

INTRODUCTION

On July 15, 1851, Elder Franklin D. Richards of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published a short notice in the Church's European newspaper, *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, announcing the publication of "a new work which will soon be ready for sale." This work was expected to be "a source of much instruction and edification to many thousands of the Saints." The name Elder Richards gave this new volume was the Pearl of Great Price, taking his inspiration from Jesus's parable in Matthew 13:45–46.

Writing from Liverpool, England, Elder Richards informed readers in the preface to the first edition of the Pearl of Great Price that he felt the volume was necessary because of "repeated solicitations of several friends of the publisher, who are desirous to be put in possession of the very important articles contained therein." By compiling this collection of "revelations, translations, and narrations" of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Elder Richards hoped that members of the Church would "increase their ability to maintain and to defend the holy faith" by becoming better informed of the "precious truths" revealed by the Prophet. "It would," he assured, "commend itself to all careful students of the scriptures." The content selected by Elder Richards for this new compendium included:

- Extracts from the book of Genesis and the Gospel of Matthew from Joseph Smith's inspired translation or revision of the King James Bible (known today among Latter-day Saints as the Joseph Smith Translation)
- The book of Abraham, an inspired translation of some Egyptian papyri acquired by the Prophet in the summer of 1835
- Extracts from the Prophet's personal history composed in the summer of 1838 and serialized in Church newspapers both in North America and Europe beginning in 1842
- Extracts from the Doctrine and Covenants, one of the three canonical books of the Church at the time (along with the Bible and the Book of Mormon)

- An extract from an 1842 account of Joseph Smith’s history describing the foundational beliefs of the Church
- A poem composed by Elder John Jaques titled “Truth”

The Pearl of Great Price was immensely valued by the Saints in Great Britain, who then had convenient access to some of Joseph Smith’s most impactful revelations and historical writings. But it was not long until Elder Richards’s pamphlet, which was intended primarily for British Latter-day Saints far removed from the bulwark of Zion in Utah, grew beyond its initial audience. By the end of the decade, the Pearl of Great Price was being cited in general conferences in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, and it was eventually realized that a second edition would be necessary to satisfy increasing demand. Accordingly, in 1878 Elder Orson Pratt of the Quorum of the Twelve—with the assistance of Elder Richards and fellow Apostles Elders Albert Carrington, Brigham Young Jr., and George Q. Cannon—produced a second edition of the Pearl of Great Price that made significant revisions in both content and structure to the first edition while remaining true to the book’s original intent. Two years later on Sunday, October 10, 1880—the fifth day of the Fiftieth Annual General Conference of the Church—President Cannon, First Counselor in the First Presidency, proposed before the assembled body of Saints that the Pearl of Great Price be sustained as the Church’s fourth book of scripture and be “binding upon us as a people and a Church.” The proposal was sustained unanimously.

After its canonization, the Pearl of Great Price underwent three more major editions: one produced in 1902 under the supervision of James E. Talmage, another in 1921 under the supervision of Elder Talmage and other members of the Quorum of the Twelve, and a third in 1981 (revised in 2013), which is the current official edition of the Church. The 1902 edition prepared by Elder Talmage standardized the contents of the Pearl of Great Price: the book of Moses, the book of Abraham, the “Writings of Joseph Smith” (later Joseph Smith—Matthew and Joseph Smith—History), and the Articles of Faith. Two revelations added to the Pearl of Great Price on April 3, 1976, were moved a few years later in 1979 to the Doctrine and Covenants, becoming sections 137 and 138 of that book. Otherwise, the content of the Pearl of Great Price (including its versification), known and cherished by Latter-day Saints today, has remained effectively the same for over one hundred years.

Although diminutive in size, the Pearl of Great Price has had a profound impact on the faith of the Latter-day Saints. It is a book of scripture that spans dispensations. It reveals the grand scope of Creation as it unfolded under the direction of God and His Only Begotten; it reaches far back into the history of God’s interactions with His children, preserving heretofore unknown accounts from the lives of Adam, Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses; it narrates the calling of Joseph Smith as prophet, seer, and revelator in modern

times; it provides clear warnings about the signs and tribulations the Saints should expect as the world prepares to receive the Son of Man in His glory; and it provides a useful outline of the Saints' fundamental principles of faith. It is a book that encompasses the beginning and the end, situating its readers in a worldview that predates humanity and extends well beyond the confines of this earth.

In harmony with the Lord's commandment to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118), over the course of many decades Latter-day Saint scholars have probed the contents of the Pearl of Great Price with the tools of scholarship. Successive generations of committed disciple-scholars who have closely studied the Pearl of Great Price have reaped a bountiful harvest, offering many important insights that greatly enhance appreciation for this remarkable text. Readers of the Pearl of Great Price today have access to a treasure trove of academic resources that make studying the text relatively easy and immensely rewarding.

To help facilitate awareness of these resources and to provide a sense of how they might be usefully synthesized to increase faith and understanding, the creation of a study edition of the Pearl of Great Price felt both appropriate and needful. The offering presented here, *The Pearl of Great Price: A Study Edition for Latter-day Saints*, hopes to satisfy the counsel given in Doctrine and Covenants 88:118 and to help both new and longtime members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints magnify their study of this sacred text.

The idea for this study edition had its genesis with the work of Book of Mormon Central, a nonprofit research foundation dedicated to making the Book of Mormon accessible, comprehensible, and defensible to the entire world. In its early years, Book of Mormon Central focused exclusively on making academic resources on the Book of Mormon accessible to a growing digital audience of curious and sometimes troubled Latter-day Saints who were encountering new information about their faith at a seemingly break-neck speed. In 2019, Book of Mormon Central launched Pearl of Great Price Central—the first of several planned interconnected websites in a larger digital ecosystem—that sought to do for the Pearl of Great Price what it had already done for the Book of Mormon. By the end of 2020, Pearl of Great Price Central had produced dozens of short, informative articles on the individual books of the Pearl of Great Price, extensive bibliographies and archival resources, YouTube videos and podcasts, an online study edition of the book of Abraham, and a digital book on Joseph Smith's First Vision. With these and other academic resources in mind (and, as mentioned above, with a desire to raise the Saints' engagement with the text), research associates and members of the executive board of Book of Mormon Central felt a study edition of the Pearl of Great Price would be an excellent medium for delivering this content to a broad general audience.

Although this study edition endeavors to be informative and offer grounded readings of the text, it does not presume to offer the final say on how to understand or otherwise interpret the individual books of the Pearl of Great Price. Furthermore, the commentary offered herein has been deliberately kept short and focused so as not to draw readers' attention away from what matters most: the inspired scriptural text. As is true with any commentary, there is much that had to be left unsaid and many avenues of thought that had to remain unexplored out of practical necessity. For example, the matter of how to harmonize the scriptural accounts of Creation or the historical lives of Adam and Eve with the findings of modern science has been left alone for the simple reason that the proper approach to these important topics requires the laying of more scholarly and exegetical groundwork than could be provided in the commentary offered herein. Similarly, because it is the prerogative of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to determine doctrine for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, this study edition has largely avoided providing doctrinal explication on the text. Because devotional and pastoral application of scriptural teaching is so deeply personalized to the needs of the individual, such has also been left alone in this study edition. The focus of the commentary provided in this study edition is, consequently, predominantly historical, linguistic, text-critical, structural, and theological—that is, this edition attempts to understand the broader significance of the text's religious message. Both a general bibliography for the study edition as a whole and specific bibliographies for each scriptural book in the text have been provided, and readers are encouraged to consult the sources contained therein as well as the resources available online at pearlofgreatpricecentral.org for additional scholarly insight.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The text underlying this study edition of the Pearl of Great Price is the current (2013) official edition published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (With the kind permission of the Church, Book of Mormon Central has been granted a license to use the current official edition of the scriptures in its study material.) To simplify readability, this study edition has repunctuated and reformatted the 2013 text with, for example, new headings to subdivide the text into meaningful narrative units. Otherwise, it remains unchanged from the 2013 text. Significant or meaningful textual variants from past editions are noted and discussed in the commentary.