44. "Discourse, 9 October 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards," in Heimburger and others, *Documents, Volume 13*, 168.

45. "Discourse, 15 October 1843," 188.

46. "Discourse, Between Circa 26 June and Circa 4 August 1839–C," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents, Volume 6*, 553.

47. "Discourse, Between Circa 26 June and Circa 2 July 1839," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents, Volume 6*, 524.

48. "Minutes, 25–26 October 1831," in *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2013), 81.

49. "Discourse, Between Circa 26 June and Circa 2 July 1839," 524.

instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing unto you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, [and] by noticing it you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon [thereafter] . . . and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it you may grow into the principle of revelation until you become perfect in Christ Jesus."[50]

Friends and colleagues, I believe that growing into the principle of revelation is indispensable to "becoming BYU."[51] This Restoration university must, like the restored Church itself, be built upon the rock of revelation. Early in his prophetic ministry, President Russell M. Nelson declared, "Our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, will perform some of His mightiest works between now and when He comes again. We will see miraculous indications that God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, preside over this Church in majesty and glory. But in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost."[52]

I believe that some of those mighty works will transpire on this campus. They will come as we answer our prime directive to teach every subject by the Spirit of God. They will come as we claim this promise from President Kimball: "We expect the natural unfolding of knowledge to occur as a result of scholarship, but there will always be that added dimension that the Lord can provide when we are qualified to receive and [God] chooses to speak."[53] President Kimball then quoted Joseph's prophecy of "a time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be made manifest"—a time when "all thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ (D&C 121:28–29)."[54]

In this sesquicentennial year, may we cultivate the spirit of revelation. May we herald and hasten the promised day when "nothing shall be withheld." May we claim in our day President Kimball's promise "that the scriptures contain the master concepts for mankind."[55] I believe that we will find those master concepts in the scriptures the Lord revealed through

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50. "Discourse, Between Circa 26 June and Circa 2 July 1839," 526.

51. C. Shane Reese, "Becoming BYU: An Inaugural Response," Brigham Young University, September 30, 1984, BYU Speeches, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/c-shane-reese/becoming-byu-an-inaugural-response/.

52. Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Liahona,* May 2018, 96.

53. Kimball, "Second Century Address," 453.

54. Kimball, "Second Century Address," 453.

55. Kimball, "Second Century Address," 455.

the Prophet Joseph Smith. I believe that the revelations of the Restoration contain the master concepts for all of our disciplines. May we immerse ourselves in those master concepts. Then, "with authority and excellence" and "in the language of scholarship,"[56] may we radiate the Restoration's light into the academy and into the world.

Zion

Few themes run as powerfully and persistently through Joseph's revelations as does the theme of Zion. The revelations call explicitly for "a school in Zion" (D&C 97:3). At Brigham Young University, we strive to build a school that is not only *in* Zion but *of* Zion—a covenant community where all who learn and labor strive to become "pure in heart" (D&C 97:21), "of one heart and one mind" with "no poor among" us (Moses 7:18).

Joseph taught that human beings are designed with eternal relationships in mind. We are formed and fitted to forge enduring bonds. God convened his spirit children in heavenly council, Joseph said, "to form them tabernacles so that he might gender the spirit and the tabernacle together so as to create sympathy for their fellow man."[57] This astonishing insight illuminates other Restoration truths. "The spirit and the body are the soul of man" (D&C 88:15). "Man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy" (D&C 93:33–34). "That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory" (D&C 130:2). "Men are that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25).

What if we at BYU were to take these Restoration insights and run with them? Could our scholars and students do even more to probe how the children of God are primed—biologically, socially, culturally, spiritually—to forge enduring bonds? Beyond this particular topic, could we not, in every discipline, gather the scattered gems of the Restoration and savor what they have to teach? President Nelson's pioneering heart research was prodded by two key passages in the Doctrine and Covenants.[58] Might we not garner similar insights from similar sources with a similarly transformative impact?

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56. Kimball, "Second Century Address," 446.

57. "Discourse, Circa 28 March 1841," 86–87.

58. Russell M. Nelson, "Begin with the End in Mind," devotional, Brigham Young University, September 30, 1984, BYU Speeches, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/begin-end-mind/; Russell M. Nelson, "The Love and Laws of God," devotional, Brigham Young University, September 17, 2019, BYU Speeches, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/russell-m-nelson/love-laws-god/.

Unsurprisingly, given his gregarious disposition and social theology, Joseph cared deeply about relationships. Our BYU mission statement declares, "All relationships within the BYU community should reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor."[59] Joseph wanted a society sweetened by such relationships—a society sanctified by kindness and purified by compassion.

There must be no gossiping or evil speaking in Zion, he warned. "There is no salvation in believing an evil [report] against our neighbor."[60] "To be righteous is to be just and merciful. If a man fails in kindness, justice, and mercy he will be damned," or stopped in his spiritual progress.[61] "It is one evidence that men are unacquainted with the principle of godliness," he observed, "to behold [their] contraction of feeling and lack of charity. The power and glory of Godliness," he said, "is spread out on a broad principle to throw out the mantle of charity."[62]

Charity, for Joseph, was both the means and the product of drawing closer to God. "The nearer we get to our Heavenly Father," he said, "the more are we disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls—to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our back."[63] Charity, on Joseph's telling, fueled unity, which for Joseph was not just a social principle; it was a cosmic decree. "The principles by which the world can be governed," Joseph said, "is the principle of two or three being united. . . . The sun, moon, and planets roll on that principle. If God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost were to disagree, the worlds would clash together in an instant."[64] "If ye are not one," the Lord warned, "ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). "Unity *is* power," the Prophet taught.[65] "By union of feeling we obtain power with God."[66] Unity, Joseph taught, feeds on friendship. Joseph prized his friendships enormously and was deeply moved by gestures of grace. "Friendship," he said, "is the grand fundamental principle of [the restored gospel]"—a principle destined

59. Tanner, "Mission of Brigham Young University," 65.

60. "Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," 479.

61. "Discourse, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray," 325.

62. "Discourse, 9 June 1842," 62, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 23, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-june-1842/2.

63. "Discourse, 9 June 1842," 62.

64. "Discourse, 11 April 1844–A," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14,* 372.

65. "Letter to John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, Between Circa November and Circa 20 December 1843," in Heimburger and others, *Documents, Volume 13,* 415, emphasis in original.

66. "Discourse, 9 June 1842," 61.

"to revolutionize . . . the world."[67] "Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin," he said, "as to take them by the hand and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind."[68]

Less than a week before his death, Joseph told the Saints, "If it was not for the tender bonds of love that bind me to you, my friends and brethren, death would be to me as sweet as honey."[69] "The only thing I am afraid of," he mused, "is that I will not live long enough to enjoy the society of . . . my friends as long as I want to."[70] It seems that nothing in Restoration theology thrilled Joseph's soul more than the assurance of a Resurrection rendezvous with those he loved the most.

Now, when I look out over this mighty group and think of you, my faculty colleagues and friends, I am moved to paraphrase these additional words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "I delight in the society of my friends and [colleagues] and pray that the blessings of heaven and earth may be multiplied upon [your] heads."[71]

In this sesquicentennial year, may we nurture the bonds of friendship that bind us to one another. May we reconnect with an old friend and find a new friend. Where needed, may we repair a ruptured friendship or bestow the balm of forgiveness. May we answer the repeated calls for peacemakers from both President Nelson and President Oaks.

Temple and School

Zion, in Joseph's theology, required two core institutions: a temple and a school. The prophetic vision for both was set forth in the same revelation, one of Joseph's grandest: "The Olive Leaf," section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which President Dallin H. Oaks once called "the basic

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67. "Discourse, 23 July 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards," 13, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 23, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-23-july-1843-as-reported-by-willard-richards/3.

68. "Discourse, 9 June 1842," 62.

69. "Discourses, 22 June and 23 or 24 June 1844, as Recorded in Fullmer, Letterbook," 85, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 23, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-discourses-22-june-and-23-or-24-june-1844-as-recorded-in-fullmer-letterbook/3.

70. "Discourse, 11 April 1844–B," in Smith and others, *Documents, Volume 14*, 377.

71. "Journal, 1835–1836," in *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2008), 147.

constitution of Church education."[72] This revelation prescribed a sweeping curriculum and charged learners to sanctify themselves, to teach one another, to seek wisdom from the best books, and to seek learning by study and faith. It also called for a holy house—"a house of prayer, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God" (D&C 88:119). The temple, of course, must be such a house, but so, I submit, must the school.

Joseph's own life experience united temple and school. During the fall of 1835 and the winter of 1836, while he was engrossed in final preparations for the House of the Lord in Kirtland, Joseph read and studied as never before, including at the Kirtland Hebrew School, where, as we will see, he was a strong and assiduous student. Joseph's journal for November 11, 1835, records, "Attended school during school hours." And then, "Returned home and spent the evening around my fireside, teaching my family the science of grammar."[73] The next day, Joseph gathered Church leaders to impart soaring instructions about the endowment of power, the solemn assembly, and the washing of feet. "You need an endowment, Brethren," he said, "that you may be prepared and able to overcome all things."[74] The Prophet then predicted, "All who are prepared and are sufficiently pure to abide the presence of the Savior will see him in the solemn assembly."[75] A staggering promise. And then, the very next day, "Attended school again during school hours."[76]

And so it went throughout that memorable winter—stunning heavenly disclosures and stirring prophetic teachings, interwoven with the joyful labor of language study. On November 20, 1835, Oliver Cowdery returned to Kirtland from a trip to New York. He brought with him, Joseph recorded, "a quantity of Hebrew books for the benefit of the school. He presented me with a Hebrew Bible, lexicon, and grammar; also a Greek lexicon and Webster's English lexicon." Joseph was delighted. He could hardly wait to dig in. He spent the next day "examining my books and

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72. Dallin H. Oaks, "A House of Faith," Brigham Young University, August 31, 1977, BYU Speeches, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks/a-house-of-faith/, reprinted in *Envisioning BYU: Volume 2—Learning and Light,* ed. John S. Tanner (Brigham Young University, 2023), 6.

73. "Journal, 1835–1836," 96.

74. "Discourse, 12 November 1835," in *Documents, Volume 5: October 1835–January 1838,* ed. Brent M. Rogers, Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Christian K. Heimburger, Max H Parkin, Alexander L. Baugh, and Steven C. Harper, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2017), 50.

75. "Discourse, 12 November 1835," 51.

76. "Journal, 1835–1836," 99.

studying the Hebrew alphabet."[77] Six days later, he was "much afflicted with my cold" and so he "spent the day in reading Hebrew at home."[78]

On December 22: "Continued my studies. O may God give me learning and language and endow me with qualifications to magnify his name while I live."[79] The next day, Joseph's thirtieth birthday, he celebrated "in the forenoon at home studying the Greek language."[80]

On January 4, 1836, Joseph held an evening chapel meeting "to make arrangements for a singing school"[81]—the ancestor, I suggest, of the BYU School of Music.

On January 19, Joseph hailed the Hebrew School's progress. "The Lord blessed us in our studies," he dictated. "It seems as if the Lord opens our minds in a marvelous manner to understand his word in the original language, and my prayer is that God will speedily endow us with a knowledge of all languages and tongues, that his servants may go forth for the last time to bind up the law and seal up the testimony."[82] Two days later, Joseph received a sequence of heavenly visions, one of which is now canonized as section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Then, the very next morning, he was back at school, though apparently slightly distracted. He and his classmates gathered at the usual hour, but instead of leaping into their lexicons as usual, they spent some time marveling at the previous evening's manifestations.[83]

All of this happened, I should note, before the group's Hebrew instructor, Joshua Seixas, had even arrived in Kirtland.[84]

Joseph clearly relished his studies. "My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original," he enthused on February 17, "and I am determined to pursue the study of languages until I shall become master of them, if I am permitted to live long enough."[85] That last clause hints at troubling premonitions. In any event, this season of language study and temple preparation was never one of irenic calm. Joseph agonized over the temple's cost and the burden of preparing the Saints for the manifestations to come. On January 30, he recorded, "I returned to my house

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77. "Journal, 1835–1836," 107.
78. "Journal, 1835–1836," 111.
79. "Journal, 1835–1836," 135. This journal entry is one of the few written by Joseph Smith instead of a clerk.
80. "Journal, 1835–1836," 135.
81. "Journal, 1835–1836," 143.
82. "Journal, 1835–1836," 164.
83. "Journal, 1835–1836," 171.
84. "Journal, 1835–1836," 173.
85. "Journal, 1835–1836," 186.

being weary with continual anxiety and labor in putting all the authorities in [order?] and in striving to purify them for the solemn assembly according to the commandment of the Lord."[86] On March 27, the day of dedication, Joseph offered the prayer whose text he had previously received by revelation (see D&C 109)—a prayer that President Nelson urged us to study.[87] At the dedicatory services, the heavens parted, and the veil drew back. A week later, on Easter Sunday, April 3, Joseph and Oliver Cowdery saw the resurrected Savior and received keys of power from Moses, Elias, and Elijah. Between these Pentecostal outpourings, the Hebrew School wrapped up its work. On Tuesday, Joseph "attended school"—the final session with Professor Seixas. In the evening, the Saints gathered in the temple for sacred ordinances. "The Holy Spirit rested down upon us," Joseph recorded, "and we continued in the Lord's house all night, prophesying and giving glory to God."[88]

The celestial outpourings of early 1836 proved prelude to a season of severe trials—an economic panic, the collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society, widespread apostasy, renewed persecution in Missouri, the 1838 "War of Extermination," the Hawn's Mill massacre, Liberty Jail, and a frozen flight across the Mississippi into Illinois.[89]

Yet Joseph never relinquished the tie between temple and school. And he never abandoned the dream of a great city of Zion crowned by these complementary jewels. Indeed, that dream grew increasingly ambitious and daring. On January 15, 1841, Joseph and his counselors in the First Presidency announced their bold intentions: "The 'University of the City of Nauvoo,'" they wrote, "will enable us to teach our children wisdom—to instruct them in all knowledge and learning in the arts, sciences, and learned professions. We hope to make this institution one of the great lights of the world, and by and through it to diffuse that kind of knowledge which will be of practical utility and for the public good, and also for private and individual happiness."[90]

Four months later, the First Presidency summoned all Saints to gather to Nauvoo. "This is important," they declared, "and should be attended to by all who feel an interest in the prosperity of this the corner

86. "Journal, 1835–1836," 178.

87. Russell M. Nelson, "Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys!," *Liahona,* May 2024, 121.

88. "Journal, 1835–1836," 213.

89. For the correct spelling of Hawn's Mill, see Alexander L. Baugh, "Jacob Hawn and the Hawn's Mill Massacre: Missouri Millwright and Oregon Pioneer," *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 1–25.

90. "Proclamation, 15 January 1841," in Godfrey and others, *Documents, Volume 7,* 503.

stone of Zion. Here," they said, "the Temple must be raised, [and] the University be built."[91] Joseph and his counselors affirmed that the temple and the university, along with other key buildings, were "necessary for the great work of the last days."[92] When the Board of Regents of the University of the City of Nauvoo was formed in 1841, it included the Prophet Joseph Smith and the entire First Presidency, as well as leading bishops in the Church. After Joseph's death in 1844, the Board included President Brigham Young and other members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The Lord thus established from the very beginning that Zion's university must enjoy prophetic guidance.[93]

Joseph, of course, never saw Nauvoo's temple completed or its university built. But the dream of a great Restoration university—one that would stand worthily alongside the temple of our God—lived on. Indeed, it lives on still. Fittingly, it carries the name of Joseph's earnest pupil and mighty successor. Joseph's educational vision—a vision of light and learning, knowledge and truth, temple and school, study and faith—is, I submit, the most precious part of our patrimony here at BYU. "Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations," Joseph asked, "and where is our religion? We have none."[94] I submit that the same is true of our school. We would not exist, and we would have no reason to exist, without the revelations of the Restoration and the living oracles of God. At the dawn of this sesquicentennial year, may we here highly resolve to become the school that Joseph foresaw—a university founded on the unshakable rock of revelation; secured by the sacred keystone of the Book of Mormon; crowned by the glorious capstone of the Doctrine and Covenants; "founded, supported, and guided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints"; "enlightened by living prophets and sustained by those moral virtues which characterize the life and teachings of the Son of God."[95] May we strive as never before to become the

91. "Letter to the Saints Abroad, 24 May 1841," in Rogers and others, *Documents, Volume 8*, 156.

92. "History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," 1204, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed January 23, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/376.

93. I am indebted for this insight to Anthony Sweat, chair of the Department of Church History and Doctrine.

94. "Minutes and Discourse, 21 April 1834," in *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834–September 1835,* ed. Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H Parkin, and Alexander L. Baugh, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2016), 15.

95. Tanner, "Mission of Brigham Young University," 65.

Christ-centered, prophetically directed university of prophecy—"the fully anointed University of the Lord about which so much has been spoken in the past."[96]

Conclusion

Colleagues and friends: In a way that I cannot fully describe, but that I hope the Spirit will sear into our minds and hearts and souls, I believe that the Lord would have us lean ever more fully into our unique identity as the great university of the Restoration. I believe the Lord would have us do everything in our power to ensure that every BYU student graduates with an unwavering witness that the Father and Son appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, and that Joseph spent the rest of his life—under their direction and endowed with their authority and power—revealing the knowledge of Christ to an ominously darkening world. Accordingly, I invite all of us, in this sesquicentennial year, to bear just such a witness to our students—at least once in every course. I invite us to pray fervently for every student to receive such a witness of his or her own—a witness that will never be dimmed by time nor dented by the Prophet's detractors.

When Joseph knelt among the trees,
The hopes of all the centuries
Crescendoed into one,
As from a fierce, effulgent flame
The Father spake the farm boy's name
And introduced His Son.

When Joseph pleaded through the night,
Moroni came and, clothed in might,
Revealed the plates of gold.
The Baptist, Peter, James, and John
With keys of power proclaimed the dawn
By prophets long foretold.

When Joseph built a House of God
And sent swift messengers abroad
With tidings of glad things,
The Lord restored His sealing power
And set a watchman on the tower
To hail the King of Kings.

96. Kimball, "Second Century Address," 453.

When Joseph bled in Carthage Jail,
His spirit slipped beyond the veil
Into the realms of grace,
Where once again, as in his youth,
Amid a blaze of light and truth,
He saw his Father's face.[97]

"It is my meditation all the day," Joseph said, "and more than my meat and drink to know how I shall make the Saints of God to comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind."[98] I bear witness of that beautiful, abundant, sublime, and overflowing surge. I bear witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is its divine and inexhaustible source—the fount of every blessing and the giver of all good things.

I testify that Joseph Smith is God's prophet, as is President Dallin H. Oaks, and that this people is God's people. I pray that in his good time and by his good grace we may become his university.

In the incomparable name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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97. Justin Collings, "Brother Joseph," *BYU Studies* 64, no. 3 (2025): 73.

98. "Discourse, 16 April 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards," in Grua and others, *Documents, Volume 12,* 209.

Eve, Learning of Pregnancy

A ewe taught me. She grew in girth,
spreading her legs as she walked.
One morning she stayed in the fold,

shuddering. What is this? I thought.
Will we lose her? I stayed there
all day and at last saw a miracle

come through her body, a tiny copy
of its mother, staggering then bleating.
Was this why my own stomach

has stirred and now blooms as if
I have swallowed the August sun?
This is my future, I suddenly see,

to give my body bringing new life.

—Susan Elizabeth Howe

Faith in the Shadows of War

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Japanese Mission in Hawai'i, 1937–1950

Christian Heimburger

In late June 1942, a Federal Bureau of Investigation agent interrogated Japanese American Latter-day Saint Wuta Terazawa aboard a steamship arriving in San Francisco Bay. Terazawa was then returning from a two-year stint in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Japanese Mission, which facilitated missionary work among people of Japanese ancestry living in the Territory of Hawai'i.[1] For Terazawa, the past six months had been an emotional maelstrom. Within months of the Empire of Japan's attack on an American naval base at Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the creation of military defense zones where "any and all persons may be excluded." Armed with this broad authority, the United States Army forcibly removed Japanese and Japanese Americans from the West Coast, Alaska, and southern Arizona and incarcerated them in inland concentration camps.[2] Terazawa's family had fled their home in Pasadena, California, and moved to Utah before the army's removal order went into effect. She, along with most other people of Japanese descent

1. Hawai'i did not become a state until August 1959. See Hawai'i Admission Act, Pub. L. No. 86-3, 73 Stat. 4 (1959).

2. Exec. Order No. 9066, 7 Fed. Reg. 1407 (Feb. 19, 1942), accessed March 5, 2025, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5730250. Historian Greg Robinson has argued that though Roosevelt's executive order was vague, "nobody inside or outside the government had any doubt that the purpose of the order was to give the army the power to remove the Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast." Though the United States was also at war with Germany and Italy, comparatively few people of German or Italian ancestry were incarcerated. Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy*: *Japanese Confinement in North America* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 108–13.

living in Hawai'i, had been spared imprisonment. Her return voyage to California now put that status in jeopardy. Wartime anxiety and racial tensions were still high. Following her interrogation, the FBI agent informed Terazawa that he would decide by the following day whether she could join her parents in Utah, or she would face imprisonment with other people of Japanese ancestry for the duration of the war. She must have endured a fitful sleep that night. The following day, the agent broke the news that she would be allowed to travel to Utah.[3] Terazawa ultimately settled in the Salt Lake City area and often shared stories about her missionary experiences in Hawai'i with local congregations.[4] After the war, she briefly returned to the Japanese Mission with her husband, Roy Tsuya, a decorated World War II veteran.[5]

Wuta Terazawa's unusual story highlights both the racialized milieu of wartime America and a unique period in the history of Latter-day Saint missions. Beginning in 1937 and throughout the war with Japan, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints actively proselytized people of Japanese ancestry in the Territory of Hawai'i. The Japanese Mission in Hawai'i was unique at the time because its missionaries' proselytizing efforts were exclusively directed at an ethnic diaspora living outside of their traditional homeland. Terazawa, like other Japanese American (or *Nikkei*[6]) Latter-day Saints, had been commissioned to help realize that vision.

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3. John H. Walton, "The Mending Link: A Brief and Nostalgic History of the Japanese Mission in Hawai'i," addendum, 7–8, typescript, 2002, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/92699cb1-dc54-4d2c-a0b0-9dc42c1a560e/0?view=summary; LeGrand Richards to Chiye Terazawa, March 11, 1942, Roy and Wuta Terazawa Papers, 1906–2013, Special Collections, J. Willard Mariott Library, University of Utah; Jay Jensen to Wuta Terazawa, June 24, 1942, Roy and Wuta Terazawa Papers; Herman P. Goebel to All Peace Officers, July 1, 1942, Roy and Wuta Terazawa Papers; "California, San Francisco, Passenger Lists, 1893–1953," Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

4. "Japanese Girl M.I.A. Speaker," *The Weekly Reflex,* September 3, 1942, 1; "Wasatch Ward," *Deseret News,* April 10, 1943, 11.

5. "Mission Romance Ends in S.L. Temple Marriage," *Deseret News,* November 13, 1943, 30; Testimony, September 30, 1947, microfilm, Central Pacific Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports, 1937–1950 (hereafter cited as CPMMH), Church History Library.

6. *Nikkei* is a Japanese word that refers to Japanese immigrants and their descendants around the world. Since one of the largest contingents of Nikkei settled in the United States, it was, and is, used interchangeably with the term "Japanese Americans." Oxford English Dictionary, under "nikkei, n.1," accessed February 16, 2026, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/nikkei_n1?tab=meaning_and_use#10760534; Lane Hirabayashi,

Between 1937 and 1948, the Territory of Hawai'i became the de facto gathering place for Latter-day Saints of Japanese ancestry. This article analyzes the Church's efforts to preach to Nikkei living in Hawai'i and establish Japanese congregations as part of this gathering. During World War II, the Hawai'ian Islands became a refuge of sorts for Church members of Japanese ancestry as most Nikkei were not incarcerated en masse like their counterparts on the mainland. This allowed Japanese American Latter-day Saints to more fully participate in Hawai'ian society during the war and thus develop an identity that reflected the islands' unique cultural hybridity. This article examines the role of Japanese American missionaries from Hawai'i and the mainland and considers the Japanese Mission in Hawai'i's legacy as Nikkei converts served missions in postwar Japan.

The Japanese Mission: An Ambitious Launch and A Quiet Withdrawal

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints first dispatched Anglo-European missionaries to *Nippon* (Japan) in 1901—the Church's first sustained mission in Asia. The eighty-eight missionaries who labored in the country between 1901 and 1924 converted some earnest Japanese people but failed to systematically adapt the Church's Protestant-facing message to a largely non-Christian audience and struggled to learn the language well enough to teach effectively. In twenty-three years, less than 175 people joined the Church in Japan, with far fewer remaining active.[7] In the end, Church leaders deemed the mission a failure and pulled missionaries out of Japan in June 1924.[8]

Akemi Kikumura-Yano, James A. Hirabayashi, eds., *New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2002), 1–8.

7. Heber J. Grant to Rachel Ivins Grant, December 8, 1902, Ronald W. Walker Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; Hilton Robertson, "To the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve," January 4, 1921, Hilton Robertson Papers, 1921–1987, Church History Library, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/fbf5e1a2-dfb1-4510-ba15-a6898162a0f2/0; "A Visitor from Japan," *Millennial Star* 84, no. 7 (February 16, 1922): 101; Takeo Fujiwara, "Relationship Between Shinto and Mormonism," *Improvement Era,* September 1933, 654–55; Reid L. Neilson, *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan, 1901–1924* (University of Utah Press, 2010), 83–119. For records of missionaries called to Japan (1901–1924) and baptisms (1902–1939), see Shinji Takagi, *The Trek East: Mormonism Meets Japan, 1901–1968* (Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 219, 477–82.

8. Neilson, *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan,* 120–32; Takagi, *Trek East,* 218–30, 242–44. Despite the mission's closure, Church representatives continued to correspond with members in Japan over the next decade. Alma O. Taylor to Fujiya Nara, January 25, 1927, image 19, Alma O. Taylor Papers, 1904–1936, Church History Library;

Within a year of the mission's closure, however, some Church leaders began conceptualizing ways to restart missionary work among the Japanese. In July 1925, several former missionaries in Japan, including Alma O. Taylor and Hilton Robertson, wrote to the First Presidency to suggest that the Church evangelize people of Japanese ancestry living in the Territory of Hawai'i.[9] In the following decade, prominent Church leaders such as Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark, and John A. Widtsoe started seeing missionary work among the Japanese in Hawai'i as a means to generate "a strong colony of Japanese Saints . . . [who] could operate from there into their homeland."[10]

Hoʻākoakoa: Gathering in Hawai'i

By the 1930s, decades of immigration had transformed Hawai'i into one of the most ethnically diverse societies in the world.[11] This was largely a product of economic expansion. In 1875, the Territory of Hawai'i and the United States of America finalized a treaty of commercial reciprocity that allowed Hawai'ian-grown products, such as sugar, to enter the United States duty-free.[12] The treaty stimulated an increase in rice and sugar production, which, in turn, necessitated more labor from Asia. Facing demographic and economic changes in their own country, farmers from rural Japan began migrating to Hawai'i in great numbers. By 1930,

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Takeo Fujiwara to Alma O. Taylor, May 14, 1935, Correspondence to Alma O. Taylor, c. 1935, Taylor Papers; J. Christopher Conkling, "Members Without a Church: Japanese Mormons in Japan from 1924 to 1948," *BYU Studies* 15, no. 2 (1975): 196, 197–99.

9. Takagi, *Trek East,* 275.

10. J. Reuben Clark, "The Outpost in Mid-Pacific," *Improvement Era,* September 1935, 533; Heber J. Grant to William H. King, January 20, 1936, 1935 November–1936 September letterbook, 456–57, Heber J. Grant Collection, 1852–1945 (bulk 1880–1945), Church History Library; see also First Presidency to Hilton A. Robertson, January 29, 1937, transcribed in Hilton A. Robertson, Diary, image 17, typescript, Hilton A. Robertson Collection, Church History Library; and Robertson, Diary, Hilton Robertson Setting Apart Blessing, images 14–16 (December 7, 1936). For more information about the Japanese Mission in Hawai'i, see John A. Widtsoe, "The Japanese Mission in Action," *Improvement Era,* February 1939, 88–89, 125, 127.

11. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Outlying Territories and Possessions* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 48; Stephen Roberts, *Population Problems of the Pacific* (London: Routledge, 1927), 315, 321; Romanzo Adams, *Interracial Marriage in Hawaii: A Study of the Mutually Conditioned Processes of Acculturation and Amalgamation* (Macmillan, 1937), xi, 12–13, 20, 61; Andrew Lind, *An Island Community: Ecological Succession in Hawaii* (University of Chicago Press, 1938), 304–16.

12. *Treaty of Reciprocity Between the United States of America and the Hawai'ian Kingdom* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1875), https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/mk/files/2017/02/Q-6-Treaty-of-Reciprocity-1875.pdf.

139,631 people of Japanese descent lived in Hawai‘i, constituting thirty-eight percent of the islands’ total population.[13]

Some Latter-day Saints of Japanese ancestry also migrated to Hawai‘i during the early twentieth century. Tomizo Katsunuma, for example, joined the Church while studying veterinary medicine at Brigham Young College in Logan, Utah, before relocating to Hawai‘i in 1898.[14] Tsune Nachie, a woman baptized in Japan in 1905, traveled to Lā‘ie in 1923 to receive her temple endowment and elected to put down permanent roots.[15]

Missionaries reportedly preached to some Japanese people in Kaua‘i in 1919, and between 1917 and 1923, several Nikkei joined the Church in Lā‘ie, including Hisasi Okawa, Jusaburo “Frank” Kuroda, Mary Matsumoto, and Otokichi Matsumoto.[16] The Matsumotos’ father, Tarouemon, had migrated to Hawai‘i in 1899 and worked as a stable hand on the Church’s Lā‘ie plantation. The family lived within throwing distance of the Lanihuli Mission home, and Mary frequently played with the missionaries’ children. When Mary finally asked her parents if she could be baptized, they simply reminded her that they were Buddhist. Mary continued to attend Church, however, and her parents eventually consented to her baptism in 1922.[17] The conversions in Lā‘ie may have prompted Hawai‘ian Mission

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13. Eleanor C. Nordyke and Y. Scott Matsumoto, “The Japanese in Hawaii: A Historical and Demographic Prospective,” *Hawai‘ian Journal of History* 11 (1977): 162–65; Yukiko Kimura, *Issei: Japanese Immigrants in Hawai‘i* (University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 1–13; Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawai‘i: 1778–1965* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 1968), 120.

14. Shinji Takagi, “Tomizo and Tokujiro: The First Japanese Mormons,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 2 (2000), 76–78.

15. Japanese Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports, 1901–1955, vol. 1, 1901–1916, September 26 1905, Church History Library, accessed March 5, 2026, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/809e7749-7bb0-4e58-91b6-42080cd0fad2/0/0 (hereafter cited as JMMH); “Japanese Mission, History of Mission for the Three Months Ending Foreword,” typescript, in JMMH, vol. 2, 1916–1952, Church History Library, accessed March 5, 2026, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dc502980-d2de-4198-88a6-bf701d3ec009/0/0.

16. “Great Interest in Hawaii Conference,” *Deseret Evening News,* November 15, 1919, 35; Hawai‘ian Islands, part 18, Record of Members Collection, 1836–1970, Church History Library; “Kuroda,” 1925 Church Census, reel 118, CR 4 311, Church History Library; see also Widtsoe, “Japanese Mission in Action,” 89, 125; Rick Carroll, “Jusaburo Kuroda: ‘A Special Man,’” *Honolulu Advertiser,* June 20, 1985, 13.

17. Taroamong Matsumoto and Gura Matsumoto, in “Hawaii, United States Records,” FamilySearch, image 1281, accessed August 13, 2025, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBQ-QL4?view=explore, from United States, National Archives and Records Administration, Image Group Number: 005157749 [1910 census, Laie village], enumeration district 66, sheet 7B, NARA microfilm publication T624 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); Matsumoto and Kirra Matsumoto,

President Elias W. Smith to recommend to his successor, Preston Neff, that "a certain number of the missionaries sent to the Hawai'ian Islands be given work strictly among the Japanese and Chinese people."[18]

Smith's suggestion was not adopted, and missionaries in the Hawai'ian Mission apparently made little effort to systematically proselytize the Japanese people. This may be explained by a long-standing belief among missionaries, mission presidents, and Church members that the mission was specifically set apart for the *Kānaka Maoli,* or indigenous Hawai'ians. Speaking of indigenous Hawai'ians in 1882, mission president Edward Partridge wrote to John Taylor, "Our mission is principally for their benefit."[19] Viola Kehau Peterson, who grew up in Lā'ie during the 1910s and 1920s, later recalled, "I used to think that the Mormon church was only for the white people and the Hawaiians because the Gospel wasn't preached to the other races on the island."[20] Another Church member in Hawai'i later opined that because the majority of members were, in fact, Kānaka Maoli, "all the missionaries and the mission presidents felt that this mission was for the Hawaiians, that the white people and the Japanese and others weren't good enough to teach the gospel to. . . . This was a mission for the Hawaiians."[21]

This belief began to change after the establishment of a Japanese-language Sunday School in Honolulu in 1934. Five years earlier, businessman Kichitaro "Kay" Ikegami moved from Salt Lake City to Honolulu to work for State Savings and Loan; his wife, Matsuye, and their children joined him in 1933. Though not members of the Church at the time, the family regularly attended a Latter-day Saint Sunday School in

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in "Hawaii, United States Records," FamilySearch, image 671, accessed January 9, 2025, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRJN-ZT2?view=explore&cc=1488411&lang=en&groupId=TH-1942-23026-1056-92, from United States, National Archives and Records Administration, Image Group Number: 004969104 [1920 census, Laie], enumeration district 142, sheet 3B, NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); Mary Matsumoto Powell, Oral history interviews, R. Lanier Britsch Oral History Collection, 1970–1996, Church History Library.

18. "Islands Declared Logical Place to Train Missionaries," *Deseret News,* May 25, 1923, 20.

19. President Edward Partridge to President John Taylor, August 13, 1882, typescript, Hawaiian Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports, 1850–1978 (hereafter cited as HMMH), Church History Library, accessed january 9, 2026, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/818c3f1a-c7d6-4b72-85f0-42210febb1ba/0/0.

20. Viola Kehau Kawahigashi, interview, March 15, 1983, typescript, Polynesian Cultural Center Oral History Collection, 1961–2015, Church History Library.

21. Elwood L. Christensen, interview, 1978, 18 [image 51], typescript, Church History Library.

Honolulu. Ikegami eventually approached Hawai‘ian mission president Castle Murphy and inquired if the Church would consider organizing a Japanese-language Sunday School for the benefit of his family and other Latter-day Saints of Japanese ancestry. This suggestion intrigued Murphy and two other local leaders: Elwood Christensen, the former missionary to Japan, and Edward Clissold, the first counselor in the O‘ahu District Council and a student of the Japanese language.[22] On April 6, 1934, Castle and Verna Murphy, Clissold, Christensen, Katsunuma, Nachie, and Kuroda met in Honolulu to discuss the suggestion.[23] All endorsed the idea and on May 6, members of the Church's first Japanese Sunday School in Hawai‘i met in the Kalihi Street chapel. Nachie and Christensen were appointed its first teachers.[24] The Church later instituted additional Japanese language Sunday schools in other locations around Honolulu.[25]

The Japanese Sunday School catalyzed the organization (or reorganization) of a Japanese Mission in Hawai‘i. In late June 1935, Church President and former missionary to Japan, Heber J. Grant, traveled to O‘ahu to organize a new stake, the first created outside of North America. During Grant's visit, a group of Nikkei—including Church members—regaled Grant and his counselor J. Reuben Clark with ethnic food, music, and dancing on two occasions. Nine Hawai‘ians of Japanese ancestry (including Kay Ikegami) had recently been baptized and asked the Church President to confirm them members of the Church. Grant reportedly replied, "That's more than I confirmed during all the time I was in Japan. I'll be glad to do it."[26]

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22. Edward L. Clissold, "Missionary Work Among the Japanese," CPMMH; Henry Castle Hadlock Murphy, "First Stake in Hawaii, 1975," 71, typescript, Church History Library; Donna K. Ikegami, "The Story of the Ikegami Family: The First Three Generations in America," September 29, 2023, book 2, p. 9–10, in Kichitaro Ikegami Family Search Memories, accessed January 1, 2025, https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/memories/L64C-CHL; Christensen, interview, 1978, 18 [image 51].

23. Clissold, "Missionary Work Among the Japanese."

24. Clissold, "Missionary Work Among the Japanese"; Widtsoe, " Japanese Mission in Action," 89. Forty years later, former Hawaiian Mission President Castle Murphy asserted that "a class for the people of Japanese ancestry" was organized on June 19, 1932, rather than in 1935. Murphy, "First Stake in Hawaii, 1975," 3; Edward Lavaun Clissold, interview, 1976, 7 [image 26], typescript, Church History Library. For more information on Edward Clissold's involvement in organizing the Japanese Mission in Hawai‘i, see "Church Plans to Reopen L.D.S. Mission in Japan," *Deseret News,* October 22, 1947, 1.

25. "Where to Go to Church in Honolulu," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin,* March 9, 1935, 36.

26. Clissold, interview, 1976, 7 [image 27]; Christensen, interview, 1978, 19–20; Heber J. Grant, Journal, June 30 and July 3, 1935, typescript, Grant Collection, accessed

Behind the scenes, the new Oʻahu Stake president Ralph Woolley and his counselor Edward Clissold reportedly approached President Grant and J. Reuben Clark with an even grander idea: the creation of a new mission in Hawaiʻi focused on the Japanese population. Clark consulted Christensen about this notion, and Christensen expressed his full support.[27] Clissold and Murphy later recalled that Grant was delighted by the progress of the Japanese Sunday School and recent baptisms, reportedly telling Murphy, "I am so pleased to find so many Oriental people accepting the Gospel. This is the place in which to organize again the work of proselyting among these people. We will send you a mission president. . . . And from this place, we will be able to send well prepared leaders to take charge of the Mission in Japan, and their own people will listen to their teachings."[28]

Two months after President Grant and J. Reuben Clark returned to Salt Lake City, Clark wrote about their trip in an article published in the *Improvement Era* (fig. 1). Clark was paradoxically alarmed and encouraged by the Hawaiʻian islands' racial diversity and noted how the intermixing of races was "already exerting a sensible and considerable influence upon the Church in Hawaii and upon the spread of the Gospel there."[29] The children of Asian immigrants were especially promising candidates for conversion. Highlighting the fruits of the Japanese Sunday School, Clark asserted,

> It would seem not improbable that Hawaii is the most favorable place for the Church to make its next effort to preach the Gospel to the Japanese people; and it would further appear that a strong colony of Japanese Saints in Hawaii could operate from there into their homeland in a way that might bring many Japanese to a knowledge not only of Christianity, but of the restored Gospel. . . . It would thus appear that the beginnings of a missionary service among a billion, it may be, of the children of God to whom the restored Gospel is not yet been successfully brought in China and Japan and India might be made here in Hawaii, and from here extend to the far-off home-lands. Again, Hawaii is the gateway to all of our branches in the widely scattered islands of the Pacific.[30]

January 9, 2026, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a0fcac48-7e83-4940-864e-f6d98c8c091b/0/0; Clark, "Outpost in Mid-Pacific," 533.

27. Christensen, interview, 1978, 19–20 [images 53–55].

28. Murphy, "First Stake in Hawaii, 1975," 73.

29. Clark, "Outpost in Mid-Pacific," 533.

30. Clark, "Outpost in Mid-Pacific," 533–34.

THE OUTPOST IN MID-PACIFIC

"SMOTHERED IN FLOWERS"
Seated, from left to right: J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Mrs. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., President Heber J. Grant, Mrs. Heber J. Grant, Preston D. Richards, and Mrs. Preston D. Richards.
Standing, from left to right: Mrs. Castle N. Murphy, President Castle N. Murphy, Mrs. Edith Grant Young, Jonah Anderson, Mrs. Anna Grant Midgley, President William Waddoups, and Mrs. William Waddoups.

By PRES. J. REUBEN CLARK, JR.

First Counselor in the Presidency of the Church

The significance of the organization of a regular stake of the Church in the Hawaiian Islands is set forth in this article by a man whose training in the diplomatic service of the United States Goverment makes it possible for him to understand relationships which exist among peoples and nations.

EIGHTY-FIVE years ago (December 12, 1850), Elders Hyrum Clark, Henry W. Bigler, Thomas Morris, John Dixon, William Farrer, James Hawkins, James Keeler, Hyrum H. Blackwell, Thomas Whittle, and George Q. Cannon landed at Honolulu to open the first Latter-day Saint mission in what was then called the Sandwich Islands. Elder Hyrum Clark, already a veteran missionary of the Church, was chosen the president of the mission.

On the day following their arrival they climbed a mountain back of Honolulu and erected an altar. After singing a hymn they prayed, President Clark being mouth. President Cannon records: "He embodied our desires in his prayer. They were that the Lord would make speedy work on those islands, open an effectual door for the preaching of the Gospel, confound all opposers, help us to gather out the honest in heart, and spare our lives to return home in safety."

President Cannon continues: "Having thus dedicated the land and ourselves to the Lord, one of the Elders spoke in tongues and offered many comforting promises, and another interpreted."

Seven years earlier (in 1843), the Church had sent four missionaries to open up a mission among the Polynesians in the Pacific Ocean. These never reached Hawaii, and performed their labors in the islands further to the south. One of them died at sea on the way to their field of labor.

Of the ten missionaries who went to the Sandwich Islands in 1850, three soon returned home to America. Another returned a little later, which left only six. Shortly after, President Clark went to Tahiti. Elders Hawkins and Blackwell had been assigned to the island of Hawaii, and after Elder Blackwell left for home, Elder Hawkins labored alone on the Island. Elders Cannon, Keeler, Farrer, and Bigler labored on the island of Maui.

President Cannon records that one of the first questions which arose after the Elders reached the islands was whether or not their mission was to the whites or to the natives, or to both. He states that some of the Elders took one view, others another. The president of the mission declined to decide the matter, leaving each man to make a decision for himself. President Cannon records his own feeling on this point as follows:

"For my part I felt it to be clearly my duty to warn all men, white and red; but I did not learn the condition of the population than I made up my mind to acquire the language, preach the Gospel to the natives and to the whites whenever I could obtain an opportunity, and thus fill my mission. I felt resolved to study and master the language and warn the people of those islands if I had to do it alone; for I felt I could not do otherwise and be free from condemnation; the spirit of it was upon me. Elders Bigler and Keeler felt the same."

IN view of his strong determination to preach the Gospel to the natives, President Cannon's testimony as to how he acquired the language is of great interest. He says:

"My desire to learn to speak was very strong; it was present with me night and day, and I never permitted an opportunity of talking with the natives to pass without improving it. I also tried to exercise faith before the Lord and to obtain the gift of talking and understanding the language. One evening while sitting on the mats conversing with some neighbors who had dropped in, I felt an uncommonly great desire to understand what they said. All at once I felt a peculiar sensation in my ears. I jumped to my feet, with my hands at the sides of my head and exclaimed to Elders Bigler and Keeler, who sat at the table, that I believed I had received the gift of interpretation! And it was so.

"From that time forward I had but little, if any, difficulty in understanding what the people said to me. I might not be able at once to separate every word which they spoke from every other word in the sentence, but I could tell the general meaning of the whole. This was a great aid to me in learning to speak the language, and I felt very thankful for this gift from the Lord."

Among the most reverent and touching memories to be found in the Islands today are those attending upon the missionary labors of President Cannon, particularly those having to do with his work in Maui. One is told there that President Cannon baptized 3,000 people during his labors on that island.

On the slopes of the lofty crater of the extinct volcano Haleakala, at the little village of Pulahu, stands a monument erected to President George Q. Cannon, marking the place where he translated the Book of Mormon; it is near the place where he performed his first baptism in the Islands.

President Cannon not only did this mighty work of conversion, but he also translated the Book of Mormon. He records that he determined in the last days of the month of January, 1851, to commence the work of translation.

PRESIDENTS GRANT AND CLARK AND PARTY AT THE MONUMENT MARKING PLACE WHERE THE BOOK OF MORMON WAS TRANSLATED INTO HAWAIIAN BY PRESIDENT GEO. Q. CANNON

The translation was finished on July 22, 1853, and the revision of the translation was accomplished on September 27 of the same year. It was published in San Francisco in 1855. President Cannon relates that he was greatly assisted in this by one of his early converts, an educated, intelligent Hawaiian, residing in Wailuku, Maui, by name, W. H. Napela, who "was a descendant of the old chiefs of the Island of Maui, in whose families the language was preserved and spoken in the greatest purity, and he had advantages that no other equally educated man, at the time, possessed." Brother Napela was a man of great faith and deep understanding of the Gospel.

THE memory of the visit, of a few years past, of President David O. McKay and Elder Hugh J. Cannon to the monument at Pulehu is still fresh in the minds of the Saints of Maui, and they speak in terms of awe and reverence of the spiritual experiences which were vouchsafed on that occasion.

President Joseph F. Smith also performed a great work in the Islands, his mission extending from 1854 to 1858. In March, 1864, he returned there, accompanying Apostles Ezra T. Benson and Lorenzo Snow, who were sent to restore order and discipline in the Church, which had been largely led astray by Walter M. Gibson.

After the Apostles returned home, President Joseph F. Smith remained as the president of the mission for a few months. He dearly loved the Islands and had for their people an affection as deep as that which he had for his own kinfolk. He returned to the Islands several times

Figure 1. An article in the *Improvement Era*, September 1935, President Heber J. Grant's 1935 visit to Hawai'i and Church leaders' aspiration that converts of Japanese ancestry in Hawai'i would carry the gospel back to Japan. Courtesy Church History Library.

Writing to Utah Senator William H. King in January 1936, Heber J. Grant further articulated the First Presidency's emerging vision of Hawai'i as a waystation to Asia, telling him "I believe the only chance for us to do good work for Japan would be via the Hawaiian Islands. We have talked seriously of establishing a Japanese mission with HQ at Hawai'i."[31]

The First Presidency began making concrete plans to establish a Japanese Mission in Hawai'i in fall 1936. In November, they appointed Hilton A. Robertson, who had overseen the Japanese Mission twelve years earlier, to lead the new mission.[32] Robertson, his wife, Hazel, and their six- and ten-year-old daughters arrived in Honolulu on February 24, 1937, and began preparing the mission to receive missionaries. Robertson located and unpacked boxes of Japanese language missionary tracts and copies of the Book of Mormon that had been sitting in a Kalihi storehouse since he had mailed them from Japan in 1924. Through spring and into summer, the Robertsons attended the Japanese Sunday School, which by this time had grown to eighteen members of Japanese ancestry and nearly twice as many visitors.[33] The mission's first three missionaries—Elders Melvyn Weenig, Roy Spear, and Preston Evans—arrived in Honolulu in late October 1937.[34] Four months later, Sister Chiye Terazawa, the mission's first Japanese American sister missionary, arrived on O'ahu.[35]

The Japanese Mission in Hawai'i was among The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' earliest "diaspora missions," entities where missionaries expressly evangelized a minority group living outside their homeland.[36] Because the Church had preached exclusively to Kānaka Maoli since 1850, the missionaries serving in the new Japanese Mission were immersed in another Hawai'i. Hawai'i of the 1930s was a place of

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31. Grant to King, January 20, 1936, 456–57.

32. See Robertson, Diary, 1936–1944, [image 11]. Grant reportedly wanted to appoint Alma O. Taylor as president of the new mission but was advised by J. Reuben Clark that Taylor was unavailable. Murphy, "First Stake in Hawai'i 1975," 72; "LDS Japanese Work Growing," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin,* July 4, 1923, 9.

33. Robertson, Diary, February 28, March 8–13, 28, and June 14, 1937, images 26–28, 51.

34. Robertson, Diary, October 22, 1937, images 67–68.

35. Chiye Terazawa, Mission journal, February 7, 1938, holograph, Chiye and Toshi Terazawa Mission Papers, Church History Library, accessed March 5, 2026, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/73b9c01d-23f6-4194-be18-7cbb71167767/0/0.

36. Enoch Wan, ed., *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Institute of Diaspora Studies of USA, Western Seminary, 2011), 1–8; Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, ed., *Global Diasporas and Mission,* Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Regnum Books International, 2014), 3, 11–12.

extraordinary cultural hybridity that Latter-day Saint missionaries had rarely engaged.[37] People of Japanese ancestry were the largest ethnic group living on the islands followed by whites, Filipinos, Chinese, half-Hawai'ians, and Hawai'ians (Hawai'ians composed just six percent of the total population).[38] In order to engage Japanese immigrants, missionaries were schooled in the Japanese language by Hilton Robertson and other tutors.[39] Students faced a steep learning curve. Several weeks after she arrived, Japanese American sister missionary Chiye Terazawa recorded in her journal, "We visited 24 homes & left 17 tracts. Met mostly old *obasans* [middle-aged women] who could neither speak the English language nor could Sister Robertson nor I speak *Nihongo* [Japanese] well enough to make them understand."[40]

In the end, missionaries had more success with English-speaking *Nisei* (second-generation citizens).[41] In August 1938, Elders Weenig, Spear, and Evans baptized twelve Japanese Americans in the Kalihi chapel font, all of whom were regular attendees of the Japanese Sunday School, which then numbered ninety people.[42] After the arrival of additional missionaries, Robertson assigned pairs to labor on the Big Island, Maui, and Kaua'i.[43] By February 1939, there were nineteen missionaries—sixteen male and three female—serving in the Japanese Mission. Missionaries in Honolulu helped administer three Japanese Sunday Schools and two Japanese congregations, located on Kalihi Street and South Beretania Street. Meetings were conducted in both Japanese and English.[44] Robertson reported that the mission had sixty members and stated, "The most effective work in the mission is being done so far amongst the younger people from ages ranging from fifteen to twenty-five, however, we do have several families already in the Church and other investigating."[45]

Over the next two years, missionaries continued to teach and baptize Japanese Americans living on various islands. After one baptismal

37. Clark, "Outpost in Mid-Pacific," 533.

38. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii,* 120.

39. Terazawa, Mission journal, February 9–18, 1938; Robertson, Diary, December 13, 1938, image 135.

40. Terazawa, Mission journal, February 15, 1938, emphasis added.

41. Widtsoe, "Japanese Mission in Action," 89, 125.

42. Robertson, Diary, August 28 and September 3, 1938, images 111–12.

43. Robertson, Diary, October 18, 1938, January 1, 1939, and February 5, 1939, images 117, 139, 143.

44. Widtsoe, "Japanese Mission in Action," 89.

45. Hilton A. Robertson, "Mission President's Report—1939," CPMMH.

service in August 1940, Robertson recorded in his journal, "Especially was Sister Okimoto's testimony touching as it was through her efforts and interest that the entire family came into the Church. They are the first entire family to came [*sic*] into the Church at one time in this Mission. I feel they will greatly influence others to follow. Much time has been spent with them for the passed [*sic*] two years and I feel it is worth it all."[46] By the end of December 1941, there were 150 members of Japanese ancestry in the mission, eclipsing the total number of individuals baptized in Japan over twenty-three years.[47]

The addition of Japanese (as well as some Chinese) converts greatly diversified the Church in Hawai'i. It felt especially multicultural for those coming from Utah. After First Presidency member David O. McKay visited a Japanese Sunday School in September 1941, he told the *Deseret News,* "There was no racial animosity in the islands. White people mingle with Japanese and Hawaiians in meetings and school and the Japanese Americans are as loyal as any."[48]

On December 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan's surprise attack on the US naval fleet at Pearl Harbor rocked the mission. The bombing began at approximately 7:57 a.m. local time, just as many Church members and missionaries in the Japanese Mission were getting ready for or already attending worship services. Over the course of the morning, bombs and shrapnel from antiaircraft missiles rained on the city, including one missile that fell a block and a half from the Lanakila Branch.[49] Of the thirty-two civilians killed in Honolulu that day, over sixty percent were Japanese Americans, none of whom, it appears, were Latter-day Saints.[50] Missionary activities were temporarily suspended after territorial Governor Joseph Poindexter declared martial law and instigated curfews. Like other residents, Church missionaries were folded into civilian defense activities and even helped dig graves at Nu'uanu Cemetery for those killed in the attack.[51]

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46. Robertson, Diary, August 17, 1940, image 263.

47. Takagi, *Trek East,* 279.

48. "Hawaii–," *Deseret News,* September 1, 1941, 14.

49. "Bomb Hits Home in Damon Tract," and "Civilians Wounded by Bombs, Machine Guns," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin,* December 7, 1941, 2, 3; Gwenfread Allen, *Hawaii's War Years, 1941–1945* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1950), 7–8; Walton, "Mending Link," 62–67.

50. "Civilian Casualties," Pearl Harbor National Memorial Hawai'i, National Park Service, updated September 18, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/perl/learn/historyculture/civilian-casualties.htm.

51. See Charles W. Hansen, "Remember Pearl Harbor!," *Improvement Era,* April 1942, 215; Walton, "Mending Link," 62–67.

War and Incarceration

The nation's declaration of war on the Japanese Empire had a devastating impact on people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast of the United States. Within hours of the attack on Pearl Harbor, thousands of *Issei* (first-generation Japanese immigrants) were questioned and detained by the FBI.[52] On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which authorized the Army to remove people from sensitive military areas along the West Coast.[53] In the end, only people of Japanese ancestry—not Germans or Italians—were incarcerated en masse. Over the next few months, 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans were forcibly removed to temporary assembly centers and later to permanent concentration camps.[54]

Justifying the mass incarceration of aliens and citizens alike, Western Defense Command Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt later stated, "In the war in which we are now engaged racial affinities are not severed by migration. The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born on United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship, have become 'Americanized,' the racial strains are undiluted."[55] As many as eighty-eight Latter-day Saints of Japanese descent were detained in these concentration camps, most of whom were removed from the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas.[56] A few Japanese Americans who attended the Pasadena Ward, including Chiye and Wuta Terazawa's extended family, made the difficult decision to pack up and move to Utah shortly before the military's mass incarceration order made it impossible for others to do likewise.[57]

Japanese and Japanese Americans living in the Territory of Hawai'i were selectively imprisoned even though government officials in

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52. Yasutaro Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawai'i Issei* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 5.

53. Exec. Order No. 9066, 7 Fed. Reg. 1407 (Feb. 19, 1942).

54. War Relocation Authority, *The Evacuated People: A Qualitative Description* (US Government Printing Office, 1946), 3–4; Brian Niiya, "Ask a Historian: How Many Japanese Americans Were Incarcerated During WWII?" Densho, June 2, 2021, https://densho.org/catalyst/how-many-japanese-americans-were-incarcerated-during-wwii/.

55. John L. DeWitt, *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast 1942* (Government Printing Office, 1943), 34.

56. Form 26, "Names Registry," Densho, July 28, 2022, https://ddr.densho.org/names.

57. David Kawai to Nadine Kawai, April 1, 2013, image 3, typescript, Church History Library; Susan Kamei Leung, *How Firm a Foundation: The Story of the Pasadena Stake* (Pasadena California Stake, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 18–19.

Washington initially pushed for mass incarceration.[58] The Territory's racial hybridity played a critical factor in this decision. Unlike the mainland, where people of Japanese ancestry constituted less than one-tenth of one percent of the total population, Nikkei constituted thirty-eight percent of Hawai'i's diverse population.[59] Recognizing that the Japanese comprised a significant segment of the islands' working class, General Delos Emmos, the army's commanding officer in Hawai'i, argued that mass incarceration would be impractical, expensive, and devastating to the islands' economies and defense operations.[60] Elite *Kama'āina haoles* (Whites born and raised in Hawai'i) and journalists also voiced opposition to removing this critical source of the labor.[61]

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, many Hawai'ians of Japanese descent felt compelled to publicly demonstrate loyalty to the nation by giving blood, raising funds for the war effort, and volunteering for defense committees.[62] A significant number also enlisted in the Armed Forces of the United States.[63] In the end, Emmons was largely able to stave off hard-liners in the Roosevelt administration who had advocated incarcerating over one hundred thousand Nikkei in Hawai'i.[64]

That did not mean every Hawai'ian of Japanese descent was spared. In the days and hours after Japan's surprise attack, government officials rounded up four hundred or more Issei men including consular agents, community leaders, language teachers, Shinto and Buddhist priests, and

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58. War Department, "Notes on Evacuation of Japanese from Hawaiian Islands," memorandum, circa February 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, Papers as President: The President's Secretary's File (PSF), 1933–1945, Series 2: Confidential File, box 7: Hawaii, FDR Library Digital Collections, accessed March 5, 2026, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/psf/psfa0089.pdf; "Frank Knox to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 23 February 1942," Roosevelt Papers; "Franklin D. Roosevelt to Frank Knox, 26 February 1942," Roosevelt Papers; "Harold R. Stark to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 11 March 1942," Roosevelt Papers.

59. US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population: Characteristics of the Nonwhite Population by Race* (US Government Printing Office, 1943), 7, https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-nonwhite/population-nonwhite.pdf; Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii,* 120.

60. Bradford Smith, *Americans From Japan,* ed. Louis Adamic (J. B. Lippincott, 1948), 180; Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (hereafter cited as CWRIC), *Personal Justice Denied* (US Government Printing Office, 1982), 269.

61. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Penguin Books, 1990), 381–83.

62. Takaki, *Strangers,* 384–85.

63. Takaki, *Strangers,* 385; CWRIC, *Personal Justice Denied,* 190, 197.

64. CWRIC, *Personal Justice Denied,* 269–274; See also Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 115–21.

Figure 2. A view of the Honouliuli Concentration Camp in Hawai'i. National Park Service.

Kibei (Japanese Americans educated in Japan). Some were questioned and released, while others were detained indefinitely on Sand Island. In March 1943, around three hundred of these men were transferred to a confinement site located in a gulch northeast of Waipahu called Honouliuli (inmates referred to the camp derisively as *jigoku dani* or "Hell Valley"; fig. 2). Approximately 1,900 Hawai'ians of Japanese descent were transported to mainland camps administered by the War Relocation Authority or Department of Justice.[65] A few members of The Church of

65. Sources disagree about the exact number of people transported to the mainland. See CWRIC, *Personal Justice Denied,* 276–78; Dennis M. Ogawa and Evarts C. Fox Jr., "Japanese Internment and Relocation: The Hawaii Experience," in *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress,* ed. Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitano, rev. ed (University of Washington Press, 1991), 135–38; Mary Farrell, *Honouliuli POW and Internment Camp: Archaeological Investigations at Jigoku-Dani, 2006–2017* (Trans-Sierran Archaeological Research, 2017), 37; Yasutaro Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawai'i Issei* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), xi–xiv, 5, 10, 23–65, appendix 4; "Sand Island (Detention Facility)," Densho Encyclopedia, updated July 22, 2020, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Sand_Island_(detention_facility)/; "Honouliuli (Detention Facility)," Densho Encyclopedia, updated July 22, 2020,

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with Japanese ancestry, including Kenkichi Fujimoto, were among those incarcerated on the islands or transported to the mainland concentration camps.[66]

Even though most were spared long-term imprisonment, the war had a profound effect on the lives of all Japanese Americans living in Hawai‘i. Like every citizen of the Territory, the Nikkei lived under martial law for nearly three years. During this period, many legal rights were suspended. Civilians were fingerprinted and their movements—particularly those with Japanese ancestry—were tightly controlled. Many Nikkei lived in fear that authorities might brand them disloyal or arbitrarily arrest them.[67] For those who espoused Buddhist or Shinto beliefs, religious freedom was significantly repressed. In the book *American Sutra,* historian Duncan Ryūken Williams demonstrated that "under martial law, the misguided presumption that Japanese American Christians were necessarily more loyal to the United States became increasingly apparent, and the historical animus against Buddhism and Shinto intensified."[68]

The Japanese Mission: Nikkei During the War and Post-War Period

When compared to the collective experience of Nikkei on the mainland—where 120,000 immigrants and citizens were forced to hastily abandon their homes and businesses and live in concentration camps without any due process—the situation in Hawai‘i was less severe. In a way, Hawai‘i was a refuge of sorts for people of Japanese ancestry, particularly those

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https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Honouliuli_(detention_facility)/. See also Hawai‘i Internee Database, Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i, accessed February 16, 2025, https://incarceration.jcchawaii.org.

66. "United States, War Relocation Authority Centers, Final Accountability Rosters, 1942–1946," entry for Kenkichi Fujimoto (no. 690), FamilySearch, accessed March 19, 2026, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9RF-59Q2-G?lang=en&i=23&cc=2729264, Jerome, Arkansas, citing NARA microfilm publication M-1865, Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2001; "Herbert Kenkichi Fujimoto," Application for Certificate of Hawai‘ian Birth, June 10, 1947, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, Birth, Marriage, and Death Records, Hawaiian State Archives, accessed January 20, 2023, https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61692/records/336581?tid=&pid=&queryId=cee9d0ca-c003-4f78-b652-a43ae72c63f6&_phsrc=GOX10&_phstart=successSource.

67. Yukiko Kimura, "Some Effects of the War Situation upon the Alien Japanese in Hawaii," *Social Process in Hawaii* 8 (November 1943): 18–28; Harry and Jane Scheiber, *Bayonets in Paradise: Martial Law in Hawai‘i during World War II* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), 41–64, 117–31, 159–70, 300.

68. Duncan Ryūken Williams, *American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second War* (Harvard University Press, 2019), 30–32, 42–47.

associated with Christian churches. On the surface, at least, many Nikkei Latter-day Saints went to school, work, and Church as they had before the attack on Pearl Harbor, albeit in a radically different context. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Japanese Mission persisted—thrived, even—during the war, and some Japanese Latter-day Saints were afforded expanded leadership and service opportunities.

First came a contraction of the missionary force. Five months after Roosevelt declared war, the First Presidency informed the Japanese Mission President, Jay C. Jensen, that all elders were to return home after their two years of service were complete; all female missionaries were instructed to transfer to the Northern California Mission forthwith. Neither Jensen nor the missionaries were given any indication that new missionaries would be assigned to labor in the Japanese Mission.[69] Wuta Terazawa, who had endured the emotional turmoil of her family having to flee to Utah, started her journey to the Beehive State in late June. Presiding Bishop LeGrand Richards had met with the Terazawas in Pasadena before their departure and wrote to Wuta's sister, Chiye, "I have profound respect for you and your sisters, and the fine work you have accomplished in the Church. You have been real Latter Day Saints, . . . We all hope and pray that this terrible conflict will soon be over, and that the work among the Japanese people will continue to go forward."[70]

The work did go forward but with different agents. From its peak of fifty-five missionaries in 1941, the Japanese Mission contingent dwindled to four by 1946. The departure of white missionaries created a leadership vacuum that was partially filled by Japanese American converts. In fact, from May 1942 onward, white missionaries were instructed to train local members to take over leadership of their respective branches.[71] Additionally, President Edward Clissold and his successor Castle Murphy called upon several Japanese Americans to serve full-time missions in the Hawai'ian islands. The first two, Ralph Shino and Tomosue Abo, began their missionary service in February 1944; four more were called in June and July. This pattern continued through 1948, with a total of fourteen local Nikkei—nine females and five males—serving full-time missions; a dozen or more local members also served part-time missions

69. May 8–9, 1942 entries, CPMMH.

70. LeGrand Richards to Chiye Terazawa, March 11, 1942, Roy and Wuta Terazawa Papers, 1906–2013, ACCN 2826, box 4, folder 2, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

71. Edward Clissold, "Mission President's Yearly Report [1942]," CPMMH; Walton, "Mending Link," 79.

during the same period.[72] Though most were recent converts, these men and women gained valuable leadership experience they might not have received otherwise. So, too, did Japanese converts such as Kay Ikegami, Yoshio Komatsu, and Walter Teruya, who were appointed to district councils on Oʻahu and Maui.[73]

The total number of missionaries who served in the Japanese Mission during the war decreased while the number of converts swelled. Baptisms tripled in 1942, increasing the total number of Nikkei members from 150 to 302; another 72 people joined in 1943. By the end of the war, more than 438 people of Japanese ancestry had joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hawaiʻi—a 2,747 percent increase from December 1937.[74]

What explains this significant surge in conversion rates? Was it, perhaps, the increase in the number of missionaries of Japanese descent? While some prospective believers surely felt a deeper connection to missionaries who looked like them and better understood their language and culture, the largest number of converts joined the Church before local Nikkei entered the mission field in 1944. A more plausible explanation is tied to wartime anxieties and broader patterns of Americanization. Even though Hawaiʻians lived in a decidedly pluralistic society, anti-Japanese sentiment made many Japanese living in the United States feel a need to prove their loyalty to the nation. As a result, many Nikkei jettisoned obvious markers of their culture, including "eliminating the speaking of a foreign tongue in public" and voluntarily dissolving or closing Japanese social clubs, schools, and places of worship.[75] Shortly after Pearl Habor, for example, prospective Latter-day Saint Chieko Nishimura and her mother Hatsuko "burned fans, books, documents, pictures—anything that might say, 'A Japanese family lives here.'"[76] Japanese Americans volunteered for the Red Cross, hosted blood drives, purchased war bonds, and founded or joined organizations that publicly supported home-front war efforts such as the Emergency Service Committee and Honolulu Civic Association.[77]

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72. Castle Murphy, "Mission President's Report [1945]," CPMMH.

73. Murphy, "Brief Resume," in "First Stake in Hawaiʻi, 1975," 74–76.

74. Takagi, *Trek East,* 279; Walton, "Mending Link," appendix: Baptisms and Confirmations.

75. Office of the Military Governor, Emergency Service Committee, *Final Report of the Emergency Service Committee* (Office of the Military Governor, 1946), 16–17.

76. Chieko Okazaki, *Lighten Up!* (Deseret Book, 1993), 7.

77. Office of the Military Governor, Emergency Service Committee, *Final Report of the Emergency Service Committee,* 16–17; Robert L. Shivers, *Cooperation of Racial Groups in Hawaii During the War* (Territorial Emergency Service Committees, 1946), 8–10.

Nikkei men joined military organizations (such as the Hawai'i Provisional Infantry Battalion, Hawai'i Territorial Guard, and Varsity Victory Volunteers) in great numbers.[78] Japanese Latter-day Saints also felt compelled to publicly express their loyalty through fund drives for soldiers and by participating in patriotic programs for Americanism Week.[79] Sociologist Andrew Lind later concluded, "The net effect of the war upon the Japanese has been clearly to hasten and assist their participation in the broader life of the Hawaiian community."[80]

Religion was the site of another hastening during this period. US government officials had long associated Buddhism and Shintoism with Japanese jingoism and labeled adherents potential threats to national security. Amidst the chaos of bombs falling at Pearl Harbor, US Attorney General Francis Biddle issued an order to arrest Buddhist leaders across the Territory; 234 Issei priests were eventually taken into custody in Hawai'i and on the mainland. Government agents detained far fewer Christian ministers of Japanese descent, and it was apparent to many Nikkei that Japanese Christians had received preferential treatment in the months after Pearl Habor. Duncan Ryūken Williams asserts that such actions "led some in the Japanese American community to shift their religious alliances. They believed that, by aligning religiously with the Christian majority, even if they could not transform their racially minority status, their precarious place in America would be strengthened."[81]

The mission that the Church had established among Japanese-speaking people provided physical refuge and spiritual belonging at a time when Japanese civic and religious institutions came under attack. After Lā'ie farmer Gensaku Koizumi was detained by the FBI, for example, Latter-day Saint Wallace Forsythe took in the rest of the family at nights to soothe their anxieties. In the wake of this kindness, several members of the Koizumi family later joined the Church.[82] In addition

78. Franklin Odo, *No Sword to Bury: Japanese Americans in Hawai'i during World War II* (Temple University Press, 2004), 121–26, 146–50, 222–23.

79. "L.D.S. Japanese Aid U.S. Soldiers," *Deseret News,* Weekly Church Edition, November 28, 1942, 1, 6; "Americanism Week Hailed Here," *Honolulu Star-Advertiser,* February 13, 1943, 3; Program, February 21, 1943, Central Pacific Mission General Minutes, 1922–1948, microfilm, Church History Library.

80. Andrew W. Lind, *Hawaii's Japanese: An Experiment in Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 1946), 258.

81. Office of the Military Governor, Emergency Service Committee, *Final Report of the Emergency Service Committee,* 16–17; Kelli Y. Nakamura, "Bishop Mitsumyo Tottori: Patriotism Through Buddhism During World War II," *Hawai'ian Journal of History* 51 (2017): 115; Williams, *American Sutra,* 16–21, 27–45, 57–58.

82. Kotaro and Grace Koizumi, interview, January 22, 2017, Church History Library.

to finding spiritual solace, many Japanese Americans who joined the Church during this period reflected on the fellowship, love, and support they felt as they participated in cottage meetings, Sunday school, and youth activities. Young Nikkei were especially drawn to youth programs administered by energetic missionaries.[83] Social scientist Norman Smith, who published a study of juvenile delinquency on Maui in 1942, observed that the Latter-day Saints had "organized numerous groups, particularly Hawaiian and Japanese, in all parts of the island, and have provided a program which is practical, interesting, and full of challenge" and "attracted young people by showing interest in them."[84]

This community of belonging drew in many teenagers such as Chieko Nishimura (later Chieko Okazaki), who joined the Church in 1942 after attending Sunday School and other Church activities for nearly four years.[85] Rather than simply abandoning Buddhist teachings, however, Nishimura described a hybrid approach to conversion where she blended those teachings with the tenets of her new religion to redefine her identity as a person of Japanese ancestry.[86] In the end, many of those who joined the Church between 1938 and 1945 remained active participants in their congregations and several went on to serve full-time missions.

The Japanese Mission, which became the Central Pacific Mission in May 1944, persisted until it was combined with the Hawai'ian Mission in 1950. By that point, postwar developments had shifted the thinking of Church leaders in Salt Lake City concerning where best to evangelize people of Japanese ancestry.

Tadaima! Return to Japan

In fall 1945, Edward Clissold found himself in war-torn Tokyo, Japan. A naval reserve officer before the war, Clissold was called to active duty

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83. Dennis H. Atkin and Theodocia H. Atkin, eds., *Mormon Pioneers of Japanese Ancestry: Their Conversion Stories* (Theodocia H. Atkin, 2008), 254–55, 259–61; Sharlene B. C. L. Furuto and David M. Furuto, "The Saints of the Japanese or Central Pacific Mission," in Grant Underwood, ed., *Pioneers in the Pacific: Memory, History, and Cultural Identity Among the Latter-day Saints* (Religious Studies Center, 2005), 220–21; Walton, "Mending Link," 55, 71–72;

84. Norman Smith, *Maui Youth Adrift: A Study of Juvenile Delinquency on Maui* (Maui Publishing, 1942), 137–39.

85. Chieko N. Okazaki, interview, February–April 1991, Church History Library.

86. "'There Is Always a Struggle': An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki," *Dialogue* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 128. Charles Inouye, whose family joined the Church in Utah in the 1940s, similarly described how the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints resonated with his family's Buddhist values. Charles Inouye, interview, October 13, 2003, Church History Library.

after Pearl Harbor, yet he continued to serve as president of the Japanese Mission in Hawai‘i until May 1944. Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, Clissold was stationed in Tokyo under the command of General Douglas MacArthur's occupation forces.[87] Shortly after the Americans' arrival in Japan, Clissold and other Latter-day Saint servicemen began holding Church services. Hoping to connect with Japanese Latter-day Saints, Clissold put an ad in the local newspaper *Mainichi Shinbun,* which drew the attention of at least one Japanese Saint, Tazuko Watanabe. Watanabe and another Church member, Fujiya Nara, sought out Clissold and were introduced to Russell Horiuchi, a bilingual Nikkei convert from Hawai‘i who was also serving in the occupation forces. These members, as well as former Japanese Mission elder Preston D. Evans, formed the core of the Church in Japan during the first six months of the occupation. They resumed more formal worship services in April 1946.[88]

As Americans began to learn more about the deplorable conditions faced by the war-ravaged Japanese people, Church members took actions to strengthen the bond between people of Japanese ancestry living in Hawai‘i and Japan. In late 1946, the welfare committee of the Japanese Mission in Hawai‘i prepared and shipped two hundred "relief boxes" filled with food, clothing, and shoes to the Japanese Saints and other needy persons in Japan.[89] Japanese Mission President Weenig continued to receive distressing letters from Church members in Japan, and in response, the missionaries and Church members organized clothing drives, raised funds, and sent additional relief packages to Japan.[90]

As members in Hawai‘i did their part to relieve the physical suffering of the Japanese people, Church leaders prepared to address their spiritual needs. In late 1947, the First Presidency appointed Clissold (who had just returned to Hawai‘i from Japan) president of a newly established Japanese Mission based in war-torn Japan. The peripatetic Clissold returned to Japan in March 1948 and the mission's first five missionaries—who

87. Brian O'Brien, "Edward LaVaun Clissold: The Second Most Powerful Man in the Church," *Mormon Pacific Historical Society* 28 (2007): [5].

88. Yukiko Nonno, "Fujiya Nara: Twice a Pioneer," *Ensign,* April 1993, 31–33; Takagi, *Trek East,* 310–13.

89. "200 Relief Boxes for Japan," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin,* November 12, 1946, 4; "Shoes Included in Relief Boxes," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin,* November 23, 1946, 5; "Deadline Advanced for Local Drive on Japan Clothing," *Honolulu Star-Advertiser,* December 14, 1946, 3.

90. CPMMH, March 31 and October 2, 1947; JMMH, October 2 and December 25, 1948, images 165, 168–69.

had been temporarily laboring in the Japanese Mission in Hawai'i—arrived in late June.[91]

In the early years, the post-war Japanese Mission in Japan leaned heavily on young Nisei who had embraced the message of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hawai'i and other places. For example, Kooji Okauchi, a Nisei raised in Los Angeles, arrived with the first group of missionaries. Like other Japanese in California, Okauchi and his family were forcibly removed from their home and incarcerated in Wyoming's Heart Mountain Concentration Camp. In 1943, he volunteered for the army and met a Latter-day Saint soldier who facilitated his conversion to the Church.[92] The mission received an additional contingent of missionaries in October 1948, six of whom hailed from the Hawai'ian islands, including Kenji Akagi, Kiyoshi Yoshii, Kimiaki Sakata, Kojin Goya, Tomiko Shirota, and Bessie Okamoto. Making note of this fact, Clissold recorded in the mission history, "The mission is extremely fortunate to have these young Japanese members come. They can all speak Japanese." The next day he added, "The new brethren and sisters, with their knowledge of the gospel and great faith, have filled everyone with confidence and a desire to move ahead."[93]

Between 1947 and 1954, as many as twenty-eight people of Japanese ancestry labored in Japan: twenty-one came from Hawai'i, three from Canada, and four from Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, and Utah respectively.[94] Reflecting on the service of Japanese American missionaries, President Clissold recorded in the history, "The *Nisei* brethren and sisters from Hawaii were particularly helpful in contacting and organizing

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91. JMMH, vol. 2, June 26, 1948; "Church Plans to Reopen L.D.S. Mission in Japan," *Deseret News,* October 22, 1947, 1; "Pres. Clissold Takes Hold of New Field upon Arrival in Japan," *Deseret News,* April 24, 1948, 44; JMMH, "Foreword."

92. "Progress in Japan," *Deseret News,* June 20, 1948, 71; "United States, War Relocation Authority Centers, Final Accountability Rosters, 1942–1946," entry for Kooji Okauchi, FamilySearch, accessed March 4, 2026, https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/2729264, Heart Mountain, Wyoming, citing NARA microfilm publication M-1865 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2001); "Kooji Okauchi," Draft Card, June 30, 1942, Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2238/records/18763814. See "Japanese Convert Gains Friends in Las Cienega Ward," *Deseret News,* August 7, 1954, 33; Atkin and Atkin, *Mormon Pioneers of Japanese Ancestry,* 247–48.

93. JMMH, vol. 2, October 15 and 18, 1948.

94. JMMH, vol. 2; JMMH, vol. 3, 1952–1955, Church History Library, accessed March 5, 2026, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c341edb1-2963-4c61-a3e2-ebd5eadede97/0/0.

the Japanese saints."[95] Their service during these years set a precedent that continued in future generations as "dozens and dozens" of second and third-generation Nikkei served in the Japan mission in the decades that followed. Some Japanese Americans returned to Japan a second time as mission presidents.[96] In this way, the Japan Mission most certainly fulfilled the vision of Church leaders who had originally conceptualized it as a gateway to Asia.

Legacy

Though it operated for only thirteen years, the Japanese Mission in Hawai'i was significant in several ways. First, it countered the perception held by many living in the Hawai'ian islands that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was "only for the white people and the Hawaiians." Next, the mission reinvigorated the Church's commitment to preach to people of Asian ancestry after the Japan Mission (along with other missions to Asia) had been abandoned. Partly due to the mission's success with Japanese people, the First Presidency instructed missionaries to preach to the Chinese on the Hawai'ian islands in September 1944, similarly hoping converts in Hawai'i would act as a bridge to China.[97] For Japanese American Latter-day Saints living on the islands, the Japanese Mission provided a modicum of spiritual comfort and stability amid a conflict appropriately described as "a war without mercy."[98] Finally, the mission gathered people of Japanese heritage from Hawai'i, Japan, and the mainland, and nourished a body of Latter-day Saints with the cultural knowledge, language skills, and leadership experience to later preach in Japan. Their children and grandchildren maintained a tradition of missionary service that would shape the Church in Japan for generations to come.

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95. JMMH, "Foreword."

96. Walton, "Mending Link," 94.

97. CPMMH, September 11, 1944; Clark, "Outpost in Mid-Pacific," 533.

98. John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific* (Pantheon Books, 1986), 11.

Before Spring

Night. The mountains stab cold shadows
white and dark against the stars.
Crescent moon, smiling wanly,
dripping pale shadows of sagebrush,
scrub oak, and knapweed.
I turn, survey my wandering footprints—
blind and broken stitches
in the melting snow. Below them streetlights,
much like stars, shine blurred and warm
through this winter breeze,
and all around the headless stalks
of last year's wild grain shiver.
As usual, I climb here late, late—
when all is still, when only
the timid mule deer see and wonder
why I whisper to the stars,
and to anyone beyond them
who might be listening.
I pull my coat tighter, guard
against the night, the restive breeze,
the shifting seasons of the heart.

—Roger Terry

This poem was a finalist in the 2025 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.

Wilford Woodruff's Path to the Apostleship

Alexander L. Baugh

In 1832, twenty-five-year-old Wilford Woodruff, along with his older married brother Azmon and sister-in-law Elizabeth, left their immediate family and lifelong home of Farmington (now Avon), Connecticut, and moved to Richland, New York. Wilford, Azmon, and Elizabeth put a down payment on a 140-acre farm that included a home and a sawmill. The move proved to be providential and life-changing for them.

On December 29, 1833, two Mormon elders, Zera Pulsipher and Elijah Cheney, stopped at the home of Azmon and Wilford to share the message of the Book of Mormon and the restoration of Christ's ancient Church. Neither brother was home at the time, but the missionaries informed Elizabeth about a preaching meeting being held that evening in a nearby schoolhouse. When the time for the meeting arrived, both Wilford and Azmon attended. Elder Pulsipher's preaching struck a spiritual chord with Wilford. "I felt the spirit of God . . . bear witness that he was the servant of God," Wilford wrote. "When he had finished his discourse I truly felt that it was the first gospel sermon that I had ever he[a]rd."[1] Two days after the meeting, on December 31, Wilford, Azmon, and Elizabeth were baptized by Elder Pulsipher (fig. 1).[2]

In early April 1834, Parley P. Pratt came from Kirtland and visited Wilford and Azmon in Richland, informing them that Joseph Smith had

1. Wilford Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," December 1833, Wilford Woodruff Papers, Wilford Woodruff Papers Foundation, accessed January 27, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/Q67.

2. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," December 31, 1833.

Figure 1. Zera Pulsipher, date unknown. Courtesy Church History Library.

received a revelation instructing the Church to raise an armed company to march to Missouri.[3] There, with the possible assistance of state militia from Missouri governor Daniel Dunklin, they hoped to assist in repossessing the property and homes of the Saints who had been expelled from Jackson County (see D&C 103).[4] Azmon chose not to go, but Wilford agreed to volunteer and wasted no time in settling his affairs. On April 11, accompanied by two other local Mormon recruits, Henry Brown and Warren Ingles, Wilford left for Kirtland and arrived two weeks later. Here he met Joseph Smith for the first time and even boarded at his home until May 1, when Wilford left Kirtland bound for Missouri in the first company of the Camp of Israel (later Zion's Camp).[5]

Although the Mormon army experienced a number of hardships and setbacks during the two-month-long trek to western Missouri, Wilford relished the adventure. Ultimately, however, Governor Dunklin made the decision not to call out the state militia to assist the Saints, thereby eliminating the possibility that Church members would be restored to their homes and property. When the camp disbanded, most of the men returned to their homes in the East. However, Wilford chose to remain in Clay County, where, for the next six months, he lived with Lyman Wight on the property of Michael Arthur, a prosperous landowner and friendly non-Church member who employed them to make brick for the construction of a two-story home (fig. 2).[6]

On January 13, 1835, Bishop Edward Partridge called Wilford to serve a mission to the Southern states, his first extended mission, one that would last nearly two years and take him through the backwoods

3. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," April 1, 1834.

4. Matthew C. Godfrey, "The Redemption of Zion Must Needs Come by Power: Insights into the Camp of Israel Expedition, 1834," *BYU Studies* 53, no. 4 (2014): 134–35.

5. See Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," April 11–May 1, 1834.

6. See Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," May 1834–January 13, 1835.

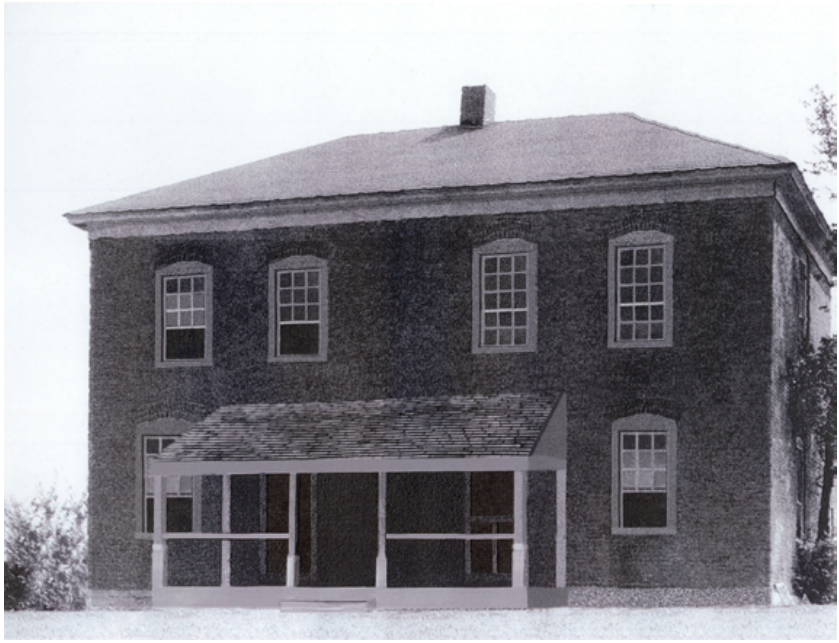

Figure 2. Michael Arthur home near Liberty, Missouri, date unknown. Arthur hired Wilford Woodruff and Lyman Wight for several months in 1834–35 to make brick for the construction of the home. The house was demolished around 1968. Image courtesy of William (Bill) Curtis, Independence, Missouri.

of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky.[7] On February 14, 1835, a month after Wilford commenced his mission,[8] a special meeting convened in Kirtland for the men who had participated in the Camp of Israel expedition to Missouri. Had Wilford been in Ohio (he was in Crawford County, Arkansas, at the time), he would likely have been in attendance. During this meeting, the First Presidency blessed and set apart the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris—who were appointed to choose, call, and ordain twelve men to make up the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Those chosen included Lyman E. Johnson, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball,

7. Wilford Woodruff, "Autobiography 1857 Draft 2," 6–7, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed February 12, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/Rkqq; Wilford Woodruff, "Autobiography of Wilford Woodruff," *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine* 3, no. 1 (October 1883): 5, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/vR1r. At the time Woodruff began his mission, in January 1835, he held the priesthood office of a priest.

8. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," January 13, 1835.

Orson Hyde, David W. Patten, Luke Johnson, William E. McLellin, John F. Boynton, Orson Pratt, William Smith, Thomas B. Marsh, and Parley P. Pratt.[9] Eleven weeks later, on May 2, 1835, the entire quorum met together for the first time and organized the Quorum by seniority, oldest to youngest.[10] It would not be until later that seniority would be determined by time of ordination and not age.[11]

As a member of the Camp of Israel and during his time in Clay County, Wilford had become acquainted with all the men who would be selected to the Quorum of the Twelve, except Elder John Boynton. It was probably not until June, while in Kentucky, that Wilford received the news about the establishment of the Quorum and the names of the men called to the apostleship—the office he unknowingly would occupy himself in just a few years.[12]

During his mission to the Southern states, Wilford distinguished himself as a tireless missionary and a dynamic preacher, laboring at various times with Henry Brown, Warren Parrish (who ordained him an elder),[13] Abraham O. Smoot, and for a time, Apostle David W. Patten (who ordained him a member of the Seventy).[14] But for much of the time he was on his own. He crisscrossed three states, traveling literally several thousand miles. He held hundreds of preaching meetings, baptized seventy people, assisted in several other baptisms, and performed

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9. "Warren Cowdery, Minute Book 1," in *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834–September 1835,* ed. Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H Parkin, and Alexander L. Baugh, The Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2016), 226–28. Lyman Johnson, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball were ordained and blessed on this occasion. The following day, February 15, Orson Hyde, David W. Patten, Luke Johnson, William E. McClellan, John F. Boynton, and William Smith received their ordinations and blessings. Three of those called, Parley P. Pratt, Thomas B. Marsh, and Orson Pratt, were not in Kirtland at the time the Quorum of the Twelve was organized, so they did not receive their ordinations and blessings until later—Parley P. Pratt on February 21, 1835, and Marsh and Orson Pratt on April 26, 1835. See "Minutes and Blessings, 21 February 1835," and and "Minutes, 26 April 1835," in Godfrey and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 4,* 239, 294, respectively.

10. "Warren Cowdery, Minute Book 1," 301.

11. William G. Hartley, *My Fellow Servants: Essays on the History of the Priesthood* (BYU Studies, 2010), 189–90, 228–29.

12. Although Woodruff was not called as one of the original Twelve, by 1837, eleven of the original twelve became acquainted with him and likely recognized his apostolic stature. He did not know John Boynton because Boynton was not in Zion's Camp. See "Boynton, John Farnham," Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed March 19, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/john-farnham-boynton.

13. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," January 2, 1836; December 28, 1836.

14. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833 – January 3, 1838)," May 31, 1836.

scores of healing blessings and ordinations.[15] In late November 1836, he made his way back to Kirtland, where he found a bustling Mormon community and a stately temple. "I truly felt to rejoice at the sight," he wrote, "as it was the first time that mine eyes ever beheld the house of the Lord."[16]

Figure 3. Daguerreotype of Phebe Whittemore Carter Woodruff by Marsena Cannon, Boston, March 8, 1849. Courtesy Church History Library.

The first few months of 1837 were eventful days for Wilford. His journal records the spiritual exuberance he felt worshipping with the Saints, participating in the ordinances of the Kirtland endowment, attending meetings with his fellow members of the Quorum of the Seventy, and receiving his patriarchal blessing under the hands of Joseph Smith Sr.[17] In late January 1837, Wilford was introduced to Phebe Carter (fig. 3), a woman from Scarborough, Maine, who had joined the Church in 1834 and moved to Kirtland. Following a two-and-a-half-month courtship, they were married in the home of Joseph and Emma Smith (fig. 4) on April 13, 1837, by Frederick G. Williams, Second Counselor in the First Presidency.[18]

It did not take long for Wilford to decide to serve another mission, and on May 31, just six weeks after his marriage to Phebe, he left Kirtland in company with Jonathan H. Hale on his second extended mission.[19] "I felt impressed by the Spirit of God to take a mission to the Fox Islands," part of Maine's coastal islands, and a region he noted that he "knew nothing about," but he believed the gospel was to be taken unto

15. For a summary of Woodruff's mission to the Southern states, see Woodruff, "Autobiography," 4–11.

16. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," November 25, 1836.

17. For two examples of his spiritual experiences, see Wilford's journal entry on the day he and Phebe were married and two days later when he received his patriarchal blessing. For their wedding, see Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," April 13, 1837. For his patriarchal blessing, see Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," April 15, 1837.

18. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," April 13, 1837.

19. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," May 31, 1837.

Figure 4. Restored Kirtland home of Joseph and Emma Smith, 2024. Wilford Woodruff and Emma Carter were married by Frederick G. Williams in the Smith home on April 13, 1837. Photograph courtesy of *Church News*.

"the isles of the sea," and although the Fox Islands lay just a few miles off Maine's eastern shore, they still qualified as "isles" (D&C 1:1).[20]

Leaving Ohio, Elders Woodruff and Hale preached in community churches, schools, and town halls in upstate New York; Ontario, Canada (Kingston); and eastern Massachusetts. They baptized those willing to accept their message and strengthened Church members residing in a number of small, scattered branches of the Church. Upon arriving in Farmington, Connecticut, in mid-July, Wilford was not only reunited with his parents and other family members after a five-year absence but also with his wife Phebe, who traveled from Kirtland to join him.[21] Three weeks later, Wilford and Phebe made their way to Scarborough, Maine, where on August 8 they arrived at the home of Phebe's parents (fig. 5), Ezra and Sarah Carter, who met their son-in-law for the first time. Here

20. Woodruff, "Autobiography," 11. In remarks given in 1896, Woodruff stated: "The Spirit of God said to me, 'You choose a partner and go straight to Fox Islands.' Well, I knew no more what was on Fox Islands than what was on Kolob. But the Lord told me to go, and I went. I chose Jonathan H. Hale, and he went with me." Wilford Woodruff, "Discourse," *Deseret Weekly* (Salt Lake City), 7 November 1896, 643. The fact that Phebe's family lived in Scarborough, Maine, likely influenced his decision.

21. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," July 16, 1837.

Figure 5. Ezra and Sarah Carter home, Scarborough, Maine, 2002. Photograph courtesy of Alexander L. Baugh.

Phebe made plans to spend time with her family while Wilford and Elder Hale preached and proselytized on the Fox Islands.[22]

Wilford and his companion set foot on North Haven Island, Maine, on August 20, 1837. The pair wasted no time in getting an audience and secured permission to preach in a Baptist meetinghouse that very night (fig. 6). Wilford wrote, "This was the first time that I or any Elder of the Church, (to my knowledge) ever arose before the inhabitants of one of the Islands of the sea to preach unto them the fullness of the everlasting gospel and the Book of Mormon."[23]

On October 9 (almost two months after their initial arrival), Wilford's companion Jonathan Hale returned to Ohio, leaving Wilford

22. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," August 8, 1837.

23. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," August 20, 1837. Although Wilford would have liked to claim the distinction of being the first Mormon missionary to preach the restored gospel on an isle of the sea, he could not have known that on July 23, 1837, less than a month prior, Heber C. Kimball had preached the first sermon by a Latter-day Saint in Preston, England. See Heber C. Kimball, *President Heber C. Kimball's Journal: Seventh Book in the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 17–19. See also James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Deseret Book, 1992), 29–33.

Figure 6. Baptist church on North Haven Island, Maine, 2002. Wilford Woodruff and his companion Jonathan Hale preached in this church. Photograph courtesy of Alexander L. Baugh.

without a companion,[24] although at various times Phebe left her family in Scarborough to join him.[25] He labored primarily on the island known as North Haven, and occasionally Vinal Haven (the south island), but from time to time he returned to the mainland, where he preached in several communities on Maine's coastal shore.

While Wilford was enjoying considerable success in his missionary labors in Maine, the Church in Kirtland was experiencing a wave of internal dissension generated by the collapse of the Church-backed Kirtland Anti-Banking Safety Society and other nationwide economic factors. The dissenters, some fifty in number, were led by Warren Parrish (Wilford's well-loved mission companion and Joseph Smith's former personal secretary), Luke Johnson and John F. Boynton (Apostles), Martin Harris (Book of Mormon Witness), Joseph Coe (a member of the Kirtland high council), and Cyrus Smalling (a member of the Seventy), each of whom openly opposed Joseph Smith's leadership, resulting in

24. Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," October 9, 1837.

25. Woodruff's journal cites Phebe with him on December 19, 1837; January 20, 29, February 5, March 22, 1838; and others. See Woodruff, "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," December 19, 1837; Wilford Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," January 20, 1838, Wilford Woodruff Papers, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/nGY.

their being cut off from the Church in late December 1837.[26] Fearing possible repercussions and probable lawsuits, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Brigham Young, and other loyal leaders fled Kirtland on January 12, 1838, then made their way to Far West, Missouri, to join the members of the Church residing there.

The Church in northern Missouri, however, was experiencing its own element of apostasy. On March 10, 1838, just two days before Joseph Smith arrived in Far West, the Missouri high council and bishopric excommunicated W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer, counselors in the Missouri presidency.[27] One month later, on April 12, Oliver Cowdery, Assistant President of the Church, withdrew his membership. The next day, David Whitmer, a member of the Missouri presidency, and Apostle Lyman E. Johnson withdrew their memberships.[28] Lastly, on May 11, Apostle William E. McLellin also withdrew his membership.[29] Sadly, Phelps and Cowdery would be the only persons to find their way back to the Church. Wilford probably did not learn about the problems in Kirtland and Missouri until several weeks, if not months, later.

In January 1838, Wilford was joined on the Fox Islands by a second missionary companion, Elder Joseph Ball. The pair worked together for three months, after which Wilford was left once again to preach on his own or with recently baptized converts. In early summer, he left the islands once again and traveled to Farmington, Connecticut, to visit and teach his parents and other extended family members. On July 1, an exultant Wilford baptized his father, his stepmother Azuba, his half-sister Eunice, an aunt, and a cousin.[30] He was also present for the birth of his and Phebe's first child, a daughter named Sarah Emma, born on July 14.[31]

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26. John and Clarissa Smith to George A. Smith, January 1, 1838, image 1, George A. Smith Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. John Smith gives December 28, 1837, as the date of the excommunication of Parrish, Johnson, Boynton, Harris, Coe, and Smalling.

27. "Part 1: 15 February–28 June 1838," in *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839,* ed. Mark Ashurst-McGee, David W. Grua, Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Alexander L. Baugh, and Brenden W. Rensink, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2017), 4.

28. On April 13, the Church formally excommunicated these men. "Minutes, 12 April 1838," and "Minutes, 13 April 1838," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents, Volume 6,* 83–94, 94–104, respectively.

29. See "Journal, March–September 1838," in *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839,* ed. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2008), 268.

30. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," July 1, 1838. Woodruff organized a branch of nine members, eight of whom were his relatives.

31. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," July 14, 1838; Woodruff, "Autobiography," 22.

In early August, Wilford returned to the Fox Islands. There, on August 9, he received a life-changing letter from Thomas B. Marsh (fig. 7), President of the Quorum of the Twelve. The letter was dated July 14, 1838, written from Far West, Missouri (fig. 8):

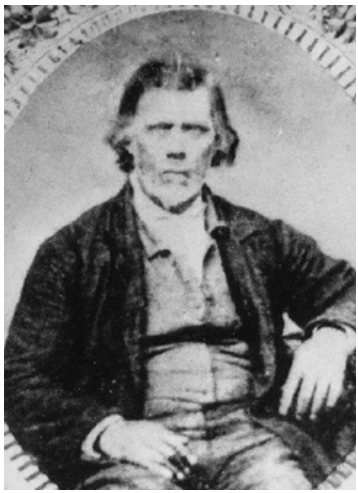


Figure 7. Thomas B. Marsh, date unknown. Courtesy Church History Library.

Elder W. Woodruff.

Sir; a fiew [few] days since, Prest. Joseph Smith Jr and someone [some] others was assembled together to attend to some church business, when it was thought proper to select those who was designed of the Lord to fill the places of those of the twelve who had fallen; namely W^{m} E. M^{c}Lellin, Lyman E. Johnson, Luke Johnson and John F. Bointon [Boynton].[32] The persons selected were John E. Page, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards. On the following day[,] five of the Twelve with President Rigdon and some others met and resolved that President Rigdon write to Br Richards, who is now in England, and inform him of his appointment and that P.P. Pratt write to Orson Pratt that the 12 assemble in this place as soon as possible, and that I should write to yourself.[33] Know then by this br Woodruff that you are appointed to fill the place of one of the twelve apostles; and that it is agreeable to the word of the Lord given very lately that you should come spe[e]dily to Farwest. And on the 26 of April next, to take your leave of the saints here and depart for other climes acrost the mighty deep!

Yours in the Love of God,

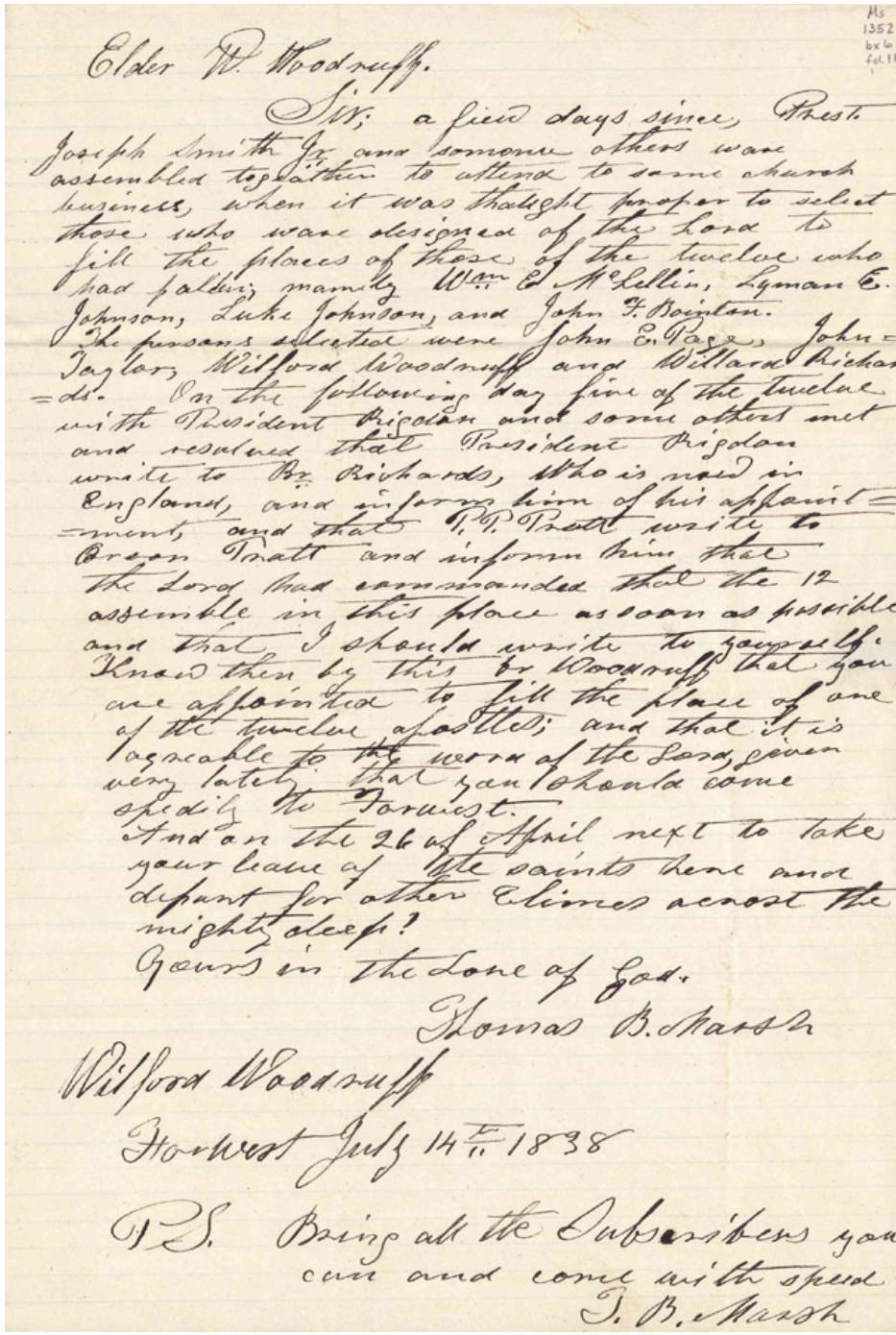
Thomas B. Marsh

Wilford Woodruff

Far West July 14th 1838

32. In the letter to Wilford, Marsh failed to mention that on July 8, 1838, six days prior to writing his letter, Joseph Smith had received and dictated a revelation naming the four men who were called to replace the Apostles who had been cut off. The revelation appears as section 118 in the Doctrine and Covenants. See "Revelation, 8 July 1838–A [D&C 118]," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents, Volume 6,* 175–80.

33. Marsh did not indicate who had been assigned to notify John E. Page and John Taylor of their appointments to the Twelve. This was likely because at the time both men were in company with a number of Canadian Church members en route to Missouri. See "Revelation, 8 July 1838–A [D&C 118]," 175–80.


Ms
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Elder W. Woodruff.

Sir; a few days since, Prest. Joseph Smith Jr. and sumdry others were assembled together to attend to some church business, when it was thought proper to select those who were designated of the Lord to fill the places of those of the twelve who had fallen; namely Wm E. McLellin, Lyman E. Johnson, Luke Johnson, and John F. Boynton. The persons selected were John E. Page, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards. On the following day five of the twelve with President Rigdon and some others met and resolved that President Rigdon write to Br. Richards, who is now in England, and inform him of his appointment, and that P.P. Pratt write to Orson Pratt and inform him that the Lord had commanded that the 12 assemble in this place as soon as possible. and that I should write to yourself. Know then by this Br Woodruff that you are appointed to fill the place of one of the twelve Apostles; and that it is agreeable to the word of the Lord, given very lately, that you should come speedily to Far West.

And on the 26 of April next to take your leave of the saints here and depart for other climes across the mighty deep!

Yours in the bone of God.

Thomas B. Marsh

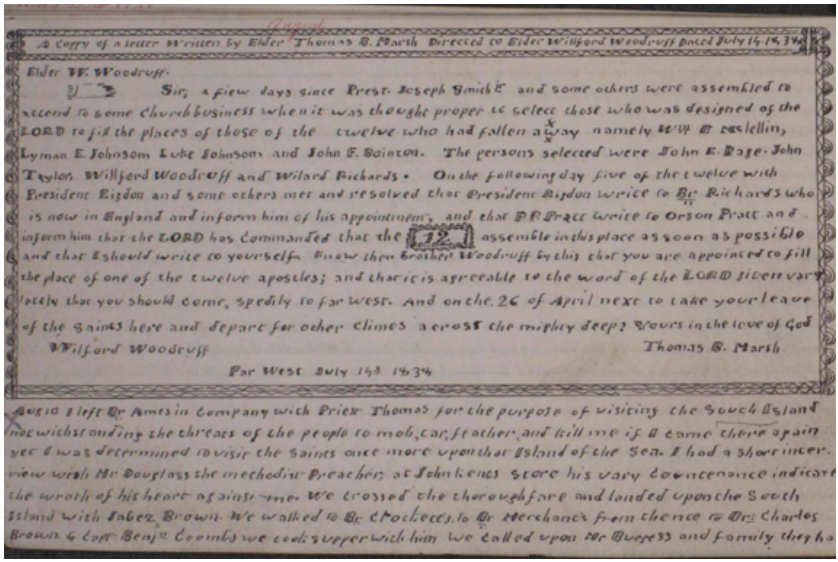
Wilford Woodruff

Far West July 14th 1838

P.S. Bring all the Subscribers you can and come with speed

T. B. Marsh

Figure 8. Thomas B. Marsh to Wilford Woodruff, July 14, 1838, MS 1352. Courtesy Church History Library.



A Copy of a letter Written by Elder Thomas B. Marsh Directed to Elder Wilford Woodruff dated July 14, 1838

Elder W. Woodruff.

Sir, a few days since Prest. Joseph Smith & some others were assembled to attend to some Church business when it was thought proper to select those who was designed of the LORD to fill the places of those of the twelve who had fallen away namely W.W. E. Haslelin, Lyman E. Johnson Luke Johnson and John E. Bointon. The persons selected were John E. Page. John Taylor, Willford Woodruff and Wilard Richards. On the following day five of the twelve with President Rigdon and some others met and resolved that President Rigdon write to Br. Richards who is now in England and inform him of his appointment, and that P.P. Pratt write to Orson Pratt and inform him that the LORD has Commanded that the 12 assemble in this place as soon as possible and that I should write to yourself. Know then brother Woodruff by this that you are appointed to fill the place of one of the twelve apostles; and that it is agreable to the word of the LORD that you very speedily that you should come, speedily to far west. And on the 26 of April next to take your leave of the Saints here and depart for other climes across the mighty deep? Yours in the love of God

Willford Woodruff — Thomas B. Marsh

For West July 14th 1838

August 9 left Br Ames in Company with Priest Thomas for the purpose of visiting the South Island notwithstanding the threats of the people to mob, tar, feather, and kill me if I come there again yet I was determined to visit the Saints once more upon that Island of the Sea. I had a short interview with Mr Douglass the methodist Preacher at Johnsons store his very countenance indicated the wrath of his heart against me. We crossed the thoroughfare and landed upon the South Island with Isaac Brown. We walked to Br Crockets. to Br Merchants from thence to Mr. Charles Brown & Capt. Benj. Coombs we took supper with him We called upon Mr Burgess and family they ha

Figure 9. Wilford Woodruff's journal transcription of Thomas B. Marsh's July 14, 1838, letter notifying Woodruff of his call to the apostleship. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, August 9, 1838. Courtesy Church History Library.

PS. Bring all the Subscribers you can and come with speed

T. B. Marsh[34]

News of Wilford's appointment to the Twelve was soul-stirring. That evening, he noted in his journal, "Sleep departed from me as I spent the night in deep meditation."[35] He also made a transcription of Marsh's letter into his personal journal (fig. 9).[36] It was a day he would never forget.

With news of his appointment, Wilford immediately began to make plans to travel to Far West as instructed. In addition, he encouraged those who had converted to the Church on the islands and Maine's seaboard to relocate and gather with the main body of the Church in Missouri. On October 4, 1838, Woodruff left Maine to begin an overland journey in company with eight families, consisting of fifty-three people. On December 19, near Rochester, Illinois, after having traveled "nearly two thousand miles," Wilford learned that Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs had issued an extermination order calling for the evacuation of the Latter-day Saints from

34. Thomas B. Marsh to Wilford Woodruff, July 14, 1838, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed January 28, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/lYrl.

35. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," August 9, 1838. Woodruff wrote this statement in shorthand; LaJean Purcell provided the transcription.

36. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," August 9, 1838.

the state. Because of the order, Wilford and the Fox Island Saints chose to spend the winter of 1838–39 near Rochester. Here the Woodruff family remained until April 8, 1839, at which time they relocated to Quincy, Illinois, where most of the Mormon refugees had gathered after leaving Missouri.[37]

No sooner had the Woodruffs settled in Quincy than Brigham Young determined the Twelve should return to Far West to fulfill the revelation calling them to leave the temple site on April 26, 1839, for their collective mission to Great Britain (see D&C 118:4–6).[38] Accordingly on April 18, Wilford in company with Brigham Young, Orson Pratt, John Taylor (all Apostles), and George A. Smith crossed the Mississippi River into Missouri and made their way to Caldwell County.[39] En route, fellow Apostle John E. Page joined the company.[40]

Following a week's travel across northern Missouri, the group arrived in the vicinity of Far West, Missouri, late on the evening of April 25. Here they were met by fellow Apostle Heber C. Kimball, who was already in the area.[41] During the early morning hours of the appointed day (April 26), a group of men ceremoniously assembled at the Far West Temple site: the five current members of the Twelve (Young, Kimball, O. Pratt, Taylor, and Page), Woodruff, George A. Smith (who had yet to be ordained), and eighteen other Latter-day Saints.

The services began with the singing of a hymn, after which Alpheus Cutler, a skilled stonemason, "recommenced laying the foundation of the Lord's house agreeable to revelation" (see D&C 115:10–11) by "rolling up" a large stone, which had been placed near the southeast corner of the temple excavation during the dedication of the temple site on July 4, 1838. Next the Apostles ordained Woodruff—he being the eldest of the two—then Smith, as Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ on the southeast cornerstone (figs. 10–11).[42] Following the ordinations, each of the

37. On December 19, near Rochester, Illinois, after having traveled "nearly two thousand miles," Wilford and his company likely learned about the Missouri persecutions, the arrest of Joseph Smith and other leaders, and Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs's infamous extermination order calling for the evacuation of the Latter-day Saints from the state. Woodruff, "Autobiography," 23–25.

38. "Revelation, 8 July 1838–A [D&C 118]," 175–80; Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," April 17, 1839.

39. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," April 18, 1839.

40. Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1856–1862, Book G, April 18, 1839, 26 [image 32], Church History Library, accessed January 28, 2026, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d13d909b-8390-4227-870b-0407e5169596/0/31.

41. Orson F. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Deseret Book, 2001), 252–53.

42. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," April 26, 1839; Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball,* 264; Alexander L. Baugh, "The Mormon Temple Site at Far West,

Figure 10. Southeast cornerstone at the Far West temple site, 1992. This is the location where Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith were ordained Apostles. Photograph courtesy of Alexander L. Baugh.

Figure 11. Southeast cornerstone at the Far West temple site, 2022. In recent years the cornerstones have been covered by clear plexiglass to protect them. Photograph courtesy of Alexander L. Baugh.

Twelve offered prayers in order of their seniority. This was followed by singing the hymn "Adam-ondi-Ahman," after which Alpheus Cutler placed the southeast cornerstone into position in the excavation, concluding the ceremony and leaving the company to make their way back to Quincy.[43]

So began the apostolic journey of Wilford Woodruff, one that would extend over fifty-nine years. Wilford would outlive all the members of the Twelve who had preceded him in that office to become the President of the Church in 1890 and would serve in that capacity until his death in 1898 at the age of ninety-one. He served fifty-nine years and four months. Only David O. McKay, Heber J. Grant, and Joseph Fielding Smith's apostleships were longer—sixty-three years and nine months, sixty-two years and seven months, and sixty-two years and three months, respectively.

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Caldwell County, Missouri," in *The Missouri Mormon Experience,* ed. Thomas M. Spencer (University of Missouri Press, 2010), 82–83.

43. Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," April 18, 1839. As noted in the text, on April 26, 1838, Joseph Smith received a revelation instructing the Church to "build a house unto me" at Far West beginning on July 4, 1838 (see D&C 115:8–10). On that day, a formal dedication of the temple site was held. The revelation further instructed the Church to commence the actual construction on the building beginning April 26, 1839 (see D&C 115:11). In a subsequent revelation received four days after the July dedication, the Twelve were instructed to serve a collective mission to the British Isles and to officially start their mission on April 26, 1839, by assembling at the temple site. However, in the months that followed, violence against the Latter-day Saints ensued, culminating in their removal from Missouri, thereby prohibiting the Church from fulfilling the revelation calling for the construction of the temple. Nonetheless, despite these difficulties, this core group of the Twelve chose to return to Far West under difficult circumstances in order to fulfill the revelatory injunction that instructed them to "take leave" for their overseas mission "in the city of Far West" on April 26, 1839. See "Revelation, 26 April 1838 [D&C 115]," in Ashurst-McGee and others, *Documents Volume 6,* 112–18; "Revelation, 8 July 1838–A [D&C 118]," 175–80.

Five-Pounders

small babies, light as a bag of sugar
or a trout, too eager to get out,
to get going, first babies, babies of mothers
who didn't give up gin or meth or lucky strikes,
mothers who didn't know,
babies who come in twos or threes,
their heads squished like a peanut
or potato, too weak to latch
or using more calories nursing
than they take in, sleeping again
before they eat enough, babies who shiver,
unable to stay warm even flannel-wrapped,
a heat lamp over them, eyes bandaged
against a burn, an IV in the head for glucose,
a tube for oxygen in the nose,
drops from a syringe after mom pumps,
monitors attached to chest, legs, arms,
tough babies, fighters who learn,
after they get here, to breathe,
to burn calories, to suck, babies
named Reggie, Mia, Kyle, or Bao,
babies finally hooked to no machines,
wearing only their diapers, babies who kick
and wave and gum their fists and thrive

—Susan Elizabeth Howe

"Not Because You Have Done Wrong, or Because the Lord Does Not Hear Your Prayer"

Wilford Woodruff's June 22, 1883, Letter to Eliza Dana Gibbs

Jason Godfrey

Eliza Dana Gibbs (1813–1900) was a woman of faith and fortitude. Like many other pioneers who joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in its early years, Eliza was already familiar with religious doctrine, spiritual impressions, and seeking the divine by the time she converted to Mormonism. Before that conversion took place, however, Eliza longed for her own Aldersgate experience. That is, she desired a direct experience with God like John Wesley had in 1738 on London's Aldersgate Street, which eventually led to the founding of the Methodist faith.[1]

Converting to Methodism as a young adult, Eliza soon dismissed the denomination as she "could not accept the Methodist doctrine of eternal punishment."[2] Eliza continued to seek experience of God's existence and love. Fraught with mental worry and afflicted by physical ailment, Eliza, like Lucy Mack Smith and many others, felt overburdened by her health and anxiety over her salvation. Miraculously for Eliza, "a beautiful vision opened up to her where she was able to glimpse the beauties of eternity."

1. John Wesley wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed," and he received the assurance that his sins were forgiven. Nora Ratcliff, ed., *The Journal of John Wesley* (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1940), 73; Randy L. Maddox, *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Kingswood Books, 1990), 133–46. See also Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Epworth Press, 2002).

2. Maurine Carr Ward, ed., "Autobiography of Eliza Dana Gibbs," *Nauvoo Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 3, https://ensignpeakfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ5-1_Ward.pdf; see John Wesley, "Of Hell; Mark ix. 48," in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley,* 10 vols. (New York, 1826), 6:365–73.

In addition, "a personage ministered to her, casting away all of Eliza's doubts and fears, leaving only a peaceful calmness." Soon, Eliza heard a Latter-day Saint preach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. She wrote, "I . . . discovered that the principles he taught were the same I had adopted, and I told him it was useless to preach that doctrine to me for I already believed it." Eliza chose to be baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1837.[3]

Eliza and other members of her family, including her husband William, migrated from New York to Nauvoo, Illinois, to gather with other Latter-day Saints. As Eliza began her new life as wife, mother, and Latter-day Saint, experiencing the tribulations and heartache of persecution, constant movement, poverty, and loss, she remained faithful to her covenant. She remained resolute after reluctantly moving away from Salt Lake City to Fillmore, Utah, in 1863 and losing a niece that she had nurtured as her own.[4] Then, in an 1883 moment of crisis, she was again desperate for some blessed assurance.

On May 22, 1883, Eliza suffered the death of a daughter, Medora Victoria Gibbs Melville, and a granddaughter, Medora Ethel Melville, on the same day.[5] Three weeks later, Eliza and her widowed son-in-law, James Andrew Melville, wrote letters to Eliza's former neighbor, Wilford Woodruff—then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.[6] He replied a week later, on June 22, 1883, with the letter published hereafter.

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3. Ward, "Autobiography of Eliza Dana Gibbs," 3; see also "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845," 3, bk. 2, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed February 2, 2026, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/21.

4. Ward, "Autobiography of Eliza Dana Gibbs," 4–6.

5. See the timeline on the "About" page for Medora Victoria Gibbs and Medora Ethel Melville on FamilySearch: "Medora Victoria Gibbs," LCVJ-RRN, FamilySearch.org, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed December 6, 2025, https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/about/LCVJ-RRN; "Medora Ethel Melville," K246-6MN, FamilySearch.org, accessed December 6, 2025, https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/about/K246-6MN.

6. Marge Becraft, contributor, "Biography of Medora Victoria Gibbs Melville," Medora Victoria Gibbs, LCVJ-RRN, FamilySearch.org, November 24, 2020, https://www.familysearch.org/en/tree/person/memories/LCVJ-RRN. See also William Gibbs, in 1860 Federal Census, 14th Ward Great Salt Lake City, Great Salt Lake Co., Utah Territory, 51 [image 211], FamilySearch.org, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GBSF-94X1?view=explore&cc=1473181&lang=en&groupId=TH-1951-25275-25962-44, from United States. National Archives and Records Administration, Image Group Number: 005171491; Wilford Woodruff, "Journal (February 1880–December 1885)," October 9–10, 1880, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed April 22, 2025, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/XQOA.

Neither Eliza's nor James's letters to President Woodruff are known to exist today, but some of their contents can be surmised from Wilford's paraphrases and answers. Eliza wrote seeking comfort and counsel from Wilford but also from his wife, Phebe, who had died, or nearly died, in 1838.[7] Of Phebe's experience, Wilford recorded the following:

> Her spirit left her body, and she saw it lying upon the bed, and the sisters weeping. She looked at them and at me, and upon her babe, and, while gazing upon this scene, two personages came into the room carrying a coffin and told her they had come for her body. One of these messengers informed her that she could have her choice: she might go to rest in the spirit world, or, on one condition she could have the privilege of returning to her tabernacle and continuing her labors upon the earth. The condition was, if she felt that she could stand by her husband, and with him pass through all the cares, trials, tribulation and afflictions of life which he would be called to pass through for the gospel's sake unto the end. When she looked at the situation of her husband and child she said: "Yes, I will do it!"[8]

This deeply affecting moment in Wilford and Phebe's marriage was published in Wilford's 1882 autobiography, *Leaves from My Journal*.

When Eliza wrote to Wilford the following year, her desire for assurance of God's grace and goodness included not only a deep need to know what had become of her departed loved ones but also the need to once again converse with her daughter, Medora Victoria.[9] This hoped for reality can perhaps be better understood in light of American religious culture during the nineteenth century. While it's unknown whether Eliza

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7. Wilford Woodruff knew what it was like to deal with family tragedy and the loss of someone dear. For example, Wilford lost his mother not long after his first birthday. See "Timeline, June 11, 1808," Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed December 11, 2025, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/timeline. When he was thirty-one, he lost his half brother, Asahel. See "Timeline, October 18, 1838," Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed January 28, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/timeline. Additionally, Wilford and Phebe lost their first child, Sarah Emma, soon after her second birthday. See "Timeline, July 17, 1840," Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed March 2, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/timeline. Phebe was miraculously healed from brain fever after Wilford prayed for, anointed, and blessed her. Wilford Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839)," December 2–5, 1838, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed April 22, 2025, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/pp6.

8. Wilford Woodruff, "Autobiography 1882 Leaves from My Journal," December 3, 1882, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed April 22, 2025, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/Gqy.

9. Wilford Woodruff, "Letter to Eliza Dana Gibbs, 22 June 1883," Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed July 9, 2025, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/NjZm.

was familiar with Spiritualism, it is interesting to note that the Spiritualist phenomenon had reached a crescendo "in the aftermath of the American Civil War as people yearned to communicate with loved ones who had perished in the conflict."[10] Eliza's longings echoed the nineteenth-century desire to hear from and about the dead. Decades later, the losses of World War I and the 1918 influenza pandemic renewed popular interest in Spiritualism. Latter-day Saints were advised against participating in Spiritualist "practices" because they were regarded "as counterfeit revelations from the adversary."[11] But the Lord was responsive to the deep longings of people with deceased loved ones, giving President Joseph F. Smith the visions in Doctrine and Covenants 138.[12]

Similarly, Wilford Woodruff's June 22, 1883, letter to Eliza Dana Gibbs offers empathetic and corrective counsel to a grieving mother and grandmother who felt "sorely tried" because her petitions to God to converse with her daughter were not answered as she had hoped.[13]

Eliza's letter, like the rest of the documents that are now freely accessible at wilfordwoodruffpapers.org, is in the style known as expanded transcription. The copy of Eliza's letter that is still known to exist, and from which the transcript below was made, is found in the Wilford Woodruff letterpress copybook, 1882 March–1885 December, courtesy of the Church History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah. Though penned by a scribe, the letter appears to have been signed by Wilford Woodruff in his own hand. Visit wilfordwoodruffpapers.org for more on the project's editorial method.[14]

Salt Lake City, June 22, 1883.

> Sister E. Gibbs—Your letter of June 17 is before me, as is Brother Melville's. I have stated to him my situation, away from home a great deal of the time attending conferences, and having a heavy correspondence and being full of business, so that I cannot do justice in answering so many critical questions as you ask in your letter, but I will answer the best I can.

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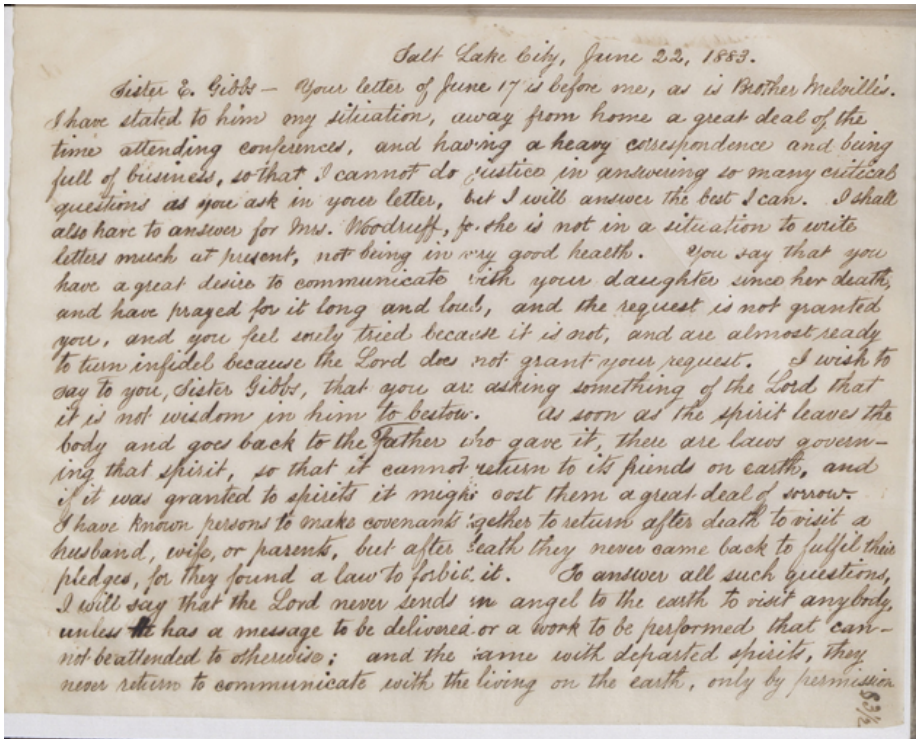
10. *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days,* vol. 2, *No Unhallowed Hand, 1846–1893* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), 362, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v2/part-3/24-an-immense-labor?&id=p45-p46#p45; David K. Nartonis, "The Rise of 19th-Century American Spiritualism, 1854–1873," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (2010): 361–73.

11. *Saints,* 2:362.

12. See George S. Tate, "The Great World of the Spirits of the Dead: Death, the Great War, and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic as Context for Doctrine and Covenants 138," *BYU Studies* 46, no. 1 (2007): 4–40.

13. Woodruff, "Letter to Eliza Dana Gibbs, 22 June 1883."

14. See Wilford Woodruff Papers, "Editorial Method," accessed February 5, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/about/editorial-method.



Salt Lake City, June 22, 1883.

Sister E. Gibbs — Your letter of June 17 is before me, as is Brother Melville's. I have stated to him my situation, away from home a great deal of the time attending conferences, and having a heavy correspondence and being full of business, so that I cannot do justice in answering so many critical questions as you ask in your letter, but I will answer the best I can. I shall also have to answer for Mrs. Woodruff, for she is not in a situation to write letters much at present, not being in very good health. You say that you have a great desire to communicate with your daughter since her death, and have prayed for it long and loud, and the request is not granted you, and you feel sorely tried because it is not, and are almost ready to turn infidel because the Lord does not grant your request. I wish to say to you, Sister Gibbs, that you are asking something of the Lord that it is not wisdom in him to bestow. As soon as the spirit leaves the body and goes back to the Father who gave it, there are laws governing that spirit, so that it cannot return to its friends on earth, and if it was granted to spirits it might cost them a great deal of sorrow. I have known persons to make covenants together to return after death to visit a husband, wife, or parents, but after death they never came back to fulfil their pledges, for they found a law to forbid it. To answer all such questions, I will say that the Lord never sends an angel to the earth to visit anybody, unless he has a message to be delivered or a work to be performed that cannot be attended to otherwise; and the same with departed spirits, they never return to communicate with the living on the earth, only by permissio

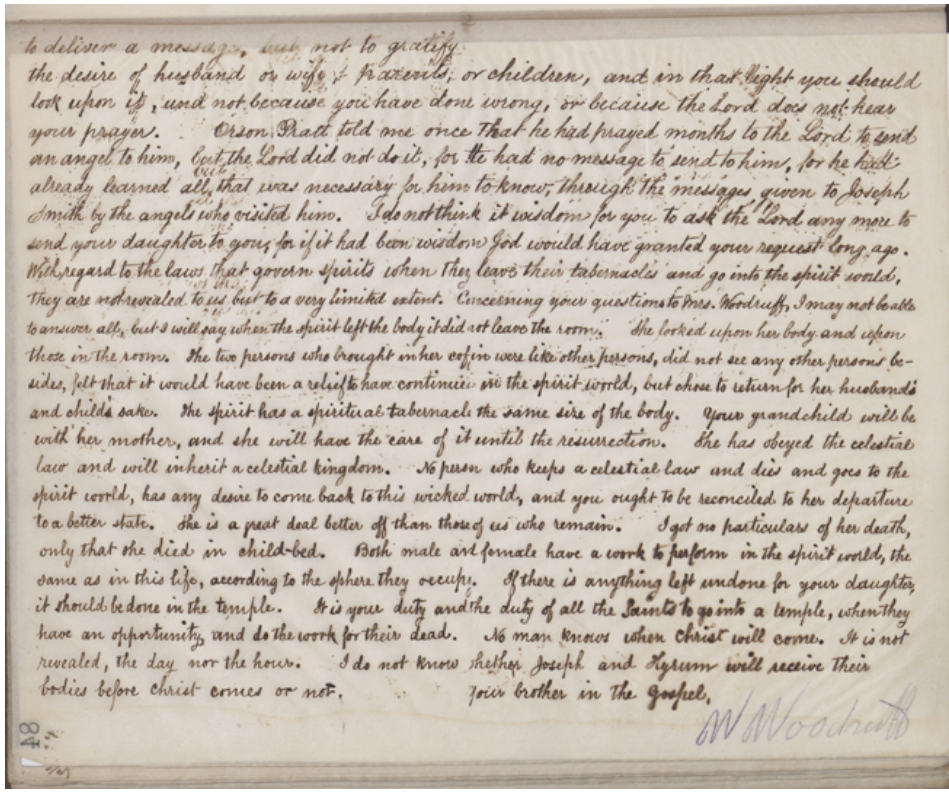
Figure 1. A photograph of the first page of the letter. Courtesy Wilford Woodruff Papers.

The Wilford Woodruff Papers Foundation began in 2020 and strives to digitally preserve and publish Wilford Woodruff's eyewitness account of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ from 1833 to 1898. The purpose of the Wilford Woodruff Papers "is to inspire all people, especially the rising generation, to study and increase their faith in Jesus Christ, understand and honor sacred temple covenants, and thereby receive the blessings of exaltation with their families."[1] With more than forty-seven thousand pages located amongst Wilford Woodruff's journal, autobiographies, daybooks, correspondence, discourses, and more, this letter to Eliza Dana Gibbs is one of thousands that can be accessed online at wilfordwoodruffpapers.org.[2]

1. See Wilford Woodruff Papers, "Our Mission" and "Our Story," accessed February 5, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/about.

2. See Wilford Woodruff Papers, "Progress," accessed February 5, 2026, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/progress.

I shall also have to answer for Mrs. Woodruff, for she is not in a situation to write letters as much at present, not being in very good health. You say that you have a great desire to communicate with your daughter since her death, and have prayed for it long and loud, and the request is not granted you, and you feel sorely tried because it is not, and are almost ready to turn infidel because the Lord does not grant your request. I wish to say to you, Sister Gibbs, that you are asking something of the Lord that it is not wisdom in him to bestow. As soon as the spirit leaves the body and goes back to the Father who gave it, there are laws governing that spirit, so that it cannot return to its friends on earth, and if it was granted to spirits it might cost them a great deal of sorrow. I have known persons to make covenants together to return after death to visit a husband, wife, or parents, but after death they never came back to fulfil their pledges, for they found a law to forbid it. To answer all such questions, I will say that the Lord never sends an angel to the earth to visit any body, unless He has a message to be delivered or a work to be performed that cannot be attended to otherwise; and the same with departed spirits, they never return to communicate with the living on the earth, only by permission to deliver a message, but not to gratify the desire of husband or wife, parents, or children, and in that light you should look upon it, and not because you have done wrong, or because the Lord does not hear your prayer. Orson Pratt told me once that he had prayed months to the Lord to send an angel to him, but the Lord did not do it, for He had no message to send to him, for he had already learned all that was necessary for him to know, through the messages given to Joseph Smith by the angels who visited him. I do not think it wisdom for you to ask the Lord any more to send your daughter to you, for if it had been wisdom God would have granted your request long ago. With regard to the laws that govern spirits when they leave their tabernacles and go into the spirit world, they are not revealed to us but to a very limited extent. Concerning your questions to Mrs. Woodruff, I may not be able to answer all, but I will say when the spirit left the body it did not leave the room. She looked upon her body and upon those in the room. The two persons who brought in her coffin were like other persons, did not see any other persons besides, felt that it would have been a relief to have continued in the spirit world, but chose to return for her husband's and child's sake. The spirit has a spiritual tabernacle the same size of the body. Your grandchild will be with her mother, and she will have the care of it until the resurrection. She has obeyed the celestial law and will inherit a celestial kingdom. No person who keeps a celestial law and dies and goes to the spirit world, has any desire to come back to this wicked world, and you ought to be reconciled to her departure to a better state. She is a great deal better off than those of us who remain. I got no particulars of her death, only that she died in childbed. Both male and female have a work to perform in the spirit world, the same as in this life, according to the sphere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same as in this life, according to the sphere they occupy. If there is anything left undone for your daughter,
it should be done in the temple. It is your duty and the duty of all the Saints to go into a temple, when they
have an opportunity, and do the work for their dead. No man knows when Christ will come. It is not
revealed, the day nor the hour. I do not know whether Joseph and Hyrum will receive their
bodies before Christ comes or not.

Your brother in the Gospel,

W Woodruff

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Figure 2. A photograph of the second page of the letter. Courtesy Wilford Woodruff Papers.

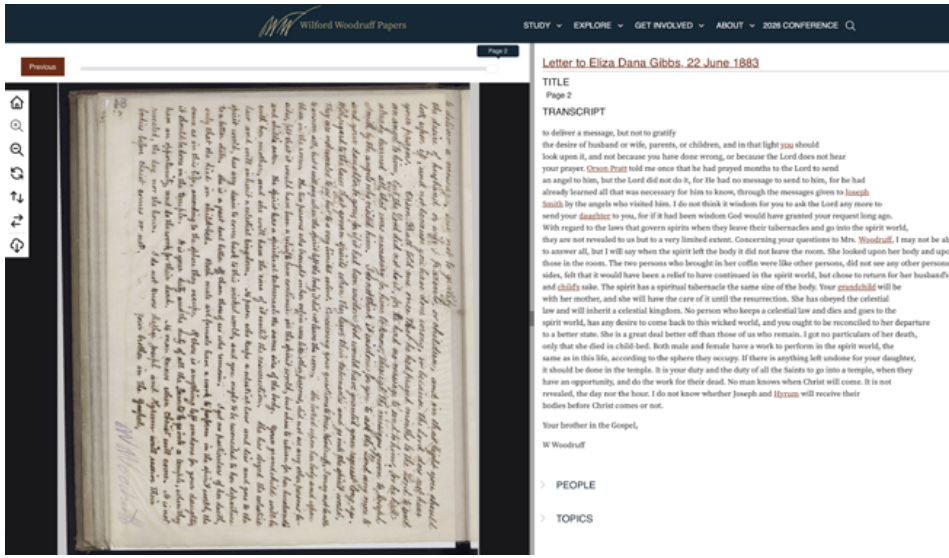

Figure 3. A screenshot of the second page of the letter with the transcript to the right, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/NjZm. Courtesy Wilford Woodruff Papers.

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15. Woodruff, "Letter to Eliza Dana Gibbs, 22 June 1883."

Mothership

Mik Johnson

The main deck on a cruise ship is a carnival of a place.

Colors, lights, martinis, mocktails. Bikini body babes sprawl over slatted lawn chairs, their hot-pink nails thumbing through paperback beach reads. Over-bellied men fill their plates with queso and chips at the taco bar, while under-muscled teens ride kneeboards and surfboards on the wave simulator. Tennis-shoed grandmas jog laps around the track. Hawaiian-shirted grandpas rub their arms with suntan lotion. Families with younger children splash in the kiddie pool, while families with older children race each other down the tube slides. Sunglasses. Smiles. Sunscreen. Surfing. On the main deck, it's always summer. On the main deck, it's always a party.

Running along the perimeter of the main deck is a bulwark—steel bars, white paint, smooth wood. The sturdy build and sleek finish make this railing a lovely place to lean on, watch the sunset, and snap a few pictures. As I lean against it, though, I think about how I could slip over the bulwark if I lean too far. If I slip over the bulwark, I'll fall into the ocean. If I fall into the ocean, they'll call, "man overboard." They'll call, "man overboard," but only if they see me. If they don't see me, I'll never party on the main deck again, and my whole world will be the water until I drown.

The first time I walked along the main deck on a cruise ship was eleven months before you were born. In those days, I only dreamed of you: the thought of a baby filling my heart with cotton warmth. I didn't understand, back then, what it's like to be a bulwark—what it's like to make sure you have a good life, what it's like to make sure you don't fall in.

When I go to Walmart, eight months pregnant, strawberries are all that I can buy.

My belly's an anchor, shoving my hips out of socket, tethering me earthward. Shocks of icicle pain shoot up and down my legs each time a foot leaves the floor. "Wait until the baby comes," my OB says. "Displaced pelvises suck back into place during postpartum recovery." Every step counts, hurts—I can barely move. Gather/checkout/hobble/car. It takes me three minutes to ease into the driver's seat, the zing of homeless bones shouting from my hips.

I pull out of the parking lot. At the corner, a man smiles with crooked teeth, his cardboard sign asking for anything. I study his grisly beard, dirt-stained wrinkles, and cobalt eyes. *That's somebody's baby.* Your toes press tight against my ribs, your heels bobbing against my uterine wall. Wincing, I lean over the passenger seat, crank down the scrolly window, and urge myself to forget the painful steps of the grocery store. "Here," I say, passing the carton into his hands, our fingertips brushing against each other. His hands are rough against mine, and I wish he were tiny and soft again so that I could wrap him in my arms and give him gentleness.

I ask him: "Do you like strawberries?"

What I want to ask him: "Where is your mother? Why couldn't she protect you from this life? What can I do differently for my own baby? Is it wrong for me to judge you this way? Am I a bad mother already?"

The day I nearly bled to death is the day I met you, darling.

Sticky from your birth sack, you nestle soft against my bare chest, your skin on my skin, the smell of you like fresh earth and autumn mornings. Spit bubbles bob against your lips, each of them a docked boat bumping against a soft jetty. I know you from all those times you wiggled inside me; I know you by your daddy's nose; I know you by my ruddy cheeks, yet here you are, a new creature, and I marvel.

Interrupting our wonder—a whirlpool roils inside my body.

"Something's wrong!"—the nurse.

"She's hemorrhaging!"—the doctor.

Thick red inlets spool from my body, and as they do, your button eyes meet mine. Daddy lifts you away from me, and as my own eyes cloud over with blackness, I'm grateful that I met you because I'm sure that I will die, and since all lives end on a moment, at least this is the moment I'm ending on.

What I don't know, as I lie dying, is that I'll live. What I don't know, as I lie dying, is that in thirteen months' time, I'll choose to carry a baby

again, notwithstanding the risk of blood death. What I don't know, as I lie dying, is that the second baby is another boy, a feisty boy, your brother.

What I *do* know, as I lie dying, is that every risk to my physical body is worthwhile if it gives you life and keeps you safe.

It's the middle of the night,

and it's the fourteenth time, but the voices in my mind won't quiet down until I check (just one more time) that every window is shut, that every door is locked, that every light is off, and that you and your brother are breathing, your chests falling softly, up and down, below my palms. Can I really begrudge them, though? Those voices in my mind? Depriving me of any sleep? Telling me to check on you over and over again? When, in the end, they always lead me to this moment, where all the world is like water without whitecaps, the gentle undulations of your lungs pulsing beneath my hand.

Inside my pocket, inside my phone, inside my browser, six web searches are open.

1. How likely is a four-month-old to die of SIDS?
2. How did Elizabeth Smart's abductor enter the home?
3. How many children are the right number for a happy family?
4. Am I having a heart attack or a panic attack?
5. Is it normal to feel relief when I think about dying?
6. Can postpartum anxiety and depression become long-term anxiety and depression?

I never sailed through questions like these before I became a mother.

How much rain and wind and seawater can a bulwark take before it breaks from the hull? I don't want to know.

There's bubbles

in your hair, down your arms, and across your back, the tub swathing your body in clean, soapy water. At your feet, a yellow toy wobbles through the foam. Seated on the lip of the tub, I lean over and scrub your scalp. Beside you, your brother asks, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And you, your teeth bright and ivory, your lashes and brows flecked in dew drops, say, "A trash man."

I give you a nod, a smile. As I rinse my hands, my heart gives a prick. Why do I feel the need to protect you from something that isn't harmful, like a trash man job—a job that isn't harmful except in terms of social status, but I thought I didn't care about that stuff anyway?

Am I protecting you from the wrong things?

Next Thursday, when the trash collector climbs down from his truck to open the dumpster gate, his thick cheeks covered in rough black stubble, will I wave? When our eyes meet, will I smile? Will I ever stop to learn his name and become friends with him, thanking him for hauling our crap across the county so that we can live in a nice, clean, tidy-style place, and hey, we both love Hubert's lemonade and watching that one wilderness survival show that's pretty cool?

In twenty years, if you take your turn in the seat behind that massive brown wheel doing this massive brown job, will people ever stop to learn your name too?

After hours on my knees,

"God—" I plead. You and your brother sleep, your eyelids flickering to and fro in the dance of dreams, your breath as soft as inlet water smoothing onto sand, your cheeks as supple and untouched as the skin on June peaches. "Give them my frizzy hair, yes. And Dad's gout feet, sure. Grandma's nearsighted eyes, and Great-Grandfather's meatless arms. Give them our upset bellies and heart disease and cancer guts and stout little frames and minds that remember too much and mouths that say too much. Give it to them, God, give it all, except this—do not give them our depression. Protect them from the worst of it."

Little boy, your sickness came as blood in pee.

It filled the bowl with scarlet, like Moses filled the Nile. Five days pass, a fever dream. Needles/doctors/phone calls/weeping/hemoglobin/too low/too low. Four a.m., I hold you, your breath whistling against my neck, tubes twirling into your veins. Blood bags, hanging soft and plastic from a metal cross, drip liquid rubies. I imagine a woman, rolling up her sleeve yesterday, scrolling through Instagram, crushing a stress ball. A phlebotomist circles her skin with waves of iodine. Does the donor know that, besides me, she's the only other to give you life?

Can it be that there are others on our voyage protecting you too?

The sky is like spilled sugar on dark velvet; stars sprawl overhead

while we sing our songs and roast our marshmallows. This isn't your first camping trip, but still, I sit too close, ready to catch you if you fall towards the flames. You sing-yell, "down by the bay" while you turn the roaster stick, squealing with delight when the mallow catches fire. "Blow it out, Mom, blow it out!"

I do as you ask, lay the marshmallow on a piece of chocolate, press it all between graham crackers, and pass it into your dirty hands. You stuff the lot into your mouth. Between bites, you look up at me, eyes twinkling. "Can we do this again sometime?"

Your joy is contagious, and I smile. "Yes, baby. Of course."

Maybe, I start to realize, I'm meant to protect you *and* enjoy you.

In my faith,

teenagers recite this scripture during their studies in high school seminary class: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25). In my faith, we share the story of creation—God's breath of life, Adam's borrowed rib, a tempter sly as a serpent, the tree of forbidden fruit. In my faith, we celebrate Eve, who left paradise for the fallen world because the fallen world had children.

There was no one to protect before you were born.

I drove cars past one hundred miles per hour. Broke boys' hearts. Had my heart broken. Kept less than $1,000 in the bank at all times. Moved to South America, no problem.

It's strange, remembering the woman I was before I had you. I felt I would swim no matter the storm, that I was as fierce as a shark and as clever as an octopus and as sturdy as a whale.

Or perhaps, it's that there was no water in my life then? Nothing to sail on? Nothing to sink into?

What I know now: I'd choose the ocean over the dry land every single time, now that I've sailed here. Now that I'm a mother, there's no going back, not even if it were possible.

Joy—fat and soft—wraps around my heart like a bulwark wraps around her passengers

as I wrap you and your brother against me. You, five years old, pull away to join the kindergarten lineup. Your brother, three years old, shouts, "Wait! I forgot to give you a Spider-Man high five!"

The two of you make your fingers into Spidey shapes while the mother to my left says, "Your boys are the cutest!" And the mother to my right says, "I can't help thinking you'll announce a third one soon!" The two of you smack hands, cheering. The two mothers drift their separate ways. A shock of water—depression, doubt—slaps over my joy.

You sail inside, giddy to join your classmates, while your brother buries his face in my neck, asking to watch *Bluey* when we get home.

My arms wrap around him—my two arms that just a moment ago were holding the two of you—two, because there's just enough of me to hold both of you. But what if there was a third child?

As I buckle your brother into his car seat, my mind backpedals to what that second mother said. It was none of her business, but even so, I can't deny that I've wondered about a third baby. Often. Would it be a wonderful thing to have another child? Another child for me to wipe and dry and tickle and cuddle? Another child to fill my heart to bursting?

Bursting. Would the deck be too full then, with three of you bumping against the rails, bumping until one of you bursts over the bulwark and plunges into the waters below? Maybe you would fall into the water, but then, I would pull you out again. Maybe a little water is good for you. Not a lot, but a little. Just enough to help you learn to swim on your own.

I kiss your brother's forehead, then close the car door, pressing my hand against the window. I make a face at him through the glass, blowing up my puffer fish cheeks, sticking out my eel's tongue. He squeals, points, claps for more. Joy comes surging up again, a sea at high tide.

I put the key in the ignition, and we drive home. As I pull into the carport, a thought settles like driftwood in my mind. I am the bulwark, yes; I have known this from the start—I'll do anything, everything, to keep you and your brother safe. But I am a cruise deck, too, and an anchor. I am rudder, keel, bowsprit, stern, galley, cabin, and helm. I am life vest and life ring and life boat and my life—all of it, the mothership—will sail for you, with you, to you, through all of life's oceans, whether joy or sorrow, whether pleasure or pain.

This essay by Mik Johnson won third place in the 2025 BYU Studies Personal Essay Contest.

Lady Eclecte: The Lost Woman of the New Testament by Lincoln H. Blumell

Fortress Press, 2025

Reviewed by Thomas A. Wayment

It is rare, in my experience, to come upon a book so well researched that also patiently and unrelentingly pursues a clear thesis. Lincoln Blumell's most recent book, *Lady Eclecte: The Lost Woman of the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 2025), is a powerful reminder that there is a vibrancy in academia that surrounds familiar questions and that it can be productive to revisit conversations that appear to have reached a standstill. Professor Blumell's project, if I have understood it correctly, brings his papyrological skills to bear on a familiar New Testament problem—namely, the question of the first verse of the short epistle known as 2 John.

For those unfamiliar with the scholarship surrounding the Johannine Epistles, these three epistles traditionally attributed to John have been assigned a date sometime in the second century, an estimation drawn from Polycarp of Smyrna's (died 155 CE) direct reference to 1 John 4:2–3: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (NRSVue). Polycarp's direct reference to this passage serves as a *terminus ante quem*—or latest possible date—for the composition of 1 John, and likely the other short Johannine Epistles, although not necessarily so. Much of the scholarly interest in these letters has focused on the purpose for writing them, the historical situation around their writing, and (connected to these general points of interest) the persistent question of who wrote them. Blumell's work seeks to refine our understanding of the historical situation of the writing of 2 John, and to establish that the epistle ought to be read as conforming to normal standards for personal letters written on papyrus from the period.

As a papyrologist, Blumell has published extensively and is well positioned to take on the task he sets out to achieve. I believe that his findings will definitely shape the conversation going forward and that his work will become an anchor point in the discussion over the identity of the elect lady in 2 John 1. Much of the book is written with a crossover audience in mind, by which I mean an interested public that is not necessarily familiar with the terms and conversation points of New Testament scholarship. Many terms are defined and patiently pursued so that the reader can understand such topics as how textual variants are weighed, how letters were produced, and how a study of onomastics shaped the findings presented in the volume, to name only a few.

Although there has been little that could be considered new on the topic of 2 John for quite some time, scholars have continued to express puzzlement over the person addressed in 2 John 1:1: "The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth" (NRSVue). Scholars have rightly wondered about how one should understand the "elect lady" and whether she represents a single person or whether the term is a corporate metaphor for a larger group of saints.

Blumell's skill as a researcher is on full display in the opening chapter, although some, like me, may find it distracting to read due to its first-person detective-like prose. The opening chapter begins a survey of literature spanning from the time of the first patristic commentators (the so-called "Christian Fathers" who wrote circa 100–450 CE) and carefully analyzes what they had to say regarding the "elect lady." Within the commentaries of several early Christian authors, Blumell recovers a thread of a conversation about whether the "elect lady" was actually a woman named Eclecte. He is also careful to document those sources that do not support that reading and who instead read the passage as a metaphor for a community or church of Christian believers. Thus, Blumell has set the footings in place for the most prevalent interpretation of the passage, the one that argues for the opening address to be interpreted as a metaphor that characterized a community as an elect female.

Chapter 2 surveys modern scholarship on 2 John, and again, Blumell's work is thorough and careful. Herein, Blumell picks up on a minor note in scholarship, raised by several previous scholars but brought out most succinctly in the work of Hans-Josef Klauck, who raises the possibility that 2 John 1 is addressed to a woman named Eclecte, but which Klauck summarily dismissed because it lacks the definite article before the name. Klauck's work on the New Testament epistles is well known, and he is considered by many to be a leading scholar on the Johannine

Epistles, so it is a pivotal moment for Blumell to delineate a clear grammatical foundation upon which he will build his thesis.

On page 37, Blumell directly attacks the consensus opinion that the address in 2 John 1 invoked a metaphorical congregation described by a feminine adjective, and on pages 35–41, Blumell sets out his counterarguments to the consensus position, which he does so with some force. To dislodge the consensus, Blumell describes the issues surrounding the historic interpretation of 2 John 1 in the following ways: (1) 2 John 1 has been read as a metaphor for the church or a congregation, which is carefully refuted due to what Blumell sees as unconvincing parallels; (2) the shift between second person singular and plural address has traditionally been seen as an argument that the letter must be interpreted as invoking a church and not a single person; (3) the use of 2 John 1:13, which mentions an "elect sister," has traditionally been used as a counterargument against the name Eclecte appearing in the first verse because it would mean that verse 13 would record a note to Eclecte's sister named Eclecte, which exegetes have thought to be unlikely. Blumell rightly points out that verse 13 can only be read as an adjective, "your elect sister," instead of a second woman named Eclecte.

Chapter 3 brings the reader into direct conversation with papyrological evidence, which is the area where Blumell has established himself as an influential voice in the field. For those not acquainted with the discipline of papyrology, Blumell patiently explains some of the unfamiliar terminology of the discipline while marshalling a cogent argument that 2 John is best understood as a common example of a Roman period letter written on papyrus in Greek (43, 57, 84). Ultimately, Blumell argues that the original form of the address should be read as Ὁ πρεσβύτεροςἘκλέκτῃ <τῇ> κυρίᾳ, "The elder to the lady Eclecte," with "<>" brackets to indicate an editorial correction (83). This proposed emendation is significant for the overall thesis because without the addition of the definite article τῇ, the epistolary address of 2 John 1 is a less convincing parallel to contemporary letters (81).

Blumell's argument is based on an abundance of parallel examples from other contemporary Roman letters, if the proposed emendation is accepted, and Blumell marshals a strong argument that 2 John was indeed a letter between two individuals: the elder and the lady Eclecte. Importantly, Blumell (83) considers the error as arising from the repetition of the same letters: the end of the name Eclecte has the same termination as the definite article and so they were inadvertently omitted, for which Blumell offers an interesting parallel in English where someone might omit "the" in the example "clothe the child" because "clothe" contains the same letters as the definite article that follows it.

Fairly convinced of Blumell's argument, I was surprised that chapter 3 did not move to consider the absence of the word "greeting" following the names of the sender and recipient. Blumell states in reference to one of the contemporary parallels, "The opening address [of UPZ 1.60] in line 1 follows the same basic pattern as found in 2 John 1: sender (first position nominative) to addressee (second position dative with nor article) followed by a salutation (third position)" (46, 61; see also 45–46, 63, and 70). The point of concern is that while the opening address follows the form of parallel letters, what follows the names of the sender and recipient does not follow precisely the parallels that were cited. Using the NRSVue translation, the opening of the letter reads, "The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love" (2 John 1:1–3). If I have understood Blumell's thesis correctly, then the expected opening of the letter should read, if it followed the most common parallel examples, "The elder to the lady Eclecte, whom I love in truth, *greetings* . . ." where I have added what is attested in the examples supplied by Blumell. In many of the parallel examples provided, although I did not check all of them, the letters contain the opening address: "'A [to] B, greetings,'" where the Greek word for *greetings* is most often represented by χαίρειν (62–63). On page 63, Blumell seeks to address the concern that 2 John's greetings are different than common letters by recourse to the Pauline corpus and not to contemporary Roman period letters. That interpretive move was somewhat surprising because the author had not established that the Pauline corpus were letters in the same way that 2 John is a letter.

That is not to say that the overall thesis thus falls apart; only that the omission of the most common form of greetings following the mention of sender and recipient departs from parallel letters from the same period. Since Blumell notes 2 John 1 follows a form almost identical to 3 John 1, this may indicate that he sees the author of the epistles having adopted a familiar form that was somewhat peculiar in the introduction. What I mean by this is that, if one is to argue that 2 John 1:1 should be corrected based on papyrological parallels, why does that correction not extend further to include the word *greetings*? Or was the opening altered when it was adopted by early Christian communities as a letter written by the authoritative "elder"?

This brings me to a final point that scholars frequently consider the literary parallels between the Johannine Epistles (and other Johannine texts) and the Gospel of John. It would have been interesting to read

Blumell's analysis of 2 John as a letter to the lady Eclecte that intentionally used concepts and terms from that Gospel. Later Christian letters at times quoted from scripture in their personal correspondence, and it seems to me that 2 John is an early example of this phenomenon. Such a conversation could have grappled more intentionally with the different form of the concept of greetings (χαίρειν) by an author that wrote within the Johannine tradition.

Chapter 4 surveys the surviving New Testament manuscripts, ranging from the papyri to majuscules and later minuscules. I was surprised to learn that the reading Blumell proposes—the definite article before "lady"—is indeed present in some later Minuscules (104–8). Less convincing was his argument that the reading may possibly be restored in some earlier manuscripts because his claims are based on areas where the manuscripts are damaged and can no longer be restored with confidence. Blumell's argument for potentially correcting earlier editions of New Testament texts is based on the position of damage to those papyrus and parchment texts, which have been reconstructed without the definite article present, based on the lengths of lines, size of letters, and other considerations (100–103). The author was careful to point out that it was not his point to correct earlier reconstructions of those already published manuscripts but to assert that the reading of the definite article was not convincingly absent in all early witnesses. Given his interest in reaching a broad audience, Blumell works through some of the rationale for weighing and deciding which New Testament variants are earlier and which were added by later scribes and copyists, a point that many readers will find helpful in understanding the development of the text of the New Testament. Ultimately, the author notes that the omission of the definite article is likely to be a simple scribal error (112–13).

Chapter 5 presents the evidence for the name Eclecte, and Blumell convincingly shows that the name was quite well known, and one should not be surprised to see it in a New Testament epistle (118–19, 121–20). I am convinced that his argument for the reading "lady Eclecte" has carried the day, and future commentators will need to reckon with the evidence provided. In this same chapter, Blumell also resumes his discussion of 2 John 1:13 and the reading of that verse, which has often been used as an argument against the name Eclecte being read in 2 John 1:1 (138–44). In the final verse, Blumell reads it as the vast majority of translations do: "The children of your elect sister send you their greetings" (NRSVue), which understands the usage of ἐκλεκτῆς, "elect" in verse 13, as an adjective and not in reference to a sister named Eclecte (138–39). For specialists working in New Testament and related fields of study, this chapter presents the evidence that carries the thesis.

Chapter 6 sets out to read 2 John 1 anew with the proper opening line restored. The author presents evidence for letters that address another person, but where the sender only identifies themselves by a title, such as 2 John 1 does with the title "the elder" (155–57). Blumell criticizes Lieu, a leading authority on the Johannine Epistles, for her work on the epistles (157) and instead cites evidence that personal letters contain examples of people who do not identify themselves by name but only draw upon a title. In the examples cited, all of them draw upon familial language such as "your father" (157–58). Blumell does not locate an example that exists outside of that pattern, and instead he equates the use of a title such as *father* and *mother* to that of "the elder" (158).

I appreciate the author reading 2 John as it was intended: a short letter between associates concerning matters of their shared concerns and faith. Blumell's exploration of what the elder might have been asking of lady Eclecte was insightful and helpful. Lady Eclecte was the recipient of the letter, and she appears to have been a rather close associate of the otherwise unknown elder (165, 178). The elder expects her to follow his instruction to guard her house (173–78): "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive and welcome this person into your house" (NRSVue 2 John 1:10).

For those who read reviews of books as a guide for whether they should purchase a particular book, I would recommend this book to those who like reading informed, careful scholarship that is transparent in its goals and use of evidence. At times, I found the prose to be acerbic when discussing secondary scholarship. Such strong prose lends itself to the idea that good scholarship is under attack, but I would directly reject that notion: I see New Testament studies as a community working together on shared concerns. The book is celebrated on the back cover by two leading scholars in the field, and the publisher is a leader in the industry. If I had another go at my own translation of the New Testament,[1] I would emend 2 John 1 according to Blumell's work. For those readers who do not appreciate scholarly argumentation, this book may not be for them, but its findings are sure to influence a future generation of scholarship on 2 John.

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1. Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints,* rev. ed. (Greg Kofford Books, 2022).

Genesis: A New English Translation by Kent P. Jackson

Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2025

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]

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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]

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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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New Publication

The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Eight: Textual Criticism of the Book of Mormon

by Royal Skousen, with Stanford Carmack

Published by BYU Studies
$49.95 hardcover, ISBN 0-8425-2594-7

In this eighth part of volume 3, I consider in detail the typesetting for the Book of Mormon editions from 1841 (the first British one) through the Orson Pratt 1879 edition, with its chapters broken up and verse numbers added. I also briefly discuss the 1905 and the 1920 editions, the RLDS editions, and the table of contents for early Book of Mormon editions. Then I take up textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, with chapters on how I created the computerized collation over three years, then annotating it for WordCruncher use, beginning in 2003, from which all of volumes 3 and 4 derive. This version of the collation is now available from Digital Humanities, a department in the College of Humanities at BYU. I have chapters describing how I got the copytext for the Yale edition (the collation is the copytext; no previous edition alone was the copytext). There were no errors in the original 2009 edition because the letters of the text itself were never keyed in. I also talk about various textual criticism issues: (1) the need for a complete collation, not selective; and (2) the need to link the apparatus to the arguments for and against various reading to the most up-to-date version of ATV. Purchasing volume 5, the collation, from Digital Humanities will satisfy these two conditions.

Next I turn to the work of the Joseph Smith Papers on providing photos of the two manuscripts, along with my (revised) transcription of the text of those manuscripts. I discuss both the positives and the negatives of the JSP work. I go into their failure to recognize two leaves from the University of Chicago as forgeries. Stan Carmack (my collaborator)

and I then have a large chapter going through all the archaic entries in parts 3 and 4 of volume 3, and using more up-to-date databases from earlier English, we are able to make a more database analysis for the word meanings, phrases, expressions, and grammar that were actually in earlier English and contrast those uses which were still in use near the end of the 1700s. Most of the archaic readings are still holding, and no scholar has found evidence for their use around the time of Joseph Smith (in the late 1700s and in the early 1800s or after), neither in upstate New York—or even in Kansas or anywhere else! Carmack then provides a single chapter that reviews ten syntactic uses in the Book of Mormon that are only in early modern English.

The final portion of part 8 deals with conjectural emendations. First, I list all the English language conjectures and who first proposed them, and whether or not they are in the current LDS text or in the current Yale edition. Then I turn to three chapters that deal with the Yale conjectural emendations and whether they existed in the early translations of the Book of Mormon. I find nearly one hundred of these for each of the 1852 French and the 1852 German editions, plus nearly 50 conjectures for the 1954 Finnish edition, all first editions and done without supervision, only the honest attempt of these early translators to make a correct translation.