

Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A Historical Overview

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Moses the ancient lawgiver was given prophetic direction: "And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shalt write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee; and they shall be had again among the children of men—among as many as shall believe" (Moses 1:41). Through the opening of the heavens in modern times, Joseph Smith, Junior, was called as a prophet, a seer, a revelator, and a modern lawgiver. In addition, he was commissioned as a translator, the means whereby the mind and word of God were made known to a generation in the midst of spiritual calamity. (See D&C 1:17.) To the young prophet-leader the Lord explained: "This generation shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:10).

PREPARATION FOR THE NEW BIBLE TRANSLATION

A number of events seem to have been critical in the preparation of Joseph Smith for his labor as Bible translator. As early as 1820 young Joseph recognized that salvation was not to be found within the covers of the Bible alone; confusion and uncertainty were the obvious results of unilluminated minds and undirected study, even when the object of study was the Holy Bible. Seeking for both personal fulfillment and the one system of religious practice which would lead him back to the divine presence, Joseph Smith discovered that not all of the answers were to be found within the Bible.

A further lesson was taught to the seventeen-year-old Prophet by the angel Moroni in the year 1823. Moroni quoted numerous passages of scripture to Joseph, particularly Malachi 4, though "with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles" (JS-H 1:36). Whether Moroni gave detailed instructions concerning specific passages of scripture, or whether he taught Joseph how to interpret biblical verses, is unknown. The young prophet did learn, however, that the King James Version of the Bible was not the only authorized translation of the scriptures.

Joseph Smith had learned early in his translation of the Book of Mormon that theological darkness and spiritual stumblings in the Judeo-Christian world were due in large measure to a wilful tampering with some of the earliest Bible texts. Approximately six hundred years before Christ's coming, Nephi prophesied of a time when the Bible—identified as a record which proceeded out of the mouth of a Jew (1 Nephi 13:23)—would fall into the hands of designing individuals who would "take away" or "keep back" plain and precious truths, and many covenants of the Lord. As a result of such corruption, "an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them." (1 Nephi 13:26-34.) Joseph Smith further became aware of the fact (through Nephi's prophetic vision) that through the restoration things would be made known once again to those willing to receive them. (1 Nephi 13:35-40.) The Prophet was to observe many years later: "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors." 1

While still engaged in the translation of the Book of Mormon (probably in 3 Nephi), Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, on 15 May 1829, "went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins," which was mentioned in the Nephite record (JS-H 1:68). John the Baptist appeared and delivered the keys and powers associated with the Aaronic Priesthood, and gave instructions concerning the baptism and priesthood ordination of Joseph and Oliver. The Prophet Joseph remarked that immediately upon coming up out of the waters of baptism both men enjoyed a rich endowment of the Holy Ghost, and each had the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Joseph further explained: "Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of" (JS-H 1:74; emphasis added). No doubt such spiritual understanding would have given to the Prophet not only the ability to grasp "true meaning and intention," but also the divine perspective to recognize and correct faulty biblical texts.

On 8 October 1829 Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery purchased a large pulpit-style edition of the King James Bible (containing the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha) from E. B. Grandin in Palmyra, New York, for \$3.75. The Bible was printed in 1828 by the H. and E. Phinney Company at Cooperstown, New York. It was this Bible which was used in the translation.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSLATION

There was nothing particularly unusual about a new translation of the Bible in the 1830s. Religious revivalism reached a peak in the New York area in the early nineteenth century, and with it came a heightened awareness of the need for the Bible as a divine standard for living. In fact, New England was not the only section of the country which manifested an intense interest at this time in a study and scrutiny of the biblical record; from 1777 to 1833 more than five hundred separate editions of the Bible (or parts thereof) were published in America. Many of these represented new translations or "modern translations," often with an attempt to prepare paraphrased editions or alternate readings based upon comparisons with Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. 2

Joseph Smith's translation of the scriptures was, however, highly unusual. The Prophet had no formal training in ancient languages until some years later, when he did study Hebrew with a number of the leaders of the Church. Nor did he work with manuscripts written in the biblical languages in undertaking his study. What, then, was the nature of this "translation," and how was it effected? Many in our own day, including some Latter-day Saints, are eager to point out that Joseph's work with the Bible was not a translation per se, but rather represented something of a rewording or a biblical targum or midrash. We will deal more specifically with the nature of the translation at the end of this presentation. For the present, however, it is essential that we recognize that Joseph Smith himself called the labor a translation, the members referred to the labor as a translation, and (perhaps most important) the Lord himself made frequent reference to his servant's work as a translation. As indicated earlier, the Prophet was divinely called and appointed as a "seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church" (D&C 107:92).

Joseph's mission as translator was not terminated when he had completed the Book of Mormon. In his serious study of the Bible, he sought to harmonize himself with the Spirit of God (and surely with the mind and intentions of the ancient writers) so as to recognize and correct faulty translations, as well as deficient or ambiguous passages of the Bible which had suffered the long and painful process of transmission of texts. In one sense, Joseph Smith was translating the Bible in attempting to interpret it by revelation, to explain it by the use of clearer terms or a different style of language. In another sense, Joseph was translating the Bible inasmuch as he was restoring in the English language ideas and events and sayings which were originally recorded in Hebrew or Greek. The Prophet translated the King James Bible by the same means he translated the Book of Mormon—through revelation. His knowledge of Hebrew or Greek or his acquaintance with ancient documents was no more essential in making the JST than a previous knowledge of Reformed Egyptian or an access to more primitive Nephite records was essential to the translation of the Book of Mormon. Not infrequently the Lord chooses and calls the unlearned, the "weak things of the world," to bring about his purposes (see 2 Nephi 27:15-20).

June of 1830 is the earliest date of translation given in any of the Prophet's records. From his own journal history we have the following entry: "I will say . . . that amid all the trials and tribulations we had to wade through, the Lord, who well knew our infantile and delicate situation, vouchsafed for us a supply of strength, and granted us 'line upon line of knowledge—here a little and there a little,' of which the following was a precious morsel." 3 Joseph then recorded some "selections from the book of Moses" (Moses 1), containing "the words of God, which he spake unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain." The translation of the book of Genesis continued for many months, and major doctrinal truths were revealed concerning premortal existence, the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. In December of 1830 the following is contained in the Prophet's journal:

It may be well to observe here, that the Lord greatly encouraged and strengthened the faith of His little flock, which had embraced the fulness of the everlasting Gospel, as revealed to them in the Book of Mormon, by giving some more extended information upon the Scriptures, a translation of which had already commenced. Much conjecture and conversation frequently occurred among the Saints, concerning the books mentioned, and referred to, in various places in the Old and New Testaments, which were now nowhere to be found. The common remark was, "They are lost books"; but it seems the Apostolic Church had some of these writings, as Jude mentions or quotes the Prophecy of Enoch, the seventh from Adam. To the joy of the little flock . . . did the Lord reveal the following doings of olden times, from the prophecy of Enoch. 4

The Prophet then recorded his inspired translation of Genesis 7 (also known to us as Moses 7), containing many of the remarkable details of the ministry and eventual translation of Enoch and his city.

Work on the Old Testament continued until 7 March 1831. On that date, Joseph Smith received the revelation known to us as Doctrine and Covenants 45, in which he was told the following: "And now, behold, I say unto you, it shall not be given unto you to know any further concerning this chapter [the Savior has been speaking at length concerning the signs incident to his second coming], until the New Testament be translated, and in it all these things shall be made known; Wherefore I give unto you that ye may now translate it, that ye may be prepared for the things to come. For verily I say unto you, that great things await you." (D&C 45:60-62.) The manuscript of the work with the first chapter of Matthew

is dated 8 March 1831. To that point a translation of the Old Testament had progressed through Genesis 19:35. 5

For a period of about one month, work with Matthew and Genesis was undertaken concurrently, but by early April the Old Testament was put aside temporarily in order that the New Testament might receive full attention. During the months that followed, Joseph the Prophet continued the translation of the New Testament, and labored as time would permit. As was so often the case, the problems associated with a growing church, as well as providing the necessities of life for his own family, precluded more frequent work with the Bible. At this point (by 7 April) the translators had progressed through Genesis 24:42a and Matthew 9:2. 6

Worthy of note at this point is the fact that major revelations (now recorded in our Doctrine and Covenants) were being received concurrently with the translation of the Bible; in fact, it is critical to recognize that such sections as 76 (the vision of the glories), 77 (insights into the Revelation of John), 91 (information concerning the Old Testament Apocrypha), and 132 (eternal and plural marriage) were received as a direct outgrowth of the Prophet's work of Bible translation. In addition, matters in the Doctrine and Covenants pertaining to the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement (e.g., D&C 29) were matters also being revealed through the inspired translation of Genesis (e.g., Moses 2-6).

In December 1830 the translation of the Bible revealed many great things pertaining to the ancient city of Enoch, the scriptural prototype for the people of God in all ages. Joseph learned that the Lord "called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18). In February of 1831—only two months later—the Lord began to make known through revelation the plan by which his people in the latter days could establish a society of the pure in heart, and could build economic and spiritual equality in a modern Zion society (see D&C 42). In summary, one Latter-day Saint writer has explained:

The Prophet's work with the Bible was a primary source for much of the doctrinal content and the instructional information of the D&C. Consequently, one could not adequately understand either the background or the content of those parts of the D&C without an acquaintance with the history and content of the JST. The two volumes, when placed in tandem, enable the student to gain a clearer picture of how the gospel was restored in this dispensation, and gives the reader an insight as to how divine revelation comes. 7

Early in 1833 the Mormon leader wrote: "I completed the translation and review of the New Testament, on the 2nd of February, 1833, and sealed it up." 8 At this point, work with the Old Testament resumed. By 8 March 1833 the translators had moved through the Old Testament as far as the Prophets (D&C 90:13). On the very next day, 9 March, Joseph inquired of God concerning the Apocrypha and received what is now Doctrine and Covenants 91. Joseph Smith's journal entry for 2 July 1833 is as follows: "We are exceedingly fatigued, owing to a great press of business. We this day finished the translating of the Scriptures, for which we returned gratitude to our Heavenly Father." 9

The Work of Joseph Smith's Scribes

Joseph the Prophet was assisted in his translation of the Bible by a number of persons who served as scribes. It may be that his wife, Emma Smith, labored for a short time as scribe. In a revelation given to Emma in July of 1830 she was instructed: "And thou shalt go with him at the time of his going, and be unto him for a scribe, while there is no one to be a scribe for him, that I may send my servant, Oliver Cowdery, whithersoever I will" D&C 25:6; emphasis added). The Book of Mormon had been published in March of 1830, and so this directive could not have had reference to further work with the Nephite record. Oliver Cowdery would serve for a period of time in the work of translation, but would have his scribal activities interrupted by a call to serve on a preaching mission (see D&C 28, 32). John Whitmer also worked in the role of scribe for a time. He later was given an assignment to assist the Prophet in transcribing and recopying the Bible translation (see D&C 47:1). The bulk of the scribal activity was accomplished by Sidney Rigdon. Sidney entered the Church in Ohio and joined Joseph Smith and the Saints in New York in December of 1830. He became involved immediately in the work with the Bible, and labored consistently until the formal work of translation ceased in July of 1833.

The work of the scribe seems to have consisted in writing on sheets of paper that which was dictated by Joseph Smith. Joseph would read directly from the Bible and through the spirit of inspiration note the need for a revision of a text. An examination of the manuscripts reveals different approaches or methods to the work of translation. For example, the biblical text is written out in full (longhand) on the manuscripts for Genesis 1-24 and Matthew 1-John 5. A shorter method was also employed, whereby only the passages to be revised were noted by the scribe on the manuscript pages. Of equal importance in the process of translation was Joseph's marking of the large Bible. Before or after many of the passages to be altered, one may note a check or an X or some other symbol. Additional marks in the Bible (e.g., dots, slanted lines, circled words, or lined-out words) were discovered to be essential (in conjunction with the manuscripts) in discerning exactly what Joseph Smith intended with regard to particular passages. 10

We should note at this point that the Prophet's translation of the Bible was made up of four documents: two Old Testament manuscripts and two New Testament manuscripts. A total of 464 manuscript pages constitute the entire JST. For a detailed study of the history, development, and transmission of the JST manuscripts, one should consult Robert J. Matthews's book "A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary (1975,) the standard and definitive work on the subject.

THE NEW TRANSLATION: 1833-1844

The Prophet's interest or involvement did not cease when he had made his way through the King James Bible in July of 1833. Joseph spent his remaining years (until the time of his death in 1844) reviewing and revising the manuscripts—seeking to find appropriate words to convey what he had come to know by revelation. Robert Matthews has written concerning revisions in the original manuscripts:

In the face of the evidence it can hardly be maintained that the exact words were given to the Prophet in the process of a revelatory experience. Exact words may have been given to the mind of the Prophet on occasion, but the manuscript evidence suggests that generally he was obliged to formulate the words himself to convey the message he desired. Consequently, he might later have observed that sometimes

the words were not entirely satisfactory in the initial writings. They may have conveyed too much or too little. Or they may have been too specific or too vague, or even ambiguous. Or the words may have implied meanings not intended. Thus through (1) an error of recording, (2) an increase of knowledge, or (3) an inadequate selection of words, any passage of the New Translation might be subject to later revision. 11

Some of the revisions were written directly on the original manuscripts, while others were separate sheets of paper pinned to the original manuscripts.

Portions of the JST were published before the martyrdom of the Prophet, 12 although the entire translation was not made available until 1867, when the RLDS Church printed the first edition of the JST. Some of the New Translation was available through the Evening and Morning Star in Independence, Missouri (1832-33). In the Lectures on Faith, a collection of seven theological lectures delivered by the Prophet to the School of the Prophets in Kirtland (1834-35), Joseph quoted a number of scriptural passages according to the New Translation. The Lectures on Faith was contained in the first edition (1835) of the Doctrine and Covenants. In addition, what is now known as Joseph Smith-Matthew (the JST of Matthew 24) was published sometime between 1832 and 1837, while the visions of Moses (Moses 1) was published in the Times and Seasons in 1843.

One thing is extremely clear regarding the JST during Joseph Smith's lifetime: the Prophet had every intention of publishing the entire translation, and of making the valuable truths contained therein accessible to the Latter-day Saints. Inasmuch as a person is saved no faster than he gains knowledge, 13 Joseph the Prophet was eager to make known to the people the marvelous insights that had come to him through his work with the Bible. Both the Prophet and the people viewed the labor of translation and certainly the product as matters of profound gravity. In a revelation given to Frederick G. Williams in January of 1834 the Lord explained: "Now I say unto you, my servant Joseph Smith Jr. is called to do a great work and hath need that he may do the work of translation for the salvation of souls." 14 Thus on numerous occasions throughout the closing years of Joseph Smith's ministry the Prophet himself and the Twelve made frequent requests of the Saints for financial assistance, in order that Joseph might "devote himself exclusively to those things which relate to the spiritualities of the Church," one thing in particular being the New Translation. 15

In July of 1840 the First Presidency and the Twelve appointed two men to go throughout the Church to seek donations and offerings for the printing of various Church books, including the JST. An editorial in the Times and Seasons noted: "The authorities of the church here, having taken this subject into consideration, and viewing the importance of Publishing a Hymn Book, and a more extensive quantity of the Books of Mormon, and also the necessity of Publishing the new translation of the scriptures, which has so long been desired by the Saints; have appointed and authorized Samuel Bent and Geo. W. Harris, as traveling agents, to make contracts and receive monies &c. for the accomplishment of this glorious work." 16 On 19 January 1841 the Lord gave specific directions and promises to William Law, as now contained in section 124 of the Doctrine and Covenants: "If he will do my will let him from henceforth hearken to the counsel of my servant Joseph, and with his interest support the cause of the poor, and publish the new translation of my holy word unto the inhabitants of the earth. And if he will do this I will bless him with a multiplicity of blessings, that he shall not be forsaken, nor his seed be found begging

bread." (D&C 124:89-90; emphasis added.) The pleadings of the leaders of the Church in this regard were not heeded, and the Prophet Joseph Smith was murdered before the JST was printed in full.

The question of the "completeness" of the JST is an important one. In short, did Joseph Smith actually complete his work with the Bible? In one sense the Prophet completed his task in that he moved from Genesis to Revelation—that is, made his way through the King James Version of the Bible. As we noted earlier, Joseph recorded in his journal for 2 July 1833: "We this day finished the translating of the Scriptures, for which we returned gratitude to our Heavenly Father." 17 If, however, we are asking whether Joseph Smith made every change in the King James Version that could have been made, we are dealing with another matter entirely, so far as completeness is concerned.

One of the strongest evidences of the incomplete status of the JST is to be found in Joseph Smith's sermons from 1833 to 1844. On numerous occasions the Prophet clarified and corrected biblical passages, which alterations were not reflected in his earlier inspired translation of the scriptures. For example, the second verse of the King James Bible describes the state of things in the morning of creation: "And the earth was without form, and void" (Genesis 1:2). The JST of this verse is exactly the same as the KJV. In a sermon delivered on 5 January 1841 in Nauvoo, however, Joseph Smith taught that the words "without form and void" should be translated "empty and desolate." 18 In his epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul explained that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Corinthians 12:3). In an address to the Relief Society in the latter part of April in 1842 Joseph explained that no man can know that Jesus is the Lord but by the Spirit. 19 Just five months before his death the Prophet clarified another biblical passage which had received no alteration in the JST.

The question is frequently asked, "Can we not be saved without going through with all those ordinances?" I would answer, No, not the fulness of salvation. Jesus said, There are many mansions in my Father's house, and I will go and prepare a place for you. House here named should have been translated kingdom; and any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too. 20

Other examples could be given to further illustrate this point, 21 but the preceding seem to be sufficient to establish the ultimate incompleteness of the JST.

There is another very significant angle from which to view the matter of completeness of the JST: the Saints' and the world's readiness to receive all that might have been given through the Prophet Joseph Smith. According to a conversation held in the Salt Lake City School of the Prophets in 1868, "George A. Smith testified that he had heard Joseph say before his death that the new translation was not complete, that he had not been able to prepare it, and that it was probably providentially so." 22 President George Q. Cannon observed regarding the JST: "Joseph did not live to give to the world an authoritative publication of these translations. But the labor was its own reward, bringing in the performance a special blessing of broadened comprehension to the Prophet and a general blessing of enlightenment to the people through his subsequent teachings." President Cannon also noted: "We have heard Brigham Young state that the Prophet before his death had spoken to him about going through the translation of the scriptures again and perfecting it upon points of doctrine which the Lord had restrained him from giving in plainness and fulness at the time of which we write." 23

Joseph Fielding Smith wrote in 1914 that the Prophet "revised, as it is, a great deal more than the world can, or will, receive. In the 'translation' of the scriptures, he gave to the world all that the Lord would permit him to give, and as much as many of the members of the Church were able to receive. He therefore finished all that was required at his hands, or, that he was permitted to revise, up to July, 1833, when he discontinued his labors of revision." 24 Elder Bruce R. McConkie has also written: "In many passages all necessary changes were made; in others he was 'restrained' by the Spirit from giving the full and clear meaning. As with all revealed knowledge, the Lord was offering new truths to the world, 'line upon line, precept upon precept. . . .' Neither the world nor the saints generally were then or are now prepared for the fulness of Biblical knowledge." 25

THE JST: 1844 TO THE PRESENT

The Bernhisel Manuscript (1845)

After the death of the Prophet, the manuscripts of the New Translation were held by Joseph's widow, Emma, and thus eventually came into the possession of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. 26 Not long after the death of Joseph Smith, however, Dr. John M. Bernhisel, a trusted friend of the Prophet and Emma, was given an opportunity to examine the original manuscripts. In describing the occasion (in the spring of 1845) when he was able to obtain the manuscripts, L. John Nuttall has recorded:

Elder John M. Bernhisel called at the request of Pres. Taylor and explained concerning his manuscript copy of the New Translation of the Bible as taken from the Manuscript of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Bro. Bernhisel stated: "I had great desires to see the New Translation, but did not like to ask for it; but one evening, being at Bro. Joseph's house about a year after his death, Sister Emma to my surprise asked me if I would not like to see it. I answered, yes. She handed it to me the next day, and I kept it in my custody about three months. She told me it was not prepared for the press, as Joseph had designed to go through it again. I did not copy all that was translated leaving some few additions and changes that were made in some of the books. But so far as I did copy, I did so as correctly as I could do. The markings in my Bible correspond precisely with the markings in the Prophet Joseph's Bible, so that all the books corrected in his Bible so far as I now know are marked in my Bible: but as I stated, the additions are not all made in my Manuscript of those books that I did not copy." 27

The limitations of what has come to be known as the Bernhisel Manuscript are clear from John Bernhisel's own words: the copy made by him is incomplete, and thus inadequate in representing exactly what the Prophet Joseph Smith and his scribes recorded. The following are some errors that were committed unintentionally by Dr. Bernhisel: 28

1. In some cases, Bernhisel did not copy all of the corrections noted on the original manuscripts. Joseph altered 3,410 verses; Bernhisel noted only 1,463.
2. In a sense, Bernhisel's copy is interpretive, in the sense that he seems to be thinking for himself, rather than simply copying from Joseph's manuscripts.

3. Sometimes Bernhisel recorded more than he should have; that is, he anticipated corrections that were not there.

It is no doubt the case that had Bernhisel known in the spring of 1845 that the original manuscripts would be unavailable to the LDS Church for such a long period (about 125 years), he would have taken greater care to record everything that Joseph had recorded. His was intended as a personal copy, and was never envisioned by him as becoming an official document. John Bernhisel arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on 24 September 1848, and it is assumed that he brought his manuscript with him. A copy of this manuscript was made by direction of the First Presidency in 1879. The original Bernhisel Manuscript is now available in the Church Historian's Library in Salt Lake City. The Bernhisel Manuscript is significant as a historical relic, and its early date of 1845 does much toward verifying the present accuracy of the original JST manuscripts.

The Pearl of Great Price (1851)

In 1850 Elder Franklin D. Richards of the Council of the Twelve succeeded Elder Orson Pratt as president of the British Mission. One of the first things Richards noticed about the state of things in his mission was the paucity of Church reading material. Few of the Saints even had copies of the standard works. Knowing of the necessity of regular reading of good books (particularly the scriptures), President Richards compiled and published a mission tract, a booklet made up of a number of "gems" of doctrinal and historical worth, many of which were revelations and writings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. This booklet, which came to be known as the Pearl of Great Price, and which was first printed in 1851, contained such items as Joseph's translations of the Egyptian materials (Abraham's writings and the facsimiles); several revelations from the Doctrine and Covenants (e.g., all or part of sections 20, 27, 77, 87, and 107); excerpts from Joseph Smith's history of the Restoration (Joseph Smith-History); the Articles of Faith, as given in the Wentworth Letter; and a poem by John Jaques, a British convert, called "Oh Say, What Is Truth?" In addition, the first edition of the Pearl of Great Price contained the following items from Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible (as given in the table of contents of that first edition):

Extracts from the Prophecy of Enoch, containing also a Revelation of the Gospel unto our father Adam, after he was driven out from the Garden of Eden. Revealed to Joseph Smith, December, 1830 [Moses 6:43-7:69]

The words of God, which he spake unto Moses at the time when Moses was caught up into an exceeding high mountain, and he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence. Revealed to Joseph Smith, June 1830 [Moses 1:1-5:16, part; Moses 5:19-40; Moses 8:13-30]

An extract from a Translation of the Bible—being the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, commencing with the last verse of the twenty-third chapter. By the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, Joseph Smith [Joseph Smith-Matthew]

As can be seen, not all of the Moses material was contained in the 1851 Pearl of Great Price. President Richards seems to have been drawing upon the JST materials which we would identify as coming from Old Testament Manuscript 2 and New Testament Manuscript 1, as those materials would have been published earlier in the Evening and Morning Star and the Times and Seasons. 29

The First Printing of the JST 1867

At the April 1866 conference of the RLDS Church, plans were made to publish the Prophet Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible. A committee approached Emma Smith Bidamon on 3 May 1866 regarding the use of the original manuscripts, and Emma turned the manuscripts over to them. She wrote later to her son, Joseph III: "Now as it regards the Ms of the New Translation if you wish to keep them you may do so, but if not I would like to have them. I have often thought the reason our house did not burn down when it was so often on fire was because of them, and I still feel there is a sacredness attached to them." 30

An RLDS publication committee had the manuscript ready for publication by 1 July 1867, and the first shipment of the printed edition (five hundred copies) of the JST arrived in Plano, Illinois, on 7 December 1867. The book was called *The Holy Scriptures*. Subsequent editions followed, including a 1936 Teacher's Edition, the first edition to have the words *Inspired Version* as a part of the title of the book. In 1944 a *New Corrected Edition* was published, in which 352 corrections were made to the original (1867) edition. In 1970 a parallel-column edition of the JST was introduced in which the student could compare the King James Version with the JST at a glance. The 1974 printing of the *New Corrected Edition* is by far the most accurate printing to be released to date.

The 1867 edition of the JST is important not only because of its historical value (as the apparent realization of the Prophet's desires that the entire New Translation be accessible to all of the members), but also because it was the source upon which Orson Pratt drew in his production of the second (American) edition of the Pearl of Great Price in 1878. 31 Though it would have been marvelous for the Utah Church to have access to the original manuscripts much sooner in our history, we do owe a debt of gratitude to the RLDS Church for printing the Prophet Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible.

The Work of Robert J. Matthews

Interest in the JST or *Inspired Version* of the Bible continued in both the LDS and RLDS churches. Studies in the history of the JST, 32 comparisons between the King James Version and the Joseph Smith Translation, 33 and major textual analyses 34 were undertaken from 1940 to 1969. The spirit of inquiry and the desire to discover and probe the meaning and significance of Joseph Smith's work with the Bible prompted and directed theses, dissertations, articles, and books in this area for many years.

In the summer of 1944 Robert J. Matthews listened to a radio address over station KSL delivered by President Joseph Fielding Smith. 35 In that sermon President Smith quoted John 1:18, "No man hath seen God at any time," and indicated that the King James translation was incorrect. He then quoted from the Joseph Smith Translation: "And no man hath seen God at any time, except he hath borne record of the Son; for except it is through him no man can be saved" (JST John 1:19). 36 Robert

Matthews was at this time only eighteen years of age, and had never before heard of the JST. Suddenly, however, he was struck on this occasion with a deep sense of significance regarding what President Smith had just done, and at the same time gained a desire to know more about this phase of the Prophet's ministry.

Copies of the Joseph Smith Translation were scarce in his hometown, and even more scarce was any person who knew much about the work. Those who did know anything at all were negative towards it, indicating on the one hand that Joseph Smith had never finished the translation, and on the other that the printed edition was unreliable, inasmuch as it had been changed by the Reorganized Church. Finally Brother Matthews was able to obtain a 1947 printing of the Joseph Smith Translation from N. B. Lundwall of Salt Lake City, a man who had formerly belonged to the RLDS Church and who was also known for numerous important compilations and publications in the LDS book market. From 1947 to 1950 Matthews compared the KJV and the JST, quoted from it frequently in talks or lessons, but was often told by people in his ward and at BYU that the Church did not accept the book and that he was in error for even citing it.

The introduction in 1944 of the New Corrected Edition confirmed in the minds of many Latter-day Saints that surely the RLDS Church had been guilty of tampering with Joseph Smith's original manuscripts. Such attitudes heightened Robert Matthews's desire to examine the manuscripts to check for accuracy of the printed editions. After learning that the manuscripts were in the hands of the RLDS Church, Brother Matthews began to inquire of the leaders of that church as to the possibility of examining the original documents. He continued his requests for fifteen years before permission was finally granted in 1968. Matthews had also learned that a partial copy of the manuscripts—the Bernhisel Manuscript—was held by the LDS Church in Salt Lake City. Largely through the efforts of Reed C. Durham and the graciousness of President Joseph Fielding Smith, the Bernhisel Manuscript became available for research in 1965. In 1960 Robert Matthews did a master's thesis at BYU on the four Gospels in the JST, but in that study he did not have access to the original manuscripts. In 1968 he completed a Ph.D. at BYU, his doctoral dissertation examining the printed sources of the JST and the Bernhisel Manuscript. This study opened the way for the RLDS Church to permit him to have access to the original manuscripts, beginning in 1968. In 1975 he published his book, "A Plainer Translation," and therein discussed the historical and doctrinal significance of the JST, in this work drawing not only upon printed JST sources but also upon the original manuscripts.

Among many of the critical contributions of Robert J. Matthews's work with the original documents, the following points were discovered or confirmed:

1. The Prophet's corrections were not made on the pages of the Bible but on sheets of paper.
2. Various scribes labored for the Prophet in recording the corrections.
3. Some passages were corrected more than one time, with additional information being provided each time. This helped to demonstrate how revelation comes.

4. Use of the manuscripts made available key dates, which served to give a clearer indication of the time when the Prophet was translating certain chapters. Such findings established the doctrinal relationship of the JST to the Doctrine and Covenants.

5. Through access to the dates on the manuscripts it became clear that the work of Bible translation was a major activity of the Prophet, and a significant matter in LDS Church history and in the unfolding of truth in this dispensation.

6. Finally, a most significant contribution of Matthews's work is that it substantiates and verifies the text of the printed JST, giving evidence that readers may feel comfortable with what they now find in print; in almost all instances the printed text follows the manuscripts in content and meaning.

The LDS Edition of the King James Bible (1979)

In 1972 President Harold B. Lee organized a Bible Aids Committee to prepare an edition of the Bible which would provide doctrinal and historical helps for Latter-day Saint students of the scriptures. Among the first matters proposed in the preparation of the LDS edition of the Bible was that significant changes from the Prophet Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible be included. As progress went forward on this new LDS edition, it became clear that such a project would lead naturally to a consideration of the status of the triple combination as well. The Bible Aids Committee became the Scriptures Publications Committee, and consisted finally of Elders Thomas S. Monson, Boyd K. Packer, and Bruce R. McConkie. These three members of the Council of the Twelve were assisted primarily by three members of the BYU Religious Education faculty: Ellis T. Rasmussen, Robert C. Patch, and Robert J. Matthews. In addition, literally hundreds of members of the Church Educational System aided in producing the Topical Guide and an extremely complex cross-referencing system between all four books within the standard works.

There is much to recommend the 1979 LDS Edition of the King James Bible as one of the literary masterpieces of our day. Most important, as Elder Packer observed in 1982, this Bible project (in conjunction with the 1981 triple combination) "will be regarded, in the perspective of history, as the crowning achievement in the administration of President Spencer W. Kimball." Continuing, Elder Packer taught:

With the passing of years, these scriptures will produce successive generations of faithful Christians who know the Lord Jesus Christ and are disposed to obey His will.

The older generation has been raised without them, but there is another generation growing up. The revelations will be opened to them as to no other in the history of the world. Into their hands now are placed the sticks of Joseph and of Judah. They will develop a gospel scholarship beyond that which their forebears could achieve. They will have the testimony that Jesus is the Christ and be competent to proclaim Him and to defend Him. 37

One of the profound strengths of the new LDS Edition of the Bible is the marvelous light which is shed by the addition of JST changes either at the bottom of the page or at the end of the book. This factor alone—over six hundred JST alterations within our presently accepted and recommended Bible—should

do much toward removing fears or hesitations toward Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible. Recently Elder Bruce R. McConkie spoke to a group of Church educators and said:

For historical and other reasons there has been, among some members of the Church in times past, some prejudice and misunderstanding of the place of the Joseph Smith Translation. I hope this has now all vanished away. Our new Church Bible footnotes many of the major changes made in the Inspired Version and has a seventeen-page section which sets forth excerpts that are too lengthy for inclusion in the footnotes.

Reference to this section and to the footnotes themselves will give anyone who has spiritual insight a deep appreciation of this revelatory work of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is one of the great evidences of his prophetic call. 38

WHAT IS THE JST?

Unfortunately, Joseph Smith never seems to have taken the time to explain the nature of his inspired translation of the King James Bible. Just as we are uncertain as to exactly how it was that he translated the Book of Mormon, we are not informed by the Prophet himself exactly what he was doing as he studied and pondered upon the biblical text. The following have been suggested³⁹ as possibilities in explaining exactly what the JST represents:

1. Portions of the JST may represent what might be called "inspired prophetic commentary" by the Prophet Joseph Smith, insights provided by Joseph to assist a latter-day world to better understand a former-day message. This might be similar to what Nephi referred to as likening the scriptures unto us (see 1 Nephi 19:23-24; 2 Nephi 11:8). Prophetic documents may be interpreted and explained by prophets, and it is to Joseph Smith that we owe a deep debt of gratitude in this regard.
2. Portions of the JST may represent a harmonization of doctrinal concepts that were revealed to Joseph Smith independently of his work with the Bible, but proved to be the means whereby he came to recognize a biblical inaccuracy.
3. A third possibility as to what the JST really represents (and one, in my opinion, which has received far too little serious attention) is a restoration of content material, ideas and events and sayings once recorded by the biblical authors but since deleted from the collection. I believe that in a very real sense we question the honesty and integrity of Joseph Smith when we question too strongly the proposition that much of the JST is a restoration of content. Some months ago while making a presentation on the Sermon on the Mount, I referred frequently to the JST additions in the King James text. One man in the group was particularly vocal in his reactions: "Oh, come on now! You don't really believe that Jesus actually said those things, do you? Isn't the Prophet simply reading nineteenth-century Mormonism back into the first century?" I have encountered similar reactions throughout the years, and have given the matter a great deal of thought.

In the Prophet's translation of two of the Gospels, he changed the titles of the works to read "The Testimony of St. Matthew" and "The Testimony of St. John." Such an alteration is not without

significance. Joseph Smith was extremely serious about his work with the Bible, and I have great difficulty imagining him playing "fast and loose" with the King James text—adding words to the Savior's sermons, creating discussions between Jesus and the Twelve, and producing settings and recreating events of which we have no other record—except as those words and events were once part of the testimonies of the Gospel writers. Would it not suggest dishonesty (or pride or haughtiness) to insert or create or conjure up episodes or dialogue which have no basis in historical fact? The words of Joseph Smith himself are poignant in regard to pretending to a divine work:

After the foregoing was received [D&C 67], William E. M'Lellin, as the wisest man, in his own estimation, having more learning than sense, endeavored to write a commandment like unto one of the least of the Lord's, but failed; it was an awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord. The Elders and all present that witnessed this vain attempt of a man to imitate the language of Jesus Christ, renewed their faith in the fulness of the gospel, and in the truth of the commandments and revelations which the Lord had given to the Church through my instrumentality; and the Elders signified a willingness to bear testimony of their truth to all the world. 40

My personal conviction is certain as to the integrity of Joseph Smith. I do not doubt but that many of the JST alterations represent commentary or harmonization. At the same time, I believe that as a divinely called translator and restorer, Joseph Smith also (1) restored that which was once recorded but later removed intentionally; or perhaps even (2) reconstituted that which occurred or was said anciently but never recorded by the ancient writers. To doubt either the Prophet's intentions or abilities with regard to the Bible is to open the door unnecessarily to other questions relative to the books in the canon of scripture. Joseph the translator of the Book of Mormon and recipient of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants was the same man called and empowered as a translator of the Bible.

Some are hesitant to recognize or utilize the JST as a true restoration because the changes often do not reflect the readings or more obvious meanings in some of our oldest extant texts. Of all people, the Saints should use caution in avoiding improper or superficial assumptions regarding the oldest available manuscripts. Textual variants through the centuries are of two kinds—unplanned and planned. The former are frequently the unintentional ones, resulting from human error; they are in some ways the simplest to deal with and the ones to which a sincere textual critic might devote a lifetime of study. The latter—the planned variants—result when a sincere scribe begins to think for himself, or when a more devious scribe seeks to alter, take away, or keep back valuable truths. Even these latter types of errors could be corrected if we had access to original or even earlier (untampered) documents. But we do not have such documents.

Nephi's prophetic vision deals with intentional, dramatic alterations to the earliest texts. One Mormon writer has observed: "As we read the words of the angel [in 1 Nephi 13], we discover that the world has never had a complete Bible, for it was massively, even cataclysmically, corrupted before it was distributed." 41 It requires no greater faith to suppose that the Prophet Joseph Smith saw well beyond the great texts (now available) to an earlier or more complete text (or perhaps even to an episode or statement not previously recorded), than it does to accept the fact that he translated golden plates which contained a language known only to the Nephites (see Mormon 9:34). In short: "The plain and precious missing parts have not yet been made known through manuscripts and scholars, but are

available only through the Book of Mormon, the Joseph Smith Translation, and modern revelation through the instrumentality of a prophet." 42

CONCLUSION

In looking carefully at the history of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible we are able to see the hand of the Lord in a significant way: not only did the Lord direct the labors of his noble servant, Joseph Smith, in the translation itself, but he also opened doors and intervened where necessary, in order that a monumental work might be delivered intact to modern Israel. In short, the production and transmission of the JST reflect the hand of Providence, and further testify of the place of this particular branch of Joseph's calling in the breaking forth of the light of the Restoration.

The attitude with which Joseph Smith approached his assignment of Bible translation is evident in statements by the Prophet. For example, in a letter to W. W. Phelps, Joseph explained: "We have finished the translation of the New Testament great and marvilous glorious things are revealed, we are making rapid strides in the old book and in the strength of God we can do all things according to his will." [sic] 43 That Joseph and his scribe recognized that the work of Bible translation was far more than a mental exercise is apparent in a simple entry at the top of page 1 of the manuscript of Matthew: "A translation of the New Testament translated by the power of God." 44 In a revelation to Sidney Rigdon, the principal scribe for the translation, Jesus Christ gives to us His own perception of the nature and scope of the JST: "And a commandment I give unto thee—that thou shalt write for him; and the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect" (D&C 35:20; emphasis added).

In 1832 the Lord warned the Saints that unless they took seriously the "new covenant"—the Book of Mormon—the Church would remain under condemnation (see D&C 84:54-57). In 1831 Joseph Smith had taught in a similar manner concerning his Bible translation: "God had often sealed up the heavens because of covetousness in the Church. said that the Lord would cut his work short in righteousness and except the Church receive the fulness of the Scriptures that they would yet fall." [sic] 45 There is so much beauty and depth of doctrine and insight to be had within the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible that it is foolish to study and teach without it; to do so is tantamount to being choosy about what we will receive from the Lord and what we will not. Such an attitude is certainly foreign to the genuine truthseeker. Those who love and revere the name and labors of Joseph Smith should be pleased and enthusiastic to receive whatever God has chosen to reveal through his modern seer and lawgiver.

It should be obvious that we live in a day wherein the effects of the removal of precious truths are being felt in the religious world. But in harmony with the glorious prophecy of Moses, God has indeed raised up in our day a modern Moses, one through whose instrumentality the truths of heaven are "had again among the children of men—among as many as shall believe" (Moses 1:41).

NOTES

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Footnotes

1. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957), 6:57. Hereafter cited as *History of the Church*.
2. See Margaret T. Hills, *The English Bible in America* (New York: The American Bible Society, 1961); cited in Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), p. 9.
3. *History of the Church*, 1:98.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-33.
5. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," p. 96.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Robert J. Matthews, "The Joseph Smith Translation: A Primary Source for the Doctrine and Covenants," in *Hearken, O Ye People* (Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1984), p. 90.
8. *History of the Church*, 1:324.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 368-69 (emphasis added).
10. See Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," chapters 3 and 4.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
13. *History of the Church*, 4:588.
14. Revelation given to Frederick G. Williams, 5 January 1834, Joseph Smith Collection, Letters 1834, Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah (emphasis added).
15. *History of the Church*, 4:137.
16. *Times and Seasons*, vol. 1, no. 9 (July 1840), pp. 139-40 (emphasis added).
17. *History of the Church*, 1:368-69 (emphasis added).
18. See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), p. 60.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
21. See Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," pp. 210-13.
22. *Journal History of the Church*, April-June 1868, Church Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah. Entry for 20 June 1868 (emphasis added).
23. George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (reprint ed., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972), p. 148 and note (emphasis added).
24. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Joseph Smith's 'Translation' of the Scriptures," *Improvement Era*, vol. 17, no. 6 (April 1914), p. 595 (emphasis added).
25. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 384 (emphasis added).
26. For a detailed treatment of the transmission of the manuscripts, see Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," chapter 4.
27. *Diary of L. John Nuttall*, 1:335, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, under date of 10 September 1879.
28. See Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," chapter 6.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.
30. Letter from Emma Smith Bidamon to Joseph Smith III, 2 December 1867, original in RLDS Auditorium, Department of History, Independence, Missouri.
31. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," pp. 225, 278-79.
32. James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955); Reed C. Durham, Jr., "A History of Joseph Smith's Revision of the Bible" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1965).
33. Sidney B. Sperry and Merrill Y. Van Wagoner, "The Inspired Revision of the Bible," *Improvement Era*, April-September 1940; Calvin H. Bartholomew, "A Comparison of the Authorized Version and the Inspired Revision of Genesis" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1949).
34. James R. Harris, "A Study of the Changes in the Content of the Book of Moses from the Earliest Available Sources to the Current Edition" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958); Robert J.

Matthews, "A Study of the Doctrinal Significance of Certain Textual Changes Made by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Four Gospels of the Inspired Version of the New Testament" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960); Robert J. Matthews, "A Study of the Text of the Inspired Revision of the Bible" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1968); Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1969).

35. The address was delivered on 9 July 1944; cited in *The Restoration of All Things* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1945), p. 57.

36. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1982, p. 75.

37. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Bible—A Sealed Book," Address delivered at CES Symposium on the New Testament, 17 August 1984, p. 12.

38. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," p. 253.

39. *History of the Church*, 1:226 (emphasis added).

40. From Robert J. Matthews, "The Book of Mormon as a Co-Witness with the Bible and as a Guide to Biblical Criticism," LDS Church Educational System Symposium on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), p. 57.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Letter to William W. Phelps, 31 July 1832, in Dean C. Jessee, comp., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), p. 248.

43. See a copy of New Testament Manuscript 1, page 1 (8 March 1831), in Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," p. 267; see also Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures*, p. 171.

44. From an entry dated 25 October 1831 in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Far West Record* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), p. 23 (emphasis added).

45. Italics are used throughout this book to indicate wording in the Joseph Smith Translation or the Book of Mormon that is not found in corresponding verses in the King James Version. Where noted, italics are also used for emphasis.

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