

KENT P. JACKSON

1830

*Joseph Smith's
New Translation
of the Bible*

*A*s January dawned in the year 1830, the Prophet Joseph Smith had much on his mind. The Book of Mormon production was well under way in Egbert B. Grandin's print shop in Palmyra, New York. The previous summer, the Prophet had contracted with Grandin to publish the Book of Mormon—five thousand copies for three thousand dollars. Publishing a book was not an easy task in the days of Joseph Smith. The first edition of the Book of Mormon was an enormous undertaking of typesetting, printing, binding, and—probably—patience.¹

Each page of the Book of Mormon required someone to insert by hand into a wooden form about twenty-five hundred tiny pieces of metal. Every comma, every space, every period, and every letter had to be inserted

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JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER



The Prophet had contracted with E. B. Grandin to publish the Book of Mormon. The first edition of the Book of Mormon was an enormous undertaking of typesetting, printing, binding, and patience. Pictured is the Grandin Press building (above) and a replica of the Smith Improved Printing Press (below) that was used to print the first edition of the Book of Mormon. (Photos by Brent Nordgren.)

separately, backwards, and upside down so the text would print correctly. After the type for the first page was prepared, the workers would set the type for the next fifteen pages in sequence, for a total of sixteen pages to be printed on each side of big sheets of paper. After the sixteen pages of thousands of pieces of metal type were in place, the type was inked, a sheet of paper was placed on it, and the handle of the press was cranked to transfer the ink onto the paper. After that process was repeated twenty-five hundred times, the sheets were turned over for the printing of the same text on the other side. The text was identical on both sides of the sheets so that when they were cut in half, they produced two identical sheets containing sixteen pages of the book, eight

pages on each side. Those sheets are called signatures.

After each sheet was printed, the type had to be redistributed into the cases, and then the pieces were brought out again, one by one, and reinserted into the forms to create the next group of sixteen pages, each one in order. It has been shown that to produce the first edition of the Book of Mormon, the handle

on the press in Grandin's print shop had to be cranked 185,000 times to print all thirty-seven signatures in five thousand copies. When the printing for the entire book was completed, there were thirty-seven stacks of paper, each containing five thousand signatures ready to be folded, trimmed, and bound into a book.

In Joseph Smith's day, book binding was done entirely by hand. Workers laid an individual sheet of the first signature on a table and folded it by hand in such a way that the sixteen pages on it would be in the right order. Then the process was repeated with an individual sheet of the second signature and so on through all thirty-seven signatures. Workers collated the signatures in the correct sequence and then began the laborious process of binding them together. The pages of each signature had to be bound to each other with string before the thirty-seven signatures could be bound together. The workers took a needle, stitched it a few times in and out of the fold of the individual signature, looped it back to the outside, and tied it there. Thus the pages within one signature would hold together. All of the signatures were stitched that way, after which string was used to tie the thirty-seven signatures tightly together into a block of printed pages. The workers then glued together the edge of the block, put a reinforcing strip on the edge, and put the block of pages in a vice, where the folded edges on the top, bottom, and open side were shaved of with a plane. Stiff cardboard covered with leather was then added for the book's cover.

In the days of Joseph Smith, it took as much as a year or more for all the copies of an average book to be bound. Today we think of March 26, 1830, as the book's publication date, but we know that it was well over a year after that before all of the copies were completed in the bindery.

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Three non-Latter-day Saints deserve our mention for assisting in bringing to pass the first edition of the Book of Mormon. Egbert B. Grandin was the owner-operator of the print shop in which the book was printed. His building, on Palmyra's Main Street, still stands and is now the Church visitors' center in the village. It houses an excellent printing museum that celebrates the publication of the Book of Mormon and the people who made it possible. Grandin's typesetter was John H. Gilbert, who not only oversaw the typesetting but also supplied most of the punctuation that we still have in the Book of Mormon today. Luther Howard was the owner of the bindery in the building. In September 1829, Howard and Grandin became partners in the publication business.² When the Book of Mormon was published the next spring, its publisher was the Howard and Grandin Company.

On Friday, March 26, 1830, the local newspaper, the *Wayne Sentinel*, of which Grandin was the publisher, advertised the Book of Mormon for the first time by publishing a copy of the title page. At the bottom of the advertisement are the following words, "The above work, containing about 600 pages, large Duodecimo [the term used for the size of the book], is now for sale, wholesale and retail, at the Palmyra Bookstore, by HOWARD & GRANDIN."³ It appears that according to the Lord's timetable, it was necessary that the Book of Mormon be published before the Church was organized. Joseph Smith had received the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods the previous summer, yet it was not until the Book of Mormon came off the press that the Lord told him to organize the Church. That happened on April 6, 1830, eleven days after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith's Bible Translation

The Prophet's ministry did not last very long, so the Lord did not allow him to waste time. He went from one great project to another. Very shortly after the publication of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church, the Lord instructed him to begin making a new translation of the Bible. At the time he began it, he was a twenty-four-year-old living in the wilderness of North America, with no academic training and no worldly background or skills, taking on the task of making changes in the Holy Bible, the cornerstone of Western civilization. It was an audacious undertaking, but it was something the Lord instructed the Prophet to do.

Joseph Smith used the term *translation* for his work, and so do we today. Yet it was not a translation in the normal sense of using ancient Hebrew or Greek texts and rendering them in a modern language. Instead, the Prophet was recasting the text into a new form by means of inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Professor Robert J. Matthews, an early scholar on the Joseph Smith Translation, offers a description of the process:

When the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the Bible, he was not limited to what was found on the working page in front of him, whether that page was a sheet from the King James Version or a handwritten draft of his own early revision. The text seems to have been a "starting point," but the spirit of revelation was always an additional source of information. In the case of the Bible translation, the manuscript source was the King James Version. This suggested certain ideas, but the Spirit apparently suggested many enlargements, backgrounds, and additional concepts not found on the page. Thus the term "translation," when referring to Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible, differs somewhat from that

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normally used when one thinks of translating languages. To a prophet, a revelation is a more vital and dependable source than a written text.⁴

Joseph Smith did not need original manuscripts. He was able to bypass them to go to the original source—the inspiration of the Holy Ghost that enlightened the original biblical writers.

The Prophet's work on the New Translation lasted roughly three years, from the summer of 1830 to the summer of 1833.⁵ The final product was 446 manuscript pages, handwritten from margin to margin and from top to bottom on the page. The pages were approximately eight inches wide and thirteen inches tall. Joseph Smith had many interruptions while he worked on the translation during those three years, but it was an ongoing priority in his mind. Several of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants talk about the work and endorse what he was doing to bring it to pass. He made changes to about thirty-four hundred verses—about thirteen hundred Old Testament verses and twenty-one hundred New Testament verses.⁶ Perhaps the immediacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the New Testament made it a higher priority than the Old Testament.

In Joseph Smith's day, the project was called the New Translation. That is what the Lord calls it in the Doctrine and Covenants, and that is what Joseph Smith and his contemporaries called it.⁷ In the 1970s, as the Church was preparing revised editions of the English scriptures, the name Joseph Smith Translation was adopted, with the acronym JST used in the footnotes of the LDS edition of the Bible.⁸ In the past, the New Translation was often called the *Inspired Version*. But we do not use that terminology now, because the term *Inspired Version* more accurately refers to the edited, printed rendering of the New Translation published by the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints).

Why a New Translation?

Joseph Smith occasionally talked about why a new inspired translation of the Bible was needed. On one occasion he commented, "Many important points, touching the salvation of man, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled."⁹ In an editorial in the Church's newspaper in 1834, the Prophet said: "From what we can draw from the scriptures relative to the teachings of heaven we are induced to think, that much instruction has been given to man since the beginning which we have not."¹⁰ Does that mean the instruction was never put in the Bible, or does it mean it was taken out? It probably means some of both. We have an example of such a thing in the Book of Mormon. When Jesus appeared to the children of Lehi, he found that something was left out of their record that was very important—a prophecy that Samuel the Lamanite had made. The Savior instructed that the missing text be put into the book (see 3 Nephi 23:6–13). Joseph Smith's statements may suggest that there were things that ancient prophets wrote that never were included in the book, or events that took place that no one thought to write about. On another occasion he said, "[There are] many things in the bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelation of the holy Ghost to me."¹¹ When such discrepancies occur, we follow what has been revealed to Joseph Smith. One of the blessings of the Restoration is the fact that the Prophet was able to restore the gospel not only in its fullness but also in its purity. The restored gospel did not undergo the kinds of changes in the hands of uninspired people that the Bible experienced over the centuries.

Joseph Smith wrote, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8). The word *translated* here seems to mean something other than how we normally use the word. The Prophet used the term more with

the meaning of *transmitted*. “As far as it is *transmitted* correctly” would include the whole process of writing or dictating inspired words to a scribe, the making of copies, losing or damaging manuscripts, and everything else from the time of the original prophets to the present day. A final statement is descriptive: “I believe the Bible, as it ought to be, as it came from the pen of the original writers.”¹² Indeed, we believe that the original authors of the Bible were inspired like the Prophet Joseph Smith and that as they taught, wrote, and recorded, they did so correctly, just as he did. But we cannot speak with certainty regarding what happened to those writings after the time of the original writing. Modern revelation, including Joseph Smith’s New Translation, provides the key to understanding the Bible.¹³

Categories of Changes

The New Translation includes hundreds of changes made to existing verses in the King James Version. In those, the Prophet simply revised wording that was already in the Bible. For example, in Matthew 13:23, the King James Version reads, “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it.” The New Translation revises the text simply by adding two words at the end: “But he who received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word and understandeth *and endureth*.”¹⁴ The two words build on existing text, but they make the statement much more meaningful. Verse 30 of the same chapter in the King James translation reads: “Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them but gather the wheat into my barn.” The JST revision alters existing words, but in doing so it changes the order of events to make the statement more doctrinally accurate: “Gather ye together first the *wheat* into my barn, *and the tares are bound in bundles to be burned*.”¹⁵

This change has doctrinal implications, because in the last days, the Lord gathers his people to safety in Zion before the world is destroyed.

Those two examples show the Prophet changing existing text to provide expanded or new meanings. But there are other examples of material he added that have no counterpart in the Bible, sometimes large blocks of material. The best example is Moses 1 in the Pearl of Great Price. The Book of Moses is Genesis 1:1–6:13 of the New Translation. It is much longer than the Genesis equivalent, because much of it is material that has no counterpart in Genesis. Moses 1 is an example of entirely new text. The Old Testament starts, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). But before we arrive at that point in the New Translation, we have forty-two verses of previously unknown visions that Moses had before God revealed to him the information about the Creation. Near the end of that record, the Lord said, “Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest; and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak” (Moses 1:40). A few verses later, we read, “Behold, I reveal unto you concerning this heaven, and this earth; write the words which I speak. I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God; by mine Only Begotten I created these things; yea, in the beginning I created the heaven, and earth upon which thou standest” (Moses 2:1). And with that we begin the familiar Creation account.

Another example of a large text added to Genesis which has no counterpart in existing Bibles is the record of Enoch and his visions in Moses 6–7. The book of Genesis mentions the career of Enoch in six verses. The Joseph Smith Translation expands those six verses into 117, blessing us with much new information that is not preserved in the Bible. Was that material once in the Bible but later lost, or was it reserved by the Lord

to come forth for the first time in the latter days? We do not have an exact answer to such questions, but in some cases we do have some hints.

When Joseph Smith made his New Translation, he did not annotate the changes to tell us why he made them. Likely several types of changes were made for various reasons. Some probably restore lost original text, while others probably restore teachings or events that were not ever recorded in the Bible. Some changes make the text easier to read, and some probably were made to correct errors or make the message more meaningful to modern readers.¹⁶ An angel told Nephi that many plain and precious things would be taken from the Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:29). Near the end of the first chapter of the Book of Moses, the Lord says, “Thou shalt write the things which I shall speak. 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). The phrase “esteem as naught” suggests that people would disrespect or disregard the words, thus motivating them to remove them from the book. But God would later raise up someone like Moses—certainly Joseph Smith—to restore things that Moses had written but that had been taken out. Perhaps Moses 1—Moses’s visions before the Creation revelation came—was one of those accounts, and perhaps the record of Enoch was as well.

We do not know the process by which all errors made their way into the scriptural text. The angel told Nephi that some would be made deliberately by those intent on changing the Bible for future generations (see 1 Nephi 13:26–28).¹⁷ But perhaps most came by innocent means, through scribal error or through loss or damage to manuscripts. As an example,

I suspect that our current text of John 1:18 is one of these. The phrase “No man hath seen God at any time” contradicts evidence in the Bible itself, where several instances are recorded of prophets seeing God (e.g., Exodus 24:9–11; 33:11; Numbers 12:6–8; Isaiah 6:1; Amos 9:1). Joseph Smith changed it to “No man hath seen God at any time, *except he hath borne record of the Son,*”¹⁸ which adds a new dimension to the verse and makes it historically and doctrinally correct.

Joseph Smith made many small changes in the Bible that make it more understandable for modern readers. In fact, modernization of the text is the single most common type of change he made in the New Translation. Few Latter-day Saints are aware of this, because those changes are not found in the footnotes to our Church edition of the Bible. In the years leading up to 1979, when the Church published an LDS edition of the Bible in English, the decision was made to include JST changes in the footnotes on a priority basis, because not all could be included. The significant doctrinal and historical contributions were selected to be included, but changes made to modernize grammar or make the text easier to read were not considered a high priority.¹⁹

Examples of this type include changing the archaic word *wot* to *know*. The Prophet instructed that *wot* be changed to *know* every time it appears.²⁰ The article *an* was changed to *a* before words that begin with *h*, as in the phrase *an house*. The word *saith* was often changed to *said*. This is not simply a change from an old form to a modern form, but it also revises the text from a present tense to a past tense to make the sentences read more easily. When referring to humans, the King James translation often uses the relative pronouns *that* and *which* instead of *who*: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, *which* is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

The Prophet generally changed those to *who*, putting them more in line with common speech. There are also places where *ye*, *thou*, and *thee* are changed to *you*, which in today's English is used in place of the three archaic forms. He also modernized verbal conjugations. In a passage from the Book of Moses, the Lord speaks to Moses of "this earth upon which *thou* standest" (Moses 1:40). In his final revision of the manuscript, Joseph Smith changed it to "this earth upon which *you* stand." In the same verse, he changed "and *thou* shalt write" to "and *you* shall write," and in the next verse, "like unto *thee*" is changed to "like unto *you*."²¹ But Joseph Smith did not make changes like these with universal consistency. In Moses 6:32 we read, "all flesh is in *my* hands," but in Moses 7:36 we read, "the workmanship of *mine* hands," using the modernized form in one instance but not in the other. Inconsistencies like these are found in several places in the manuscripts, showing that modernization of the text was not the Prophet's highest priority. Even so, he made enough changes of this kind to convince me that it was his intention to modernize and simplify the text in this manner.

There are scores of places where the Prophet clarified the pronouns *he* and *she* by replacing them with the names to which those words refer. For example, "Mary abode with *her*" (Luke 1:56) is changed to "Mary abode with *Elizabeth*,"²² and "*he* went up into the ship" (Luke 8:37) is changed to "*Jesus* went up into the ship."²³ As a result of changes like these, Joseph Smith's New Translation is much more precise than traditional Bibles. Some changes may have been made as a result of cultural realities. Paul ends most of his epistles with the phrase, "Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss" (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:26). In the Mediterranean world, both in Paul's day and now, men openly greet male friends with a kiss on each cheek. But that was not the case in Joseph Smith's world, nor is it in Western

society today. On each occasion where this phrase appears in the Bible, the Prophet replaced the word *kiss* with *salutation*.²⁴ I suspect that the text in the Bible accurately records Paul's original words, but Joseph Smith seems to have made a *cultural* translation here to render the passage more appropriate and useful for his own time and ours.

Dates and Scribes

Joseph Smith began Genesis in June 1830 and worked to Genesis 24 by March 1831.²⁵ It was during this time that the Book of Moses was revealed, which is the first chapters of Genesis from the JST. On March 7, 1831, the Lord instructed him in revelation to stop working on the Old Testament and work on the New Testament instead, because it contained things that he needed to learn (see Doctrine and Covenants 45:60–62). The next day, he began the New Testament translation, and he worked on it until July 1832. Then he went back to Genesis 24 and translated from there to the end of the Old Testament, which he finished on July 2, 1833. In addition to the initial translation, there are some parts of the work where the Prophet went through a second time to make further revisions and refinements to the translation. That work was done for the New Testament by February 1832, and it was probably done for the Old Testament by the completion date of July 2, 1833.²⁶

Like most other prominent people of his day, Joseph Smith wrote little with his own hand but did most of his writing by dictating his words to scribes. For six years, I worked with a group of Brigham Young University students to decipher the JST manuscripts in preparation for their publication in a facsimile typescript. In that process, we became very familiar with the six scribes who worked on the translation with Joseph Smith. We spent much time studying their handwriting and

were ultimately able to distinguish scribal hands and determine where each one began and ended. During that time, I walked into my office one day and found my research assistant Brenda Johnson practicing my signature. I thought it was odd to find her practicing her boss's signature, but I realized that I had a worker who had a gift for understanding and distinguishing handwriting. She worked on the project for several years and became an expert on the scribal hands in the New Translation manuscripts. Of the 446 handwritten pages that make up the New Translation, only a few contain Joseph Smith's handwriting. He served as his own scribe for three pages in the Old Testament, and he made small revisions in his own hand in a few other locations.

Oliver Cowdery was Joseph Smith's first scribe for the New Translation. He and the Prophet knew how to work together, having labored as seer and scribe for most of the translation of the Book of Mormon. Next, John Whitmer was called to be the scribe, probably because Cowdery was called to leave on a mission to the west in October 1830. Whitmer was the primary scribe from October to December. We have Emma Smith's handwriting on the Genesis manuscript, dated December 1. Her handwriting was not discovered until 1995. That summer, Brigham Young University researchers Robert J. Matthews and Scott H. Faulring were in Independence, Missouri, and were looking at the JST manuscripts. In the middle of the John Whitmer section, they noticed what appeared to be a different scribal hand. Professor Matthews had long suspected that Emma Smith had worked as a scribe on the New Translation, and his thoughts were confirmed when samples of her correspondence were compared with the writing on the JST manuscript.²⁷ In a revelation that the Prophet had received in behalf of his wife in July 1830, she was instructed, "Thou shalt . . . be unto him for

a scribe, while there is no one to be a scribe for him”—that is, she was called to be the backup scribe—“that I may send my servant, Oliver Cowdery, whithersoever I will” (Doctrine and Covenants 25:6). By the time her services were needed as scribe, Cowdery had been assigned elsewhere, and John Whitmer was the primary scribe.

Sidney Rigdon was called to serve as the Prophet's scribe in December 1830 (see Doctrine and Covenants 35:20), and he served in that capacity until March 1832. His handwriting is the most common on the pages; more than half of the pages show him as the original scribe. Jesse Gause, who served as a counselor in the First Presidency with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, served also as scribe off and on in March 1832. Fredrick G. Williams replaced Gause in the First Presidency and as scribe on the New Translation. He began as scribe in July 1832 and continued until July 1833, when the translation was completed.

A look at the names of the scribes shows that Joseph Smith selected those who were closest to him in his ministry: the Second Elder and Assistant President (Oliver Cowdery), a close confidant and early Church leader (John Whitmer), counselors in the first presidency (Sidney Rigdon, Jesse Gause, and Frederick G. Williams), and his wife (Emma Hale Smith). Most of the translation was done by the First Presidency, with Joseph Smith dictating the translation and his counselors serving as scribes. That suggests that the Prophet and those he selected to help him knew this to be a sacred work.

Manuscripts and Publications

Joseph Smith and his scribes produced two Old Testament manuscripts. Old Testament Manuscript 1 is the original text for Genesis 1–24.²⁸ It was ended when the Prophet shifted his

focus to the New Testament. While the translation of the New Testament was under way with Sidney Rigdon serving as scribe, Joseph Smith had John Whitmer make a backup copy of Old Testament 1, influenced, no doubt, by his memory of losing the manuscript of the first part of the Book of Mormon three years earlier. We call that backup copy Old Testament Manuscript 2. But when the New Testament was completed and the Prophet returned to the translation of the Old Testament, he did it not on Old Testament 1 but on Old Testament 2. It was on Old Testament 2 that he finished the translation through Malachi, and he used it when he went through Genesis again and made further revisions and refinements to what he had translated earlier. Thus the backup copy had become the manuscript on which the rest of the work was done. On the Genesis pages, one can see where the original text is and where the later refinements were added. Often the later corrections are in a darker ink, and they are almost always in a different scribal hand. Joseph Smith's pattern usually was that he would do the original translation with one scribe but make further adjustments to the text using a different scribe. He made the later refinements as he apparently studied the wording out in his mind and followed spiritual promptings to adjust it until he was satisfied that it was right.

We see the same pattern in the New Testament manuscripts. The original dictation of Matthew is on a manuscript we call New Testament Manuscript 1. The Prophet interrupted the work at Matthew 26 when he went to Missouri for much of the summer of 1831. While he was gone, John Whitmer made a backup copy, which we call New Testament 2. When the Prophet returned and resumed the New Testament translation, he did it on New Testament 2, with the backup copy again becoming the copy for the ongoing translation through the end of the New Testament. On that manuscript, he made further

refinements to text already recorded until he was confident that the translation was as the Lord wanted it to be.

After the translation and later refinements were completed, probably by July 2, 1833, Joseph Smith had assistants go through the manuscripts again and add punctuation, capitalization, and chapter and verse divisions to get the translation ready for printing. Contemporary documents show that he felt an urgent desire to publish the New Translation and regularly expressed disappointment that the Saints could not raise the money to get it printed.²⁹ Although some excerpts were printed in newspapers during his lifetime, the work as a whole remained unpublished at the time of his death in June 1844. When he was killed, the manuscripts were in the hands of his family, and they stayed in their possession until the 1860s. During those years, Emma Smith carefully preserved them, keeping them safe and treating them as the precious documents that they are. She conveyed them to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and they have been in the Community of Christ archival collection since that time.

In 1851, Elder Franklin D. Richards, Apostle and president of the British Mission, created a pamphlet for the benefit of his mission, containing writings that came from the Prophet Joseph Smith.³⁰ He called his pamphlet the *Pearl of Great Price*, drawing its name from the parable in Matthew 13. He included some excerpts from Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: an early and fragmentary version of the Book of Moses that he obtained from Church newspapers and hand-copied manuscripts, and Matthew chapter 24, which he obtained from other early Latter-day Saint printings.

In 1867 the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints took the New Translation manuscripts and printed them in a book. The publication committee added chapter

and verse divisions patterned after those in traditional Bibles (rather than following those on the manuscripts), and they standardized spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Thus they published *The Holy Scriptures: Translated and Corrected by the Spirit of Revelation*, commonly called the *Inspired Version*.³¹ It is the Community of Christ's edition of Joseph Smith's Bible revision, and it is still in print today. The work was done with great care, and for the most part it accurately reproduces what is on the manuscripts. In order to create a modern book in Bible format, the editors had to make thousands of editorial decisions, because the text contained inconsistencies in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. When they dealt with the two Old Testament manuscripts, they misunderstood the relationship between the two. As a result, they omitted from the *Inspired Version* many of the revisions the Prophet made in Genesis, and thus important changes were not passed on in later printings.

In 1878 leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah published a Churchwide edition of Elder Richards's British Mission pamphlet. The task was placed in the hands of Elder Orson Pratt of the Quorum of the Twelve. Elder Pratt had no access to the original New Translation manuscripts, but he was aware that the Genesis material in the British Mission *Pearl of Great Price* was fragmentary and out of order. To create the Book of Moses as we have it today, he simply copied it exactly out of the 1867 RLDS *Inspired Version*, which he rightly surmised to be a more accurate and complete text than was in the British edition. This is the text that has been in all subsequent editions of the Book of Moses, with some later revising. Neither that edition nor any later edition of the Pearl of Great Price was prepared with access to the original manuscripts. At the October 1880 general conference of the Church, the Pearl of Great Price was canonized as scripture, and

thus a Genesis excerpt (Book of Moses) and a Matthew excerpt (Joseph Smith—Matthew) have been part of our scriptures and standard works since then.

In 2004 the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University published a typographic transcription of all the original manuscript pages, complete with original spelling, punctuation, cross-outs, and insertions.³² BYU researchers had complete access to the original manuscripts, and with the full cooperation of the Community of Christ, they transcribed them and printed them in typescript in an imposing book. Now, for the first time in history, scholars and laypeople alike can avail themselves freely of the original texts of Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible.

Blessings from the New Translation

We obtain many blessings from Joseph Smith's Bible translation. By way of direct blessings, we have the excerpts in the Pearl of Great Price and many other revised readings that strengthen the Bible's text, clarify its message, and reveal many new things that we are just beginning to learn and understand. Perhaps the best of these are found in footnotes in the English LDS Bible and in the "Guide to the Scriptures," published with the triple combination in other languages and posted on the Church's Internet site.³³ The availability of these JST readings has permanently changed gospel scholarship in the Church by bringing the translation to the place it deserves as one of the great contributions of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

But we also have many indirect blessings that derive from the Joseph Smith Translation that most Latter-day Saints have not considered before. Many of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants came as a result of things the Prophet was pondering and questioning as he worked on his translation of the Bible.

Seventy-seven sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, 56 percent of the total number, were revealed during the months that the Prophet was engaged in the translation. Some sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are explicitly tied to it. The vision of the three degrees of glory, section 76, came directly as a result of questions the Prophet asked while translating. He and his scribe, Sidney Rigdon, wrote, "While we were doing the work of translation, which the Lord had appointed unto us, we came to the twenty-ninth verse of the fifth chapter of John" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:15). The Lord revealed to them a revised reading of the verse, which caused them "to marvel" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:18). Then the Lord revealed the vision of the degrees of glory. Other revelations, such as sections 77, 91, and 132, can be linked to the Bible translation rather easily, and several others offer hints that they were received as a result of that work.

Another indirect blessing we enjoy because of the New Translation is the education Joseph Smith received while working on it. Robert Matthews has said, "The Lord had Joseph Smith make a translation of the Bible because of the good it would do Joseph Smith as well as the good it would also do the Church. This is the way in which the Prophet Joseph Smith learned many things about the gospel."³⁴ He added, "Through the experience of translating the Bible Joseph Smith was to come into possession of knowledge he did not previously have. . . . The labor was to be its own reward and would result in the spiritual education of the Prophet."³⁵ Indeed, Joseph Smith not only learned the Bible well from the process, but he also learned well how to understand it by the Spirit. For the rest of his life, he garnished his sermons with generous amounts of material from the Bible, usually presenting passages in a new light with expanded meanings not known by his contemporaries.³⁶

JOSEPH SMITH'S NEW TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

The Joseph Smith Translation is a great miracle, and it is something that we have not appreciated enough over the course of the history of the Church. When I was a BYU student in the early 1970s, I had a class from Robert Matthews, who at the time was doing groundbreaking research on the Joseph Smith Translation. He quoted from it frequently in class. This worried me, because I had been taught that we should not use it because Joseph Smith did not finish it, because it was mysterious, because someone had tampered with it, because it was unreliable, and because the Church rejected it. None of those things were true, but many Latter-day Saints believed them for generations. Because of Professor Matthews's research and publications that introduced the New Translation to the Church and made it possible to have the excerpts printed in our Bible, we now know it for what it really is—a revelatory text and a witness to the divine calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith. My students today at Brigham Young University have been trained from their youth to know the New Translation and to appreciate its contributions to our understanding of the gospel. The original manuscripts themselves bear testimony to it. The Old Testament begins with these words: "A Revelation given to Joseph the Revelator."³⁷ Above a later Old Testament section we read, "A revelation given to the Elders of the Church of Christ." Then the New Testament starts, "A Translation of the New Testament translated by the power of God."³⁸ And in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord endorsed it in his own words when he called Sidney Rigdon to be a scribe for the translation: "And the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, for the salvation of mine own elect" (Doctrine and Covenants 35:20).

Notes

1. The following discussion summarizes Kent P. Jackson, “Publishing the Book of Mormon,” in *Joseph: Exploring the Life and Ministry of the Prophet*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Andrew C. Skinner (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 107–16.

2. See *Wayne Sentinel*, September 11, 1829.

3. *Wayne Sentinel*, March 26, 1830.

4. Robert J. Matthews, “What Is the Book of Moses?” in *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 2: *The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 37.

5. For the original manuscripts of the New Translation and its history, see Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004).

6. Robert J. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation”: *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 425.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 124:89; *Times and Seasons*, July 1840, 140; Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:341, 365; 4:164.

8. The title was invented because the abbreviation *NT* could not be used in the footnotes because it is commonly used for the New Testament (Robert J. Matthews, personal communication).

9. *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1, *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 372.

10. *Evening and Morning Star*, March 1834, 143.

11. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and

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Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 211.

12. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 256.

13. See Kent P. Jackson, "Asking Restoration Questions in New Testament Scholarship," in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 27–42.

14. New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 1, page 25, lines 22–24, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 266–67. In some JST quotations that follow, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling are standardized. Italics are added to some passages to highlight differences between the New Translation and the King James Version.

15. New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 1, page 25, pinned note at line 37, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 267.

16. See Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 8–10.

17. For a possible setting for changes in the text, see Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 19–30; and "Asking Restoration Questions in New Testament Scholarship," 34–37.

18. New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 4, pages 105–6, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 443.

19. Robert J. Matthews, personal communication.

20. Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 69, line 17, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 699.

21. Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 3, lines 30–34, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 594. None of these changes from Moses 1:40–41 are in the current edition of the book of Moses. See Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph*

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Smith Translation Manuscripts (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 66.

22. New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 2, page 48, line 11, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 362.

23. New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 3, page 65, lines 25–26, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 387.

24. For example, see New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 4, page 135, line 26, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 527.

25. A convenient timeline of the New Translation is found in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 57–59.

26. Evidence for the dates is presented in the introductions to the individual manuscripts in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*. See also Kent P. Jackson, “New Discoveries in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” *Religious Educator* 6, no. 3 (2005): 149–60.

27. See “Emma and the Joseph Smith Translation,” *Insights: An Ancient Window*, August 1996.

28. For discussions of the manuscripts individually, see the introductions to each in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*.

29. “You will see by these revelations that we have to print the new translation here at Kirtland for which we will prepare as soon as possible” (Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams to Edward Partridge, August 6, 1833, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library). See Robert J. Matthews, “Joseph Smith's Efforts to Publish His Bible ‘Translation,’” *Ensign*, January 1983, 57–64.

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30. More detailed discussions for this and the following paragraphs can be found in Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*, 18–52.

31. *The Holy Scriptures: Translated and Corrected by the Spirit of Revelation*. By Joseph Smith, Jr., the Seer (Plano, IL: The [Reorganized] Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1867).

32. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*.

33. See <http://scriptures.lds.org>. The two changes that I most wish had been included with the LDS edition of the Bible are an addition at the end of John 8:11 that concludes the story of the woman taken in adultery: “And the woman glorified God from that hour, and believed on his name” (New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 4, page 116, lines 2–3, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 459); and an addition after Mark 14:28, telling that Judas betrayed Jesus because Judas was an apostate: Judas “went unto the chief priests to betray Jesus unto them, for he turned away from him and was offended because of his words” (New Testament Manuscript 2, Folio 2, page 40, lines 15–17, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 352).

34. Robert J. Matthews, “Using the Scriptures,” *Brigham Young University 1981 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Publications, 1981), 123.

35. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation*, 53.

36. See Kent P. Jackson, “The Prophet's Teachings in Nauvoo,” in *Joseph*, 367–79.

37. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 83.

38. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 159.

A
BOOK

OF

COMMANDMENTS,

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE

Church of Christ,

ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO LAW, ON THE

6th of April, 1830.

ZION:

PUBLISHED BY W. W. PHELPS & CO.

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1833.

Willard Woodruff

Book of Commandments

29

Title page, Book of Commandments. (Courtesy of Church History Library.)