

A Narrative Approach to the Joseph Smith Translation of the Synoptic Gospels

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One of the first projects Joseph Smith undertook after the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in April 1830 was a translation of the Bible. Although it was not a typical translation from original Greek or Hebrew manuscripts, the project was often called a “translation” nonetheless. The Joseph Smith Translation, or JST as it is often called, was referred to by the Lord in the Doctrine and Covenants as “the new translation of my holy word” (D&C 124:89). At the top of the manuscript of the revision of Matthew, it reads, “A translation of the New Testament translated by the power of God.”

It is one thing for a group or individual to undertake a modern language rendering of the Bible, but Joseph’s project was quite different. He sought to *clarify* the text more than create a new language text. He altered the biblical text as he felt led by the Spirit. The resulting text, although usually very similar to the King James Version, includes some sections and changes that greatly modify the original narrative. Some ways that the biblical story was often altered was through changes and additions in the narrator’s descriptions of characters, settings, and plot events. This paper will examine the JST narratorial changes in the synoptic Gospels to appreciate some of the modifications the JST brought to the stories as found in these Gospels. Since the Gospels are religious texts, these changes have not only narrative implications but often theological ones as well.

Joseph Smith did not leave a record for why he made the changes he did in the JST, so we are left with the story as discoursed through the JST narrators of each synoptic Gospel. We can examine how the narrator

This project started while I was working on another one related to the characterization of Peter in the Gospels. In that project, I began noticing how some JST additions related to Peter augmented the sometimes sharp dialogues between Jesus and Peter and changed some features within episodes. I wondered how the JST affected narrative features in other biblical stories. At first I was not sure how much I would find, but I submitted a proposal on this idea to the “Latter-day Saints



and the Bible” section at the National Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature anyway, and it was accepted. As I began working on the project, I quickly saw that there was too much material so I had to limit it both on the narrative side—to changes made by the JST *narrators* in the stories—and in content—only focusing on the synoptic Gospels. It became fascinating to me to see how much the narrative within the Gospels changed through the JST, which I had only casually observed before in its excerpted fashion in the footnotes or appendix. The JST is a bold retelling of the Gospel stories that incorporates new characters and dialogues, leading me to wonder what Joseph Smith saw or experienced that led him to such changes. It is one thing to modernize or theologize a passage, where the purpose is primarily for modern understanding, but it is quite another to suddenly introduce new narrative elements into an ancient story. Where did these people come from? Why were new questions or challenges posed? Is it possible that Joseph Smith had all things before him in a revelatory state and amplified these texts because of what was before him? Since Joseph did not leave a detailed account of how he produced the Joseph Smith Translation, we can only speculate.

guides the readers to perceive characters and events from each Gospel, thereby revealing the characteristics of each JST narrator. This is different from how most LDS readers interact with the JST, since the JST usually is not read in narrative form but in small extracts in the footnotes or appendix. As we look at these examples of changes to the Gospel narratives, we can see some patterns in how the story is discoursed through each JST narrator. These tendencies help us understand some of the changes and also appreciate that although there are certainly many examples of harmonizations made across the Gospels, especially in the characterization of Jesus, Joseph Smith was not out primarily to create one harmonized Gospel. His changes appropriately reflect the unique characteristics of each synoptic Gospel writer, thus preserving the individuality of each Gospel narrator.

To understand some of the patterns of changes in the JST Gospel narratives, I will apply methodology from narrative criticism. Narrative criticism has been a significant part of biblical studies since the early 1980s. Influenced by literary criticism in literature studies, biblical scholars applied similar approaches to the biblical text. Narrative approaches differed from what were then common biblical criticisms because the focus was on the final form of the whole text rather than isolating individual pericopes while attempting to find original sources or understand the editorial history of the texts. In discussing the common biblical approaches before narrative criticism, Hans Frei noted, “The historical critic does something other than narrative interpretation with a narrative because he looks for what the narrative refers to or what reconstructed historical context outside itself explains it. He is not wrong when he does this, but unfortunately he is also not apt to see the logical difference between what he does and what a narrative interpretation might be and what it might yield.”¹

In some ways, narrative criticism reclaimed the religious nature of the text as it focused on the author’s intent to create a religiously compelling account by determining the rhetorical function of the text. By examining how the parts related to the whole, biblical authors were seen as more sophisticated, creative, and purposeful than hitherto viewed. (Grant Hardy has uncovered similar advantages in applying narrative approaches to the Book of Mormon, leading to greater appreciation of

1. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 135.

the literary coherence of the text and the perspectives and communicative strategies of its narrators.)² To arrive at these types of observations, narrative critics examine different aspects of how the story is discoursed, such as its form or genre, its setting, its plot, and its characterization, including the various points of view of each character.³ One aspect of the text narrative critics usually focus on is how the narrator presents and is presented in the story.

The narrator is a key figure in the disclosure of a story to a reader. Acting as a guide, the narrator leads a reader through depictions of settings and plot events that help make the story intelligible to a reader. The narrator also provides descriptions and insights on the characters in the story and, depending on how omniscient the narrator is, can even reveal characters' thoughts and feelings. Omniscience in narration refers to the level of knowledge of the narrator in relating information about characters and events. For example, an omniscient narrator would know everything about what a character is thinking or feeling, even though he or she is outside or separate from that character. Mark Powell has noted that the narrators in the Gospels are "very knowledgeable," meaning they are able to report on both public and private events.

They even know the inner thoughts and motivations of the characters they describe (e.g., Matt. 2:3). Still, their knowledge may have limits. In the synoptic Gospels at least, the narrators' perceptions are limited spatially and temporally to the earthly realm. Descriptions of heaven and hell are offered only by characters in the stories, never by the narrators themselves. We do not find statements like those in the Old Testament that simply declare outright whether God is pleased or displeased with someone. Rather, if God is pleased with somebody in these narratives,

2. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), see especially xiv–xix.

3. For some examples of narrative theoretical models and methods, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980); Thomas G. Pavel, *The Poetics of Plot: The Case of English Renaissance Drama*, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 18 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

God enters the story and says so (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). The narrators may know the inner thoughts of Jesus, but, unlike Jesus, they do not presume to speak directly for God.⁴

The narrators in the synoptic Gospels are usually viewed as presenting the perspective of the implied author of each Gospel: Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Only in Luke is the audience to whom the narrator is speaking explicitly identified as Theophilus—either a specific individual or an implied reader who fears God. The synoptic Gospel narrators are not very intrusive and rarely address the reader explicitly (unlike Book of Mormon narrators who frequently address their future readers).⁵

Let us now turn to significant examples of how the JST narrators make changes to the synoptic Gospel stories. I will examine first the altered characterization of several individuals (including Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Apostles) and then look at other common changes throughout the Gospels (namely, clarifications, harmonizations, and transitions). I will catalogue these changes.⁶

CHARACTERIZATION

Jesus

Many of the changes the JST narrators make to the story involve characterization of major figures in the Gospels. Jesus, as the primary character, has additional information presented about him.

4. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* 26.

5. Richard Bushman noted, “Mormon moves in and out of the narrative, pointing up a crucial conclusion or addressing readers with a sermon of his own.” *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 119. Grant Hardy claimed, “We might imagine a history of the Nephites written by an impersonal, omniscient narrator whose point of view was similar to Joseph Smith’s, but that is not what we have.” Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, xv.

6. This study’s focus on the narrator will leave out information and changes we learn from the *dialogues* of other characters (which make many changes), unless the dialogue is modified by the JST narrator.

∞ A significant early addition to the Matthean story is a description of Jesus growing up as a youth and preparing for his ministry (italics show the significant changes by the JST narrator).⁷

Matthew 2:23

King James Version

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Joseph Smith Translation

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. *And it came to pass, that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh.*

The additional characterization of Jesus as a youth is somewhat reminiscent of Luke's statement of Jesus growing, becoming strong, and being filled with wisdom and having the favor of God upon him (2:40). The JST Matthew addition may be influenced from the Lucan passage and somewhat harmonizes with it, but its primary purpose is as a narrative bridge in JST Matthew between Jesus's birth and the beginning of his ministry, explaining how Jesus differed from others as he prepared for his ministry. (Mark has no such maturation passage, likely because there is no birth narrative.)

∞ Many examples in the synoptic Gospels emphasize Jesus as the fulfillment of *written* prophecy.⁸ For example, the narrator in JST Luke adds an entire dialogue emphasizing Jesus as the fulfillment of written prophecy. "*Then certain of them came to him, saying, Good master, we have Moses and the prophets, and whosoever shall live by them, shall he*

7. The text for the JST quotations comes from *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament: A Side-by-Side Comparison with the King James Version*, ed. Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

8. Some dialogues by Jesus himself in the JST also stress this point. In the presence of Pilate, rather than Jesus's ambiguous response, "thou sayest," to Pilate's question, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" the narrator adds to Jesus's speech "thou sayest *truly, for thus it is written of me*" (JST Matt. 27:11). Also in JST Luke 22:16, the narrator adds to Jesus's dialogue about not eating anymore thereof until it be fulfilled "*which is written in the prophets concerning me. Then I will partake with you.*" This insertion again emphasizes Jesus's fulfillment of what has been written by the prophets.

not have life? And Jesus answered, saying, Ye know not Moses, neither the prophets, for if ye had known them ye would have believed on me; for to this intent they were written. For I am sent that ye might have life” (14:33).

☞ Sometimes the JST will change the purpose behind the actions in the story. In the temptation account (Matt. 4:1–2), the KJV implies that Jesus went out to the wilderness to be tempted and was carried from place to place by the devil. The JST Matthew narrator, however, explains the true purpose of Jesus’s wilderness excursion—to commune with God—and how he went from place to place: the Spirit, not the devil, took him to the pinnacle of the temple and the high mountain. These examples of clarification to the story lessen the power and autonomy of the devil in this account yet still maintain the fact that Jesus was tempted by him. JST Luke also includes these clarifications so there is harmonization as well (see JST Luke 4:2, 5, 9). Although Mark’s account of the temptations is considerably briefer than similar accounts in the other synoptics, there is still some harmonization, for the JST Mark narrator does make a slight mention of Satan *seeking to tempt* Jesus rather than Jesus being tempted of him for forty days (see Mark 1:13).

☞ Repeatedly, the JST narrators make additions that heighten the roles of Jesus and stress the need for us to accept him as our Savior.⁹ An example of a JST narrator highlighting Jesus’s loftier role and the need

9. The role of Jesus is heightened in the JST Matthew narrator’s recitation of Jesus’s words (in the form of dialogue) at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Rather than simply beginning the traditional beatitudes, the JST Matthew narrator highlights Jesus’s statement of the need to accept him and come unto him for salvation as part of the message the Apostles must share. In this case, there is no harmonization with the other synoptic Gospels, but there is a close parallel in the account of Jesus’s sermon to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 12:2. “And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, *Blessed are they who shall believe on me; and again, more blessed are they who shall believe on your words when ye shall testify that ye have seen me and that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe on your words and come down into the depth of humility and be baptized in my name; for they shall be visited with fire and the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins*” (JST Matt. 5:2). Later in the Sermon, Jesus’s words are amplified as he states that “*the day soon cometh, that men shall come before me to judgment, to be judged according to their works. And many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord . . .*” (JST Matt. 7:22). Again the status of Jesus is raised even higher than the KJV text implies. Jesus’s role as future judge seems to be implied also by the narrator in JST Luke 13:35, when Jesus states: “Ye shall not know me, until ye have received from the hand of the Lord a just recompense for all your sins.”

to come unto him for forgiveness is found in JST Mark 3:28, where an entirely new setting is presented with certain men coming and accusing Jesus of claiming to be the Son of God.

Mark 3:28

King James Version

Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:

Joseph Smith Translation

And then came certain men unto him, accusing him, saying, Why do ye receive sinners, seeing thou makest thyself the Son of God? But he answered them, and said, verily I say unto you, All sins which men have committed, when they repent, shall be forgiven them; for I came to preach repentance unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme, shall be forgiven them that come unto me and do the works which they see me do.

This passage changes the setting with new characters and a new question, which challenges Jesus's designation as Son of God, for how can a pure being associate with impure sinners? This narratorial addition emphasizes the need for repentance and coming unto Christ and doing the works he does, while breaking up the original KJV passage, which has no clear notion of repentance and even less of Christ's role in that process. The changes in this passage are noteworthy because it is more common for the JST narrators to add segments of narrative to the beginning or ending of verses rather than rework inside a passage as was done here (the major exception to this tendency is modernizing word choices, which the JST does throughout). JST Matthew adds a similar sentiment of Christ's role in repentance and forgiveness, but without the narrative reworking of the episode, when it states, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men *who receive me and repent*" (JST Matt. 12:31; JST Luke 12:10 simply adds "*and repenteth*" without mentioning Christ's role).

☞ Another future prophecy raising Jesus's status, along with the Apostles, is given by the JST narrator in Matthew 25:34, where as part of the Son of man's return and separation of the wicked and righteous, "he shall sit upon his throne, and the twelve apostles with him." Thus Jesus, alongside the Apostles, will play a role in the final judgment.

☞ Jesus's status was also elevated through additional dialogue:

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. *And they said among themselves, Shall this man think that he alone can spoil this great kingdom? And they were angry with him.* But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because *that they learned that the multitude* took him for

a prophet. *And now his disciples came to him, and Jesus said unto them, Marvel ye at the words or the parable which I spake unto them? Verily, I say unto you, I am the stone, and those wicked ones reject me. I am the head of the corner. These Jews shall fall upon me, and shall be broken; and the kingdom of God shall be taken from them, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (meaning the Gentiles). Wherefore, on whomsoever this stone shall fall, it shall grind him to powder. And when the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, he will destroy those miserable, wicked men, and will let again his vineyard unto other husbandmen; even in the last days, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. And then understood they the parable which he spake unto them, that the Gentiles should be destroyed also, when the Lord should descend out of heaven to reign in his vineyard, which is the earth and the inhabitants thereof.* (JST Matt. 21:47–56)

This additional passage in Matthew adds plenty to the narrative. First, it identifies a question the Jewish leaders ask among themselves denigrating the possible role of Jesus. It also reveals their feelings of anger toward him. (JST Mark 12:12 also adds the insight that the Jewish leaders “were angry when they heard these words.” JST Luke does not include major additions in this episode.) The second part adds a dialogue between Jesus and the Apostles where more explanation is given of the parable Jesus had just shared. Jesus identifies himself as the stone and head of the corner upon which the Jews will be broken (a fulfillment of Psalm 118:22). It also gives a future prophecy of the kingdom being given specifically to the Gentiles. The narrator’s statement ends with the insight that the Apostles now understood the meaning of the parable: that the Gentiles (presumably the wicked ones) would also be destroyed when Jesus returns to his vineyard, specifically identified as the earth and the inhabitants thereof.

☞ The JST Luke narrator makes several changes in the interaction between Jesus and some Jewish opponents in Luke 16. Rather than Jesus simply making claims like in the KJV, a dialogue between Jesus and some Pharisees is moderated by the JST narrator, giving more context to the encounter. Within these additions, the Jewish opponents reject Jesus and cling to their law and prophets. They do not want Jesus to be their ruler or judge. They also grow angrier when Jesus calls them adulterers. For his part, Jesus proclaims that the law and prophets testify of him—another emphasis on Jesus as fulfillment of prophecy.¹⁰ He also

10. In the parallel passage in Matthew, the JST narrator does not make the extensive changes as in Luke, but does include the notion of those oppressing

condemns their teachings and accuses them of persecution, oppression, and sin.

Luke 16:16–18

King James Version

16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

Joseph Smith Translation

16 *And they said unto him, We have the law and the prophets, but as for this man we will not receive him to be our ruler; for he maketh himself to be a judge over us. Then said Jesus unto them, The law and the prophets testify of me; yea, and all the prophets who have written, even until John, have foretold of these days. Since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man who seeketh truth, presseth into it.*

17 *And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail. And why teach ye the law, and deny that which is written; and condemn him who the Father hath sent to fulfill the law, that you might be redeemed? O fools! For you have said in your hearts, There is no God. And you pervert the right way; and the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence of you; and you persecute the meek; and in your violence you seek to destroy the kingdom; and ye take the children of the kingdom by force.*

18 *Wo unto you, ye adulterers! And they reviled him again, being angry for the saying, that they were adulterers. But he continued, saying, Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her who is put away from her husband committeth adultery.*

☞ The institution of the sacrament at the Last Supper provided the JST Matthew narrator more opportunity to magnify Jesus’s salvific role, yet there are differences between the JST Matthew manuscripts (the only Gospel in the JST to have more than one version).¹¹ “Both

others losing their power and the fulfillment of prophecy in “these days” (JST Matt. 11:13).

11. Kent Jackson gave a brief description of how we now have two JST Matthew manuscripts: “The original dictation of Matthew is on a manuscript we call New Testament Manuscript 1. The Prophet interrupted the work at Matthew 26 when he went to Missouri for much of the summer of 1831. While he was gone, John Whitmer made a backup copy, which we call New Testament [Manuscript] 2. When the Prophet returned and resumed the New Testament translation, he did it on New Testament 2, with the backup copy

NT1 and NT2.2 add words to show that the bread was not Jesus' body but 'in remembrance' of it, something otherwise absent in the Matthew account. The words 'which I gave a ransom for you' in NT2.2 provide the doctrinal foundation for the passage. In the NT1 narrative, Jesus commands his Apostles to do as they had seen him do—to bless and pass the sacramental emblems to others."¹² Similar changes emphasizing partaking of the wine *in remembrance* of Jesus's blood are also found in the subsequent verses. JST Mark also includes the emphasis on partaking of the bread and wine *in remembrance* of Jesus and adds the promise that as they do so, they will remember this hour they were with him, "*even the last time in my ministry*" (Mark 14:24, see also 14:22), thus personalizing the experience more for the Apostles. The additional emphasis on "remembrance" in JST Matthew and JST Mark somewhat harmonizes with Luke's account as well as the earliest Christian account of the sacrament in Paul's writings (see Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor. 11:24–25).¹³

again becoming the copy for the ongoing translation through the end of the New Testament. On that manuscript, he made further refinements to text already recorded until he was confident that the translation was as the Lord wanted it to be." From "Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible," in *Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 66–67.

12. Kent P. Jackson and Peter M. Jasinski, "The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible," *BYU Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003): 46–47.

13. JST Matthew also emphasizes that Jesus's blood will be "shed for as many as shall believe on my name," heightening the role of faith in Jesus in the process of our salvation. The small insertion in JST Matthew 26:29 that Jesus "shall come" to drink the fruit of the vine again one day with them in "my Father's kingdom" shows that that event will take place "on the earth," not in heaven (see D&C 27:5). JST Luke does not include these changes, but does have one additional line when Jesus stated that he would not eat any "thereof" (the Passover meal) "until it be fulfilled, *which is written in the prophets concerning me. Then I will partake with you, in the kingdom of God*" (22:16). Thus the JST Luke narrator emphasizes the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus Christ.

☞ The episode of Jesus’s arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane contains some significant changes made by the JST narrators.

Matthew 26:50

King James Version

And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

Joseph Smith Translation

And Jesus said unto him, *Judas*, wherefore art thou come to *betray me with a kiss*? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. (NT1 And Jesus said unto him, *Judas*, *betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss*? And Jesus also said unto the captain, Friend, wherefore art thou come? And then they came, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.)

Instead of calling Judas a friend, in JST Matthew Jesus calls him by name and asks if he has come to betray him with a kiss. The question about the betrayal kiss harmonizes with Luke’s account (see 22:48; JST Mark does not add the change). As for the endearing term, “friend,” in NT1 Jesus actually calls the captain of the guard “friend,” a surprising change in the scene raising the question why Jesus would call him friend. In either case, this change distances Jesus from Judas, who at that moment has come to betray him.

☞ The next action in Gethsemane was Peter’s defense of Jesus by cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Only in KJV Luke does Jesus then heal the ear. Through the JST changes in Matthew and Mark, all the Gospels include the healing of the ear and Jesus’s restraint against using the sword for defense.

Matthew 26:52, 54

King James Version

52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

54 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

JST Matt. 26:54

(NT1 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? And he put forth his hand and touched the servant’s ear and it was healed.)

JST Mark 14:47

And one of them *who* stood by drew *his* sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. *But Jesus commanded him to return his sword, saying, He who taketh the sword shall perish with the sword. And he put forth his finger, and healed the servant of the high priest.*

In the KJV, Matthew records the clear command to put the sword back in the sheath, while KJV Luke implies allowing the arrest with the directive

“suffer ye thus far” (22:51).¹⁴ The JST Mark narrator adds the command to return the sword, along with the counsel that whoever fights by the sword shall perish with it, which parallels the KJV Matthew passage. The JST narrators in Matthew and Mark add the healing of the servant’s ear to correspond with Luke’s account. Thus, a harmonization of this episode’s two key actions is made among all the three synoptic Gospels.

There are thus several major tendencies noted among the JST narratorial changes to Jesus’s characterization:

- emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of *written* prophecy
- descriptions of needing to come to Jesus for salvation
- some harmonization of actions so they are consistent across the Gospels
- additions of new characters asking Jesus questions, thereby fleshing out the contexts for some of Jesus’s statements (these are not usually harmonized among all the Gospels)
- creation of bridges where there are gaps in the narrative, such as between Jesus’s birth and ministry
- changes in certain relationships, such as between Jesus and Judas

While some of these changes to Jesus’s characterization show some harmonization among the Gospels, more so in relation to Jesus’s actions than his teachings, there is certainly no systematic effort to harmonize across all of them. Some introductions of new characters or settings are unique to a particular Gospel, even when the same episode is found in another Gospel. Thus, each Gospel story remains a unique testimony of Jesus’s ministry.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist is another major figure whose descriptions and actions are sometimes altered by the JST narrators, most notably in JST Matthew and Mark.

∞ One aspect that often comes out in the narratorial modifications is the reinforcement of John the Baptist’s subservient role to Jesus. For

14. Other modern versions of Luke are more forceful: “No more of this!” The Gospel of John also includes this episode and follows Matthew closely in Jesus’s command to sheath the sword (see John 18:11).

example, John's deferential function of bearing record of Jesus as one coming after him with power to baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire was highlighted in JST Matthew 3:12 after John's acknowledgment that he was unworthy to even bear Jesus's shoes.¹⁵

Matthew 3:12

King James Version

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Joseph Smith Translation

And it is he of whom I shall bear record, whose fan shall be in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but in the fullness of his own time will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Thus came John, preaching and baptizing in the river of Jordan; bearing record, that he who was coming after him, had power to baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire.

☞ A few verses later, at the relating of Jesus's baptism, the JST Matthew narrator makes a significant alteration to the story where it is John the Baptist who both sees the Spirit of God descending like a dove and hears the voice from heaven commanding him to listen to Christ.¹⁶

15. The JST in John also amplifies this subservient relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist: "He it is of whom I bear record. He is that prophet, even Elias, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose, or whose place I am not able to fill: for he shall baptize, not only with water, but with fire, and with the Holy Ghost" (JST John 1:27).

16. This clarification is somewhat confirmed in JST Mark when the narrator adds to the end of the episode: "And John bare record of it" (1:11). These changes may be a harmonization with John the Baptist's testimony in the Gospel of John where it is related: "And John bare record, saying, When he was baptized of me, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him: for he who sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (JST John 1:32–34). Luke makes no change, perhaps because in Luke the opening of the heavens seems to be in response to Jesus's prayer, not the baptism. Plus both Luke and Mark have God's words directed at Jesus, "thou art," rather than as in Matthew to others, "this is."

Matthew 3:16–17*King James Version*

16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Joseph Smith Translation

16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: *and John saw, and, lo!* the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon *Jesus*:

17. And lo! *he heard* a voice from heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; *hear ye him*.

(NT1 16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: *and John saw, and lo!* the heavens were opened unto him (*John*), and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon *Jesus*.)

☞ As another indication of the close relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, the JST Matthew narrator makes a significant change regarding *who* received angels to strengthen him after Jesus’s fasting and temptations. Instead of angels coming to strengthen Jesus, Jesus sent them to John because he had heard that John was cast into prison. So the angels “*came and ministered unto him*” (JST Matt. 4:12; JST Mark does not make the change, and the Gospel of Luke does not include any visitation of angels after Jesus’s temptations).

☞ At the transfiguration experience, the JST narrators in Matthew and Mark add to the story considerably to explain how John the Baptist is part of this episode. According to the JST Matthew narrator, the identification of “Elias” is explained as actually two people: one who had already come to prepare the way before Jesus and who was taken by others and killed (John the Baptist), and another who would come to restore all things (Elijah).¹⁷

17. The JST in John also identifies an Elias who would restore all things but in another setting: the episode where people ask John the Baptist if he was that Elias: “And they asked him, *saying, How then art thou Elias?* And he *said, I am not that Elias who was to restore all things*” (JST John 1:21). Also a little later: “Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not *the Christ, nor Elias who was to restore all things, neither that prophet?*” (JST John 1:25).

Matthew 17:12–13*King James Version*

12. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.
 13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Joseph Smith Translation

12. *And again* I say unto you, That Elias *has* come already, *concerning whom it is written, Behold I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me;* and they knew him not, *and* have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.
 13 *But I say unto you, Who is Elias? Behold, this is Elias whom I send to prepare the way before me.* Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist *and also of another which should come and restore all things, as it is written by the prophets.*

In JST Mark, the narrator states that “there appeared unto them Elias with Moses, *or in other words, John the Baptist and Moses*” (JST Mark 9:4).¹⁸ It is unclear what happened to Elijah in the discussion of JST Mark. (Luke does not have a discussion about Elias.)

Thus, in the case of changes related to the characterization of John the Baptist, there does not seem to be the same harmonizing tendency among the JST narrators as found in their characterization of Jesus. The JST Luke narrator does not make significant changes related to John the Baptist’s characterization, and while JST Matthew and JST Mark both make noteworthy changes, there is not a focus on harmonization.

A close reading of the narrative changes in the JST in relation to John the Baptist reveals subtle ways the narrator changes how the implied reader will perceive John the Baptist. The JST narrator strengthens John’s subservient status while also making him the primary participant in more heavenly manifestations. Thus, his spiritual status is elevated by his participation in additional experiences, but his words reveal his secondary status to Jesus.

18. Jesus’s dialogue in the JST continues to emphasize the preparatory role of this Elias in subsequent verses as one who “cometh first, and *prepareth* all things; and *teacheth you of the prophets . . . and even* as it is written of him; *and he bore record of me, and they received him not. Verily this was Elias*” (JST Mark 9:12–13).

Apostles

The characterization of the Apostles in the synoptic Gospels shows some changes by the JST narrators especially in relation to Jesus.¹⁹

☞ Within the Sermon on the Mount in the JST, the Apostles ask Jesus a question that elicits further counsel from him. This JST narratorial addition is interesting for two reasons: first, it interrupts Jesus's free-flowing sermon with a question from the Apostles, and, second, it includes a saying of Jesus about receiving justly from one's father, but in the context of challenges the Apostles might face from unbelievers or at least those who lack faith that God could respond to them:

And then said his disciples unto him, They will say unto us, We ourselves are righteous and need not that any man should teach us. God, we know, heard Moses and some [of] the prophets; but us he will not hear.

And they will say, We have the law for our salvation, and that is sufficient for us.

Then Jesus answered, and said unto his disciples, Thus shall ye say unto them,

What man among you, having a son, and he shall be standing out, and shall say, Father, open thy house that I may come in and sup with thee, will not say, Come in, my son; for mine is thine, and thine is mine? Or what man is there among you, who if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? (JST Matt. 7:14–18)

☞ The woman anointing Jesus was an episode among several where the Apostles lacked understanding.²⁰ The NT1 JST version of Matthew shows changes in 26:10 that are sharper toward the Apostles. Here not only did they not understand Jesus's sayings but had evil thoughts toward the woman. In addition, the JST Matthew narrator has underscored Jesus's ability to know their hearts and to criticize their evil thoughts: "And when *they had thus reasoned among themselves, and understood*

19. In Jesus's first calling of some of the Apostles in Matthew, before he invites them to follow him, he identifies himself by stating, "*I am he of whom it is written by the prophets*" (JST Matt. 4:19). This small clause removes the ambiguity of whether the Apostles knew who Jesus was before he invited them to follow him. However, the JST of Mark does not make such an addition in its parallel version of this account. (Luke does not have a parallel.)

20. As another example of the Apostles not understanding what Jesus was teaching, the JST Mark narrator adds the fact that Peter, James, and John "asked him many questions concerning his saying" as a prelude to the Mount of Transfiguration experience (JST Mark 9:2).

not, Jesus knowing their hearts, he said unto them, Why trouble you the woman *and from whence is this evil in your hearts?* for verily I say unto you, she hath wrought a good work upon me.”

☞ The JST Luke narrator adds a new application of Jesus’s statement “But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God” (12:9) by turning the focus on his own disciples who somehow have spoken evil of Jesus. “*Now his disciples knew that he said this, because they had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were afraid to confess him before men. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, He knoweth our hearts, and he speaketh to our condemnation, and we shall not be forgiven. But he answered them, and said unto them, Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, and repenteth, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him who blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven him*” (JST Luke 12:10–12). This narratorial addition is unexpected because we have no account in the text of Jesus’s disciples, including the Apostles, speaking evil against him because they were afraid to confess him before men. It also changes the rationale for Jesus’s next statement—that the sin of speaking against the Son of man can be forgiven through repentance—because his disciples had begun thinking they could not be forgiven for their past actions. It is an additional example of the Apostles’ and other followers’ early weakness. Other JST examples show that the Apostles were often afraid or filled with fear (see JST Mark 9:34 and JST Luke 8:23). They also frequently lacked understanding, yet, the JST Matthew narrator states, through experience they gained greater understanding of Jesus’s exalted nature:

Matthew 23:39

King James Version

For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Joseph Smith Translation

For I say unto you, *that you* shall not see me henceforth, *and know that I am he of whom it is written by the prophets, until you shall say, Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord, in the clouds of heaven, and all the holy angels with him. Then understood his disciples that he should come again on the earth, after that he was glorified and crowned on the right hand of God.*

Within this JST emendation, the narrator has amplified Jesus’s status as the object of the prophets’ writing, and one who would return in the clouds with angels after his glorification on the right hand of God. It

also specifically states that the Apostles grew to understand these facts about Jesus,²¹ especially Jesus's second coming, which is not explicit in the KJV.²²

☞ The accounts of Jesus and the Apostles in Gethsemane receive some significant changes to their narrative in the JST, thereby affecting the Apostles' characterization. In Gethsemane, JST Mark states that it was actually the disciples who began to be sore amazed, not Jesus, and the narrator gives some of the rationale for their strong feelings: wondering whether Jesus was in fact the Messiah. "*And the disciples began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and to complain in their hearts, wondering if this be the Messiah. And Jesus, knowing their hearts, he said to his disciples, Sit you here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and rebuked them*" (14:32–33). It is unclear why these three Apostles were rebuked. Was it because they themselves were doubtful or because they were the leaders of the others and had not taught them sufficiently?

☞ There is another change in the Gethsemane episode where the narrator breaks up Jesus's free-flowing speech: "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38). The JST Mark narrator splits the two clauses between two speakers. "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. *And they said unto him, the spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak*" (JST Mark 14:38). In this case, Jesus makes the first statement, and, presumably Peter, James, and John make the second statement attesting to the difficulty they have staying awake.²³

21. In the next Matthean episode in the JST, Jesus questions the understanding of the Apostles: "Do you not understand them?" (JST Matt. 24:2). This is also found in JST Mark: "See you not all these things and do you not understand them?" (13:2). JST Luke does not include Jesus's statement but does clarify that "they" refers to "the disciples" who asked Jesus about the timing of the events he prophesied (see 21:7).

22. In the parallel passage in Luke, the JST changes are different: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not *know me, until ye have received from the hand of the Lord a just recompense for all your sins*; until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he *who cometh in the name of the Lord*" (JST Luke 13:35). Instead of the Apostles being the audience and coming to better understand Jesus's role, the audience seems to be the Jews who will receive punishment from the Lord for their sins.

23. But note that JST Matthew NT1 26:41 specifically adds "he said unto them" between the two clauses, thus keeping Jesus as the speaker of both but

☞ Regarding the events in Gethsemane, the JST Matthew narrator inserts a clause that slightly adds to the plot related to the Apostles. When Jesus stated, “Sleep on now,” the JST narrator in Matthew 26:45 “supplies the missing continuity. In NT1 we read, ‘and they did so. And when they awoke, Jesus saith unto them.’ NT2.2 expresses it differently: ‘And after they had slept he said unto them, Arise’ [JST Matt. 26:46]. Again, it is interesting to see that the Prophet inserted the same thought into each account, although not in identical words and not in the same location.”²⁴

☞ One last event in Gethsemane was the fleeing of the disciples from the arresting party (and consequently from Jesus). The JST Mark narrator adds a brief clause that may give the rationale for why they fled: they heard Jesus’s statement that “the scripture must be fulfilled” as related in the previous verse. JST Mark 14:50 begins, “And *the disciples, when they heard this saying*, all forsook him, and fled.” The addition of “when they heard this saying” [that “the scripture must be fulfilled”] may suggest that it was at that moment they remembered the scripture passage Jesus had prophetically recited for them at the Last Supper: “I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered” (Mark 14:27 referring to Zech. 13:7).

☞ As the chief Apostle, Peter is sometimes singled out for additional descriptions by the JST narrators. Interestingly, it is often not in a positive light, since he is rebuked additional times in the JST beyond the rebukes recorded in the KJV. In the episode about whether Jesus should pay tribute, instead of Jesus “preventing” (or preceding) Peter from entering the house, Jesus “rebukes” him (JST Matt. 17:25). In JST Mark 10:31–32, following Jesus’s statement that “*there are many who make themselves first that shall be last; and the last first*,” the JST Mark narrator adds, “*This he said, rebuking Peter*.” These JST additions are consistent with how Jesus repeatedly rebukes Peter and sometimes the other Apostles because he knows their hearts.²⁵

☞ The JST Mark narrator gives insight into the characterization of Judas in the encounter between him and Jesus at the Last Supper. Jesus

splitting them with a narrative interjection.

24. Jackson and Jasinski, “Process of Inspired Translation,” 50–51.

25. A probable harmonization related to Peter’s denial is when the JST Mark narrator adds that he “*went out, and fell upon his face, and wept bitterly*” (14:72), similar to the use of the adjective “bitterly” in Matthew and Luke.

stated, “But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. *And he said unto Judas Iscariot, what thou doest, do quickly; but beware of innocent blood. Nevertheless, Judas Iscariot, even one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests to betray Jesus unto them; for he turned away from him, and was offended because of his words. And when the chief priests heard of him, they were glad, and promised to give him money; and he sought how he might conveniently betray Jesus*” (JST Mark 14:28). The narrator adds some significant words and phrases that guide how the text is to be read. Jesus warns Judas of “*innocent blood. Nevertheless, Judas . . . , even one of the twelve, went to betray Jesus.*” The word *nevertheless* highlights Judas disregarding his Master’s warning, and the word *even* emphasizes how far Judas is falling: from being one of the Twelve to betraying his Master. The narrator also gives the rationale for why Judas was doing this: he turned away from Jesus and was offended because of his words. The JST Mark narrator has also moved the account of Judas’s meeting with the chief priests to during the Last Supper rather than before as in the KJV (see Mark 14:10–11), JST Matthew, and JST Luke.²⁶

These examples of narratorial changes to the characterization of the Apostles, while showing some similar tendencies, like Jesus rebuking Peter multiple times or the Apostles frequently lacking understanding, show little harmonization among the Gospels. Each Gospel introduces new settings and characterizations regardless of the other Gospels, thereby preserving the individuality of each JST narrator.

26. There are some other examples of changing the narrative order in the JST. In telling the parable of the unmerciful servant and the debt, *when* the servant fell down and worshipped his lord is placed later by the JST Matthew narrator, thus changing the servant’s act from one of petition to one of gratitude (see JST Matt. 18:26–27). Two other examples of changing the narrative order are found in the two manuscripts of JST Matthew 26, showing how these changes can develop even between the two JST Matthew versions. In Matthew 26:5, NT1 states, “Lest there be an uproar among the people, let us not do it on the feast day,” while NT2.2 keeps it in the same order as the KJV: “Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people” (this is also the same order in JST Mark 14:2). The episode of the woman anointing Jesus provides another example: the phrase in which Jesus promises that the woman would be blessed through this act is at the end of the verse in NT1 but at the beginning in NT2.2.

Other Characters

Other characters in the synoptic Gospels besides the Apostles sometimes have their characterization changed or revealed through statements and descriptions by the JST narrators, sometimes divulging a more omniscient narrator who knows the emotions and thoughts of the characters. Herod the Great asked his chief priests and scribes: “Where is the place that is written of by the prophets in which Christ should be born?” thereby reemphasizing Jesus being the fulfillment of written scripture. Then, the JST Matthew narrator gives insight into Herod’s emotions at this moment: “For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets” (JST Matt. 2:4). At the end of Jesus’s life when Pilate was washing hands, the KJV narrator gives an ambiguous statement: “I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it” (Matt. 27:24). The JST Matthew narrator absolves Pilate of some of his responsibility by changing the last phrase to a command for them to leave Jesus alone: “I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see *that ye do nothing unto him*” (JST Matt. 27:24).

OTHER NARRATORIAL CHANGES

Definitions or Clarifications

Besides characterization changes, there are several other examples of how the JST narrators change the story in each synoptic Gospel. One type of common change is when the JST narrator provides definitions or clarifying statements about terms or imagery for the reader. Examples of these definition statements are found throughout JST Matthew 24, the Olivet Discourse. Near the beginning, when using the phrase “end of the world,” the JST Matthew narrator adds the parenthetical statement “(or the destruction of the wicked, which is the end of the world)” (JST Matt. 24:3; JST Mark 13:4 makes the same change). When talking about the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, the JST Matthew narrator adds the clarifying clause: “concerning the destruction of Jerusalem” (JST Matt 24:15; JST Mark 13:14 makes the same change). In somewhat parallel fashion, JST Luke later makes the narratorial statement: “Now these things he spake unto them concerning the destruction of Jerusalem” (21:25); however, Luke does not mention Daniel’s abomination of desolation.²⁷

27. The dialogue in the JST also clarifies the time period Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24:23: “Behold those things I have spoken unto you concerning

One of the most personalized explanations was given to Theophilus by the JST narrator in Luke 3:13. This is the strongest example of a JST narrator being intrusive because he is speaking directly to Theophilus to give an explanation of a Jewish custom to a Gentile: “And he [John the Baptist] said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed unto you. *For it is well known unto you, Theophilus, that after the manner of the Jews, and according to the custom of their law, in receiving money in the treasury, that out of the abundance which was received was appointed unto the poor, every man his portion; and after this manner did the publicans also, wherefore John said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*”

In other places in JST Luke, the narrator defines many things using the word “signifying,” perhaps as additional evidence of being more intrusive in Luke because it is to a gentile, less-experienced audience. “This man began to build, and was not able to finish. *And this he said, signifying there should not any man follow him, unless he was able to continue*” (JST Luke 14:30). “*These things he said, signifying; That which was written verily must all be fulfilled*” (JST Luke 14:35). The narrator also has Jesus explain the meaning of the imagery of the green and dry trees: “*This he spake, signifying the scattering of Israel, and the desolation of the heathen, or in other words, the Gentiles*” (JST Luke 23:31).²⁸ A longer clarification is expounded in Luke and Matthew to explain the obscure image of eagles gathering around the carcass:

Wheresoever the body is gathered; or, in other words, whithersoever the saints are gathered, thither will the eagles be gathered together, or thither will the remainder be gathered together. *This he spake signifying the gathering of his saints; and of angels descending and gathering the remainder unto them; the one from the bed, the other from the field, whithersoever he listeth. For verily there shall be new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. And there shall be no unclean*

the Jews, and again, after the tribulation of those days which shall come upon Jerusalem, if any man shall say unto you, Lo! here is Christ, or there; believe him not” (JST Mark 13:20–21 basically has the same addition). Finally in this chapter, the JST narrator adds an allusion to a prophecy of Moses not even mentioned in the KJV related to the weeping and gnashing of teeth: “*And thus cometh the end of the wicked according to the prophecy of Moses, saying, They should be cut off from among the people; but the end of the earth is not yet, but by and by*” (JST Matt. 24:51).

28. JST Luke adds at least four cases when the Gentiles are highlighted, consistent with the Gospel at large (see JST Luke 3:4; 21:25, 32; 23:31).

thing; for the earth becoming old, even as a garment, having waxed in corruption, wherefore it vanisheth away, and the footstool remaineth sanctified, cleansed from all sin. (JST Luke 17:37)

Where Matthew also uses this metaphor, another long narratorial explanation by the JST narrator about this imagery is given, but it is not equal to Luke's:

So likewise shall mine elect be gathered from the four quarters of the earth. And they shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars. Behold, I speak unto you for mine elect's sake. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there shall be famine and pestilences and earthquakes in diverse places. And again, because iniquity shall abound, the love of men shall wax cold; but he that shall not be overcome, the same shall be saved. And again, this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come, or the destruction of the wicked. And again shall the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, be fulfilled. (JST Matt. 24:28)

So both these additions highlight the future gathering of the elect, but JST Luke emphasizes the cleansing of the earth and the establishment of a new earth and heaven, while JST Matthew focuses on the wars and calamities of the last days. Also, JST Matthew has moved some of the earlier verses of the chapter to this later location (for example, 24:6–7, 14).

Some additional examples of the JST narrator providing brief definitions or clarifications include “Rabbi (*which is master*)” (JST Matt. 23:7) and “dumb spirit *that is a devil*” (JST Mark 9:17). The narrator in JST Mark 12:27 explains how God is the God of the living, “*for he raiseth them up out of their graves.*” When Jesus asked the Father to forgive “them,” the JST Luke narrator identifies the direct object “them” as the soldiers who crucified him (see 23:34). JST Mark 9 has several passages where the JST narrator gives expanded explanations of imagery in Jesus’s words about things like cutting off one’s hand or foot if it becomes offensive (see 9:43, 45–48, 50). JST Matthew 16:25 explains the meaning of taking up one’s cross. When the disciples in Emmaus are described as having their eyes “holden,” the JST Luke narrator adds that the word means “*covered*, that they *could* not know him” (JST Luke 24:16).

Harmonization across the Gospels

Another category of JST narratorial changes is harmonizations across the Gospels (some examples have already been noted above in the discussion on characterization changes). For example, KJV Matthew 16:4

mentions the sign of Jonah, but Mark's parallel passage omits it. (Luke 11:29 also mentions the sign of Jonah, but in a different setting.) However, JST Mark adds it to the narrative: "There shall no sign be given unto this generation, *save the sign of the prophet Jonah; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so likewise shall the Son of man be buried in the bowels of the earth*" (JST Mark 8:12). The specific revelation of the meaning of the sign of Jonah was in the second part of this addition, and it harmonizes with another Matthean passage, 12:40; thus the JST Mark narrator has harmonized with two passages of Matthew in one addition.

When relating the words that were placed above Jesus on the cross, the JST narrators in Matthew and Mark add the fact that the high priests ask Pilate to "write that he said, *I am king of the Jews. But Pilate said unto them, What I have written, I have written*" (JST Mark 15:26; compare JST Matt. 27:37). This addition harmonizes with the account in John 19:21–22. The JST narrator in Matthew further harmonizes with John by adding that the inscription was written in "Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew" and that it said "*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*" (JST Matt. 27:37; compare John 19:19–20).

Another example of harmonization is in the scene at the tomb after Jesus's resurrection. Matthew and Mark both mention one angel or young man, but Luke mentions two young men. The JST narrators in all three Gospels identify two angels. The location where the two angels meet the women is also harmonized: outside the sepulcher by the rolled-away stone (incidentally, the JST narrator in the Gospel of John also describes two angels sitting on the stone, see JST John 20:1). In order to make this harmonization, the narrator in JST Mark shifted the women's entering the sepulcher until after the angels spoke to them. The JST Luke narrator moved the initial description of the two angels to earlier before the women went into the sepulcher (Matthew does not have the women enter the sepulcher to see where his body had been laid, but instead they encounter the risen Lord on their way to tell others; see 28:9).

In a smaller example of harmonization, the narrators in JST Mark and Luke add to Peter's confession of Christ to match more closely Matthew's account and thereby emphasize Jesus as the Son of God.

Matthew 16:16

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

JST Mark 8:29

"Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God."

JST Luke 9:20

"The Christ, the Son of God."

When Jesus was on the cross, the JST Mark narrator harmonized one passage to match that of Matthew.

<i>Matthew 27:34</i>	<i>JST Matthew 27:34</i>	<i>Mark 15:23</i>	<i>JST Mark 15:23</i>
They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.	They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted <i>the vinegar</i> , he would not drink.	And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.	And they gave him to drink <i>vinegar</i> mingled with <i>gall</i> : <i>and when he had tasted the vinegar</i> , he would not drink.

Narrative Transitions

Another common feature of the JST narrators, especially in the Gospel of Mark, is to add small transitions to bridge the narrative action from one segment to the next. These transitions also function as clarifications of what is going on in the story. Examples include: “*Now Jesus knew this*” (JST Mark 3:23); “*And this he said unto them*” (JST Mark 3:30); “*While he was yet with them, and while he was yet speaking*” (JST Mark 3:31); “*And they, entering into the sepulchre, saw the place where they laid Jesus*” (JST Mark 16:8); “*Then began he to upbraid the people in every city wherein his mighty works were done, who received him not, saying*” (JST Luke 10:13). There was also one time where Jesus’s response to his own question was added: “*I say unto you, Nay*” (JST Mark 4:21).

CONCLUSION

Since Joseph Smith did not leave a record for why he made the changes he did, we are left with seeing the differences between the KJV and the JST and interpreting from there. One facet of the JST is its narrative; thus, we can examine the narrative features to appreciate what changes were made and perhaps arrive at a closer understanding of *why*. The narrator, as guide and information-giver, holds a good deal of power in a story; therefore, the narrator in each JST Gospel can reveal much about the characters, settings, and plot. We know that Joseph Smith had all the Gospels in front of him as part of this project, thus likely influencing him to harmonize certain parts, but he also proceeded sequentially through the KJV, which could potentially lower the amount of harmonization. At first I was inclined to believe there would be one consistent narratorial voice throughout the JST Gospels, since Joseph Smith mediated them all, but upon closer examination it becomes clear that Joseph Smith did not have the intention of creating one harmonized

Gospel. Not only did he continue to allow for separate Gospel narratives, but the narrator in each of them maintains some distinctiveness. The JST Luke narrator is particularly intrusive and gives the most explanations for things where the implied audience is a less-experienced gentile member of the church. The JST Luke narrator also more often introduces teachings about the Gentiles, consistent with the Gospel at large. Narrative transitions between segments of the story to aid its flow and understanding are most common in JST Mark where the narrative is fast-paced and rapidly progressing from episode to episode. Where the Gospel of John shares similar episodes with the synoptics, some harmonization is evident, particularly in JST Matthew, perhaps because the authors were both Apostles.

Besides these unique characteristics, we see other tendencies of the JST narrators within the synoptic Gospels. With characterization, two aspects of Jesus's mission are frequently highlighted by the narrators: his salvific role for those who come unto him and his fulfillment of written prophecy. Consistent with the KJV synoptic narrators, Jesus's heavenly roles and future return are expounded in Jesus's own dialogues, not through statements by the narrator. A difference, however, is that John the Baptist is shown by the JST narrators to understand Jesus's higher Christological roles, such as sitting on a heavenly throne and judging the world. As such, John the Baptist's deferential role to Jesus Christ as the forerunner, and his witness of one who is greater coming after him, is amplified in the JST. The Apostles' and other disciples' lack of understanding and their fear continue in the JST and are sometimes even more harshly noted ("*evil in their hearts*," "*spoke evil against Jesus*," "*didn't confess Jesus before others*," and "*wondering if this be the Messiah*"), but there are also more explanations of Jesus's disciples growing to a greater understanding. The negative view in the JST toward the Jewish leaders matches the synoptic Gospels and is illustrated by additional confrontations between them and Jesus.

Other narrative tendencies of the JST narrators include changing the order of some narrative segments and harmonizing among the Gospels (but not always among all of them). The JST narrators sometimes bring to the foreground the rationale, motivations, and emotions of characters, primarily through Jesus's ability to discern others' thoughts and hearts. The JST narrators will frequently give definitions or explanations in order to reveal the meaning or sense of what is being talked about and will include narrative transitions between segments of the story to aid its flow and understanding. So, although no single one of these

tendencies is able to answer the question of why Joseph Smith changed what he did in the JST, together they show the boldness and originality of the JST in introducing new characters and settings, particularly into dialogue with Jesus (perhaps meant to restore original settings). As such, the JST goes far beyond modernization, although these new contexts can help explicate why Jesus said what he did. Through these changes, we see subtle theological refinements and explanations as the JST tries to provide a clearer understanding of the gospel in the Gospels.

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