

LDS Perspectives Podcast

Episode 55: Joseph Smith's Use of Adam Clarke's Commentary (Released September 27, 2017)

*This is not a verbatim transcript.
Some grammar and wording has been modified for clarity.*

Laura Hales: This is Laura Harris Hales, and I'm here today with Thomas Wayment, celebrating the first anniversary of the LDS Perspectives Podcast, with part 2 of a special double episode exploring Joseph Smith's Bible translation project

Thomas A. Wayment is a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. He completed a PhD in New Testament studies at Claremont Graduate University and has published extensively on New Testament topics. He is the author, co-author, or editor of many published articles and several books, and currently serves as the publications director of the Religious Studies Center at BYU, and as editor of the *Religious Educator*.

When I started looking for experts to address this topic, your name kept coming up. Is that flattering?

Thomas Wayment: A little bit intimidating. It's a difficult topic; one that I don't think I have a lot of answers for, but I've been working on for a long time.

Laura Hales: When and how did you become interested in Joseph Smith's Bible translation project?

Thomas Wayment: I would say for me, it's almost always been a peripheral interest. I was doing New Testament text stuff early on, and I just on a whim thought, "Hey, I ought to compare the textual variance to the Joseph Smith Translation and see how it stacks up against that."

I did an early publication on the results of that. My discovery was that the Joseph Smith Translation really follows scribal emendation of the text — that it doesn't seem to agree with any particular text family; it doesn't seem to agree with any particular theological type of variance. It really agrees with scribes trying to massage and clarify the text — provide the

subject, clarify the verb, fix the tense, direct objects, and things like that. I published that a number of years ago, and I left it there for long time.

Laura Hales: You've left me behind already. Let's bring this back to Earth for neophytes or beginners. What do you mean by scribal school?

Thomas Wayment: When we have the New Testament text, there are literally hundreds of thousands of changes to the text. And what scribes will come in and do is when it says, "And we believe in Jesus," they'll add "Christ" or "We have faith in Him." They'll clarify who the "Him" is. They want you to know what exactly it was implying. And if you read Greek, it's fairly clear; you understand that. But in a translation, these things are missing.

Scribes like to fill out, add a little bit of detail, and add a little bit of nuance. I found a fairly strong degree of similarity between New Testament scribes who do that and what Joseph does to the text. He wants to clarify the tense of a word. He'll often offer a different translation of a word that's within the semantic range of that word. He wants to say, "Well, it's not really consolation; it's redemption here," and that could be a possible translation. Scribes do that a lot, too. So clarifying maybe was what I originally found. The JST attempts to clarify and make the Bible easier to read.

Laura Hales: Let me see if I get this correct. When you were a student, you didn't take what he did to the KJV and compare it to other translations. You took it right to the Greek and said, "Okay, how does this compare to what others were doing with the Greek?"

Thomas Wayment: I did. Potentially, as a believing Latter-day Saint, there was this possibility that it would isolate or identify certain changes to the text that had an ancient origin. I didn't find that. That wasn't a surprise, but there was always that, "Hey, maybe a certain number of variants here will start to emerge as the original text," and it didn't. But it very much engages the quality of the English of the King James Version. That's probably its most fundamental basic contribution.

Laura Hales: Can I hypothesize on something?

Thomas Wayment: Mm-hmm. (Affirmative.)

Laura Hales: So you were maybe going off the assumption that somehow, even though Joseph didn't know Greek, he was tapping into some supernatural way of opining a Greek root to what was there?

Thomas Wayment: Yeah. I had read the English studies on it. Bob Matthews had been kind of a guiding resource back then, along with Ken Jackson's work. They were saying things like, "It restores original text."

In my area of expertise, I thought, "Well, I can put that to the test a little bit." I mean, I can't make any type of blanket declaration, but I thought, "Here's one way to at least leverage that supposition." I wouldn't probably in print today say that the JST restores the original intent. It probably doesn't restore the original text, but it does restore meaning to that text.

Laura Hales: It's interesting. I was talking to a friend a few months ago, and I mentioned to her that I had started to read the New Revised Standard version of the Bible with my sons, just for something new with the beginning of the seminary year, because they were studying the New Testament. She said, "But then you don't get the Joseph Smith Translation."

That caused me to pause because it really hadn't bothered me that I would miss out on that, but to her, it was really important. I think different members take the Joseph Smith Translation more seriously as Restoration scripture than others, and I realized that I really hadn't valued it as maybe the member next to me on the pew. So when I was doing research for this podcast — and I knew I was going to interview you — I found one book and four articles that you had published on this topic. Did I miss any?

Thomas Wayment: No. I have some forthcoming things, but it sounds like you've come across all that's been published.

Laura Hales: Let's go over some of the research that you've published, okay?

Thomas Wayment: Yeah.

Laura Hales: In 2005, Deseret Book released a side-by-side comparison of the JST and the New Testament that you had compiled. What did you learn from the process of assembling that book?

Thomas Wayment: Functionally, the book is every single change that the prophet Joseph Smith made to the King James Bible placed alongside the King James translation, so you can readily see what he changed. That way, a reader has every single change he did, not just what we have in our footnotes.

The thing that's so remarkable about it is that the JST clearly changes over time. In Genesis, the process is very revelatory. Whole chapters are being added; major sections of verses are added into the text. You can tell something different is happening. He hits about Genesis 24 and that process appears to change. He shifts from Genesis 24, and he ends there and starts in Matthew 1. When he gets to Matthew 1, the changes become very minor. A word here, two words here, a small phrase here — and that will characterize the remainder of the JST. That's one of the big things I've found. Others had obviously noted that. It's not consistent in its approach over time. Strangely, we get our canonical sections from the early JST. The things that go in the Pearl of Great Price happened the very first year (and roughly a few months) of the JST process.

Laura Hales: Did that raise any questions that made you want to continue your research?

Thomas Wayment: Yeah. There were things that I saw happening. We worked with the marked Bible for a while. One of the publications that came out of that was while he working in the Bible, he was marking it with pencil. We don't exactly know who did the crossing out, but somebody took a pencil to his Bible and crossed out the majority of italicized words in the New Testament. They just simply, if you will, tried to remove them from the text. We sat down and said, "Oh, I wonder why this is happening," and then we started to correspond those to the changes that the prophet made to the Bible, and it showed something like that he was 70% more inclined to change an italicized word than any other word. It was very clear that someone in the room — probably Joseph — was suspicious of the quality of the italicized words in the New Testament. That was a small finding.

Laura Hales: Those italicized words were italicized because they were unsure of the translation, correct?

Thomas Wayment: Sure. That's particularly how the King James Version people promoted it and the 19th-century believers thought of them.

Laura Hales: You published in 2008 with Paul Lambert an article called "The Nature of the Pen and Pencil Markings in the New Testament of Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible." Was there anything else that stood out to you in this study?

Thomas Wayment: I started to be surprised — and this will lead to some of the things that I've been working on more recently — that it's almost as if by the time the prophet Joseph Smith gets to John 6, the beginning of John 7, you almost sense there's an exhaustion in the process. They're now into a little over a year and a half. He's spent infinitely longer than he did on the Book of Mormon translation, so he's been at this project a long time. The number of changes go down; the depth of what they do to the text diminishes greatly; and by the time you get to the minor prophets, it's pretty clear that he's moving through probably whole books in a single day. That was interesting to me. I didn't pursue it at the time, but I let it be there for a couple of years, wondering what was going on.

Laura Hales: It almost seems like he's losing interest with the project. That would be the behavior of someone who's like, "I want to be done with this."

Thomas Wayment: Right. We understand that Zion's march happens during this time and that they were already dealing with some significant problems in Missouri. We know there were other things going on in addition to possibly becoming tired or weary of the project.

Laura Hales: In a chapter from the forthcoming anthology, *Creating Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects and the Making of Mormonism*, you present further research into the origins of Joseph Smith's Bible translation. What have you discovered for that project?

Thomas Wayment: Perhaps it's good just to back up one step to answer that question, just to be clear to everybody listening out there. The Joseph Smith Translation starts at Genesis 1:1 and it goes through Genesis 24, where the prophet

and his scribes write out the entire text of the Bible. For reasons that we don't fully understand, he then shifts to the New Testament, and works through the entire New Testament. Then after Revelation 22, he comes back to Genesis 24 and goes all the way to Malachi. In the process, he produces a massive number of changes to Genesis; a lot of changes to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and very little to anything else.

In the process of doing some research on the theology of the JST, I've always wanted to ask the question, "What is the actual theology of the JST? What is it trying to do?" In the process of doing that, I uncovered some remarkable parallels to early Mormon statements and also to some resources that were external to the Bible — meaning, in some books at the time. One of the things that we quickly uncovered was that there were remarkable wording similarities to Adam Clarke's commentary on the Bible.

Adam Clarke is a Methodist preacher; he's kind of a polymath; he's an expert in languages. He produces a massive 6-volume commentary on the Old and New Testament. It's quite good for the time period. He goes through and deals with things like, "This is what the Hebrew word is; this is what it means." He'll even conjecture how the translation should be different. He's doing this all in the King James Version of the Bible. What I started to do after seeing these remarkable parallels to statements Clarke had made. I decided, "Well, why don't we take all of the JST changes and line them up against what Clarke said about those passages."

What we found, a student assistant (Hailey Wilson Lemmón) and I, we discovered that in about 200 to 300 — depending on how much change is being involved — parallels where Joseph Smith has the exact same change to a verse that Adam Clarke does. They're verbatim. Some of them are 5 to 6 words; some of them are 2 words; some of them are a single word. But in cases where that single word is fairly unique or different, it seemed pretty obvious that he's getting this from Adam Clarke. What really changed my world view here is now I'm looking at what appears obvious as a text person, that the prophet has used Adam Clarke. That in the process of doing the translation, he's either read it, has it in front of him, or he reads it at night.

We started to look back through the Joseph Smith History. There's a story of his brother-in-law presenting Joseph Smith with a copy of Adam Clarke. We do not know whose copy of Adam Clarke it is, but we do know that Nathaniel Lewis gives it to the prophet and says, "I want to use the Urim and Thummim. I want to translate some of the strange characters out of Adam Clarke's commentary." Joseph will clearly not give him the Urim and Thummim to do that, but we know he had it in his hands. Now looking at the text, we can say that a lot of the material that happens after Genesis 24. There are no parallels to Clarke between Genesis 1–Genesis 24. But when we start to get to Matthew, it's very clear that Adam Clarke has influenced the way he changes the Bible.

It was a big moment. That article comes out in the next year. We provide appendi and documentation for some of the major changes, and we try to grapple with what this might mean.

Laura Hales: In the historical record, there is reference to Joseph using the Urim and Thummim in the Bible translation project. Have you traced or lined up those references to the early translation process rather than the later translation process, when you suspect that he used Adam Clarke because of the similarity between the changes and the Adam Clarke commentary?

Thomas Wayment: Yeah. Let me help put some flesh on that skeleton. It's been commonly said — and there's a lot of history here that we're also engaging as we talk about these; there's things in the popular notion about what the JST is — that the prophet didn't use the Urim and Thummim in the JST. That will be a statement made quite a bit after the prophet's lifetime is ended.

A colleague, Mike McKay, uncovered a journal reference to a contemporary who has a statement recording the Prophet saying he used the Urim and Thummim. So now we have two competing statements: the Urim and Thummim *was* used (and Joseph actually says — and I'm paraphrasing here — that "I saw the entire Bible, and it laid before me," and he talks about it in those terms). Then you have later people who came into the process and said, "No, the Prophet didn't use the Urim and Thummim."

In the process of doing this research, what we found, if we were to think about the JST in the way I've described it, is that it's very revelatory in

Genesis 1– 24. That will produce our book of Moses. It has long passages that have no Bible parallels at all. It mentions Enoch, but that’s really the only parallel. Then these are whole new stories of Enoch. He’s not, if you will, changing Genesis. He’s adding whole new things he’s seen or felt. However, the revelation works for him. When we get to Matthew, it’s deliberative; it’s careful. He’s crossing out words in his Bible. He writes one thing on the manuscript, then has the scribe cross that out. It’s very clearly ponderous.

When we think about that, I think what I’m comfortable saying today is that he likely used the Urim and Thummim for Genesis. He stopped at Genesis 24 or thereabouts, and then by the time he comes to Matthew, he’s using the best books. I think he’s always been fairly honest about that. He talks about: “Seek ye out learning from the best books,” and Adam Clarke is literally, of his day, one of the top two, three, or four commentaries out there. It’s still quite good. He’s saying, “I went to these sources, I looked at them, I deliberated with those, and I made changes to the Bible based on what they said,” which is a very natural human process.

I’m hesitant to say one part of the JST is revelatory, and one is not. That would be too simplistic. But I would say that Genesis is very revelatory, and that there are revelations like Matthew 24 in the other part as well.

Laura Hales: Do you think that your research helps us know how Joseph Smith approached the question of the quality of the King James Version translation that he was using in 1830?

Thomas Wayment: I do. That’s again a question that has a lot of history that’s going to be difficult for English speakers of the Bible, because we think in terms of absolutes with the King James Version. What the listener, I think, would want to consider is this fact: that by changing the Bible, Joseph was alerting us that there were problems with the translation. The Joseph Smith Translation at its most fundamental level is a recognition that the KJV Bible that we use is not sufficient. He’s going to make changes at the JST level. He’s going to continue into Nauvoo changing the Bible and making statements about the quality of the translation.

For us to subsequently say that now that translation is pristine, perfect, and we lose something if we don’t use it, I think misses the idea that it was

defective. There were problems with it. He goes through a period in the Gospels where he removes many of the “ye’s,” “thee’s,” and “thou’s.” He’s using modern pronouns. Then later in the epistles, he starts using “thee” and “thou” where they have “you.” So there’s this tension in the JST of Joseph trying to say, “The translation isn’t quite good enough; let me see what I can bring to it as a prophet.”

I would hope that the modern reader would realize in picking up a modern translation of the Bible, like the NRSV or other good translations, that a lot of what the prophet did in Matthew and following — apart from the revelatory sections — are accomplished by modern translations that simply try to convey the English more clearly to the modern reader.

Laura Hales: How do you believe Joseph and his associates used the term “translate”?

Thomas Wayment: That’s a fun notion to me. It’s the way he describes it. He, on multiple occasions, referred to it as a translation. I think, as a believer, I look at this question: “Why would Joseph call it a translation — not a revision, not a revelation, and whatnot?” I think that for Joseph, anything that came through inspiration to him, when it’s dealing with text, he saw his role as translation — to translate meaning.

Today we’re so inclined to think Greek into English, that’s translation. I think when he adds meaning to a passage — and what’s so fascinating in this — he will revisit the book of Genesis, opening chapters, multiple times in his life. He does, it appears, in portions in the Book of Mormon. It appears very clearly in portions of the Doctrine & Covenants. He’ll revise it in the books of Moses and Abraham. He continually is coming back and no two of them are the same. Those are almost all characterized by revelation or translation.

For me, I think if Joseph watched me in my office translate Greek into English, he would say, “No, no, no — that’s not translation. You have to add the Spirit; you have to pray about it.” I would watch him do it, and I’d say, “No, no, you need a dictionary.” So we’re these two parts of the same conversation who emphasize different portions of that word.

Laura Hales: In one of your articles — I can’t remember which one — you included a quote from Brigham Young where he said, “If Joseph were to translate the

Bible 40,000 times, he would have 40,000 different translations.” Do you recall that?

Thomas Wayment: I do.

Laura Hales: I think that’s telling.

Thomas Wayment: I think for Latter-day Saints, it’s comforting. I think it’s so easy to seize on the fact that if he had the 116 pages, he would translate them differently and that that would somehow produce the idea that Joseph didn’t really translate it. I’ve done a lot of translation in my life. No two of my translations are the same, because you see things in your own rendering of these words that were nuanced differently the next time you see it.

I personally believe if he had the JST to read over again and look at carefully, I think it would be a different text again. I think there would be new things he would see. I think that’s part of prophetic translation. I can mechanically translate, but what all readers know is computers don’t translate well. Translation is not mechanics; it’s not one word for one word. It’s intent: there’s emotion, there’s tone, there’s tense — there’s all kinds of different factors that you try to render. I think he brings a lot to it. I wish we engaged Bible that deeply. I wish we weren’t offended by the difference in the translations, and I wish we asked this question: “Here’s someone really deeply diving into a text saying ‘What does it mean?’ and offering his best translation of that.”

Laura Hales: Or maybe with three different renderings, each brings a little part of the meaning so don’t be afraid of different meanings.

Thomas Wayment: Yeah. I believe that’s true.

Laura Hales: I think members — some members — have struggled with the JST, wondering exactly what to do with it. Some have revered it as nearly canonical, when most of it isn’t or hasn’t received that endorsement. Some feel that Joseph was maybe commanded to translate the Bible mainly for his own study, even though the D & C clearly says it was done for different reasons or at least commanded —

Thomas Wayment: Mm-hmm. (Affirmative.)

Laura Hales: — for different reasons. From your research, what conclusions have you come to regarding the purpose of the Joseph Smith Translation?

Thomas Wayment: I would say that represents some of the best research being done out there. There are a number of top researchers who are asking the very question that you've asked. It's not new. We're not unaware that that's an important thing to be asking. But maybe instead of answering, I can point out a couple of factors.

In writing a history of Mormonism, I would say — and I want to be careful here, because there are such good works out there already — that no one has fully engaged the role of the Joseph Smith Translation in the beginning of Mormonism. It's simply a passing phase that he goes through. However, it's the longest translation project. He spends three years on it. It's longer, meaning it produces more text or covers more text than any other translation. I think if we're going to ask the question, "What role should it play in Mormonism?" I think we need to place it in the period of Mormon beginnings, when identity is beginning to be shaped.

I think we have to realize how consequential that period is in producing the Doctrine and Covenants. Something like two-thirds of the Doctrine and Covenants comes out during the process of the Joseph Smith translation. I think we have to also engage the notion that the Prophet sought to canonize portions of it. I don't know that he would have canonized all of that; I can't predict that. Now fast-forward to the modern era, and the Latter-day Saint is faced with canonized portions of the JST that are in the Pearl of Great Price. They have footnotes that aren't canonical, but they're in our Bible. Then we also have an appendix at the back that has the better sections.

I think the best thing that I could say for myself or others using it is it's a living text. It tells you that the Bible is, if you will, not written in stone, but it's living and it's subject to revision. I think in the future, if the church were to produce a new translation, and it moved past that, I think Mormons should say, "Hey, that's okay. The JST had always taught us

that this is a Bible that's subject to the words of the prophet." That's the way I think it functions in Mormonism, and for me, at least, that makes sense of what happened historically.

Laura Hales: Thank you, Thom, for visiting with us today. We appreciate you taking time out of your day.

Thomas Wayment: Thanks, Laura. Good to see you again.