

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION: A PRIMARY SOURCE FOR THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

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The book of Doctrine and Covenants is a fact of life and deserves our most diligent study; it presents the voice of Jesus Christ speaking to us who live upon the earth now. It is a collection of sacred utterances that have been printed and bound into a volume for easy access so that those who wish to learn of their contents may do so.

The translation of the Bible by Joseph Smith is also a fact of life and is an extensive work presenting information revealed to the Prophet primarily from 1830 to 1833. The Bible translation was done at the command of the Lord and by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. It stands along with the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price as a tangible literary product that came from the hand of Joseph Smith. It is, with the other standard works, a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, in some respects, even after 150 years both the Doctrine and Covenants and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST) remain unknown books because there is so much about them that we have not understood or appreciated. This is particularly true with regard to the circumstances out of which the revelations came. Let us peel back the cover of a century and a half and obtain a

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glimpse of the Prophet Joseph Smith as he received revelation from the Lord. When we do that, we will see that there is no essential difference in the revelations that are in the JST and the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants.

VALUE OF ORIGINAL SOURCES

One situation that has blurred our vision is that the JST is published as one book; the Doctrine and Covenants as a separate book; and the Pearl of Great Price as still another book. Having these revelations, all of which were given in the very inception of the Church, printed in separate books obscures the context and thus also the historical and doctrinal relationship between these early revelations. The books have become compartmentalized, whereas in reality the revelations in these books were revealed on a day-to-day basis in the same real-life situations. The roots of the Doctrine and Covenants and the roots of the JST are not just intertwined; they are the very same.

Every revelation that has been received was received at some specific geographical place and at some specific point in time and in connection with some specific situation. But the past becomes buried by the passage of time and the accumulation of tradition. All the while, life goes on, new experiences arise, new people come into prominence, and former leaders pass on. As a consequence, there often forms a vacuum of understanding; false concepts are gradually developed and incorrect impressions are formed. To correct this situation we often have to become literary archaeologists and dig down to the original sources so as to view them as they really are. When we do this, we will see things we had not noticed before no matter how many times we have trodden the path.

It matters not how well a person knows the *surface* of the ground and how many times he has traversed the land; he can never know what lies even close under the surface—what forms of architecture, what relics of art, and what message the past can convey—until he, or someone else, will remove the surface accumulation and examine the facts remaining from an earlier day.

It is the same way with the Doctrine and Covenants and the JST. Reading only the surface of the printed page does not give the necessary comprehension to understand the significance of some of its

plainest messages. Sometimes it is only by going to sources earlier than the printed page, to the original or at least prepublication manuscripts, that one can re-create enough historical framework to see the relationships. When we see the development that has taken place, we gain a more accurate perception and appreciation for the printed page. Until we know the background, our understanding is apt to be superficial and fragmented.

In making an inquiry as to the relationships between the Doctrine and Covenants and the JST, we need to begin with a few basic dates and concepts. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that if a man could gaze into heaven for five minutes, he would learn more about heaven than by reading all that has ever been written on the subject.¹ In like manner, if we could return to 1830, 1831, or 1844 and talk with the Prophet or walk about the streets and observe conditions, we could no doubt learn something that we have so far missed about *how* and *why* some revelations were received. But as we cannot return, we are obliged to reconstruct the history as best we can with the facts that are available. This can be pleasantly rewarding because by excavation, we will begin to see things we had not seen before.

A CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH

We will not have difficulty seeing the connection between the JST and the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants when we sort them out chronologically. We are not accustomed to doing that because we tend to think in terms of books rather than in terms of history. Without an awareness of the context, we tend to forget, or perhaps fail to ever learn, that the gospel was revealed line upon line, precept upon precept, here and there a little at a time.

Consider what the Church was like in June 1830. What were the offices, the doctrines, and the practices of the Church in that day? It would be easier to tell what the Church was not. In June 1830 there were no wards, no stakes, no First Presidency, no Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, no patriarchs, no seventies, no bishops, no "word of wisdom," no revelation on degrees of glory, no tithing, no welfare program, no law of consecration or united order, no priesthood quorums of any kind, no temples, no endowments, no sealings, no marriages for eternity, no real understanding of the New Jerusalem, no baptisms for the dead, no Doctrine and Covenants, no Pearl of Great

Price, and no JST. How did these things come to be, which today we recognize as vital to our spiritual life and basic to the Church? They came when the time was right, in answer to prayer—the result of earnest search. Each of these things was revealed at some time, and at some place, in some situation; and one-by-one each became part of the doctrine and the structure of the Church. Many of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel which are contained in the Doctrine and Covenants were first made known to the Prophet Joseph Smith as he worked through the pages of the Bible in making the inspired translation.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

The Book of Mormon came from the press during the week of March 18–25, 1830. In a few more days, on April 6, the Church was organized. A few weeks later, in June 1830, we have the earliest revelation associated with the JST. We are familiar with it as the “Visions of Moses” in the Pearl of Great Price, Moses chapter one.² We do not know the exact day in June on which the material was written, but it was in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and chronologically would be just before Doctrine and Covenants 25.³

Fortunately, the prepublication manuscript of the JST has been preserved. It is in the possession of the Community of Christ (formerly the RLDS Church) in Independence, Missouri, and through the graciousness of the Community of Christ Historian’s Office we have been able to examine it. I have found the manuscript to be in good condition and readable. It is very informative as to the history of the translation because it contains a number of dates showing when certain portions of the Bible translation were in process. These dates, along with the varying styles of known handwriting, reflecting the services of different scribes, have enabled us to identify certain relationships with the Doctrine and Covenants that otherwise would have escaped us.

After presenting the material that we call the “Visions of Moses” (June 1830), the succeeding pages of the manuscript contain what we know as JST Genesis 1–5 (Moses 2–5), which should be placed in proximity to Doctrine and Covenants 29. Since exact dates are not given in the manuscripts of either these chapters of Genesis or Doctrine and Covenants 29, the placing of these has to be approxi-

mate. The chapters from Genesis were received and recorded sometime between June 1830 and October 1830, and thus very likely previous to the reception of section 29.

The subjects of these chapters of JST Genesis have to do with the spiritual and temporal creations, agency, the rebellion of Lucifer, the Fall of Adam, and the introduction of the gospel to Adam and his posterity. The doctrinal emphasis of these topics is clear and prominent in the JST but is almost totally lacking in any other Bible.

In the Genesis account the principles are woven into story form involving several chapters, and they tell of the events of the Garden of Eden, Satan's rebellion, his temptation of Adam and Eve, and their eating the forbidden fruit and being ushered out the garden. In contrast, the material in Doctrine and Covenants 29:30–45 is a brief statement of doctrinal principles—without the story—actually a summary of the doctrines found in the longer narrative of JST Genesis 1–5.

A further point needs to be made in this comparison. As a Church, our main access to the early chapters of JST Genesis has been through the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. When the book of Moses was printed therein, the Church did not have access to the original manuscripts and thus the text was obtained from printed sources that did not have the dates of the various chapters. In the 1880 edition of Moses, chapters 2–8 were incorrectly identified as having been received by Joseph Smith in December 1830. This dating continued in subsequent editions. This was an unfortunate error, first because no one suspected it was an error, and second because it prevented readers from seeing the true relationship that existed with the Doctrine and Covenants. Access to the originals has shown us the true dates and made the foregoing discussion relative to Doctrine and Covenants 29 possible. With the printing of the new edition of the scriptures by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1981, the correct dates have been placed in the book of Moses. Thus, for maximum comprehension, JST Genesis 1–5 (Moses 2–5) should be read just prior to a study of Doctrine and Covenants 29, since that appears to be the order in which they were received.

The historical relationship between JST Genesis and Doctrine and Covenants 29 begins a procedure repeated in later revelations. The pattern shows that many of the concepts contained in the Doctrine

and Covenants were first presented to the mind of the Prophet during his translation of the Bible, and were actually first recorded therein. Later many of these subjects were enlarged upon and appeared as parts of various sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. We will examine other examples.

THE REVELATIONS CONCERNING THE BUILDING OF A LATTER-DAY ZION

An extensive revelation about Enoch and his people was given to Joseph Smith in December 1830 while he and Sidney Rigdon were translating from the fifth chapter of the King James Version of Genesis. Chronologically this came after Doctrine and Covenants section 35 and before section 37. This revelation, called in early Latter-day Saint literature the “Prophecy of Enoch,” deals with the ministry of Enoch, his faith in Jesus Christ, his preaching of the gospel, his city which was called Zion, the righteousness of his people, the fact that there were no poor among them, the taking of the people into heaven, and a declaration that they would return to the earth in the last days and be joined with the New Jerusalem that would be built upon the earth. This information about Enoch contains many items of history and doctrine of particular interest to the Latter-day Saints because it deals with the work of the Lord on the earth in our day—the establishment of latter-day Zion.

Consider the situation of the Church in December 1830. What did anyone in the Church know about Enoch, or the New Jerusalem, or the city of Zion or any of these things at that time? We certainly cannot learn much from the King James Version about Enoch or his city of Zion, or the laws that governed the people of Zion. The King James Version does not even say Enoch had a city, or that his people were called “Zion,” or that his people were translated. The entire offering in the Bible about Enoch can be read in less than two minutes and consists of only nine verses totaling thirty-eight lines of type, found in Genesis 5:18–24, Hebrews 11:5, and Jude 1:14–15. All of that together would amount to about three-fourths of one column of print in a Bible. The Book of Mormon does not mention or allude to Enoch at all.

The Church in 1830 was entirely dependent on a new revelation in order to know anything substantial about Enoch, his ministry, the

people of his city (Zion), or their laws. However, the Lord was about to reveal to the Church much about Enoch and the laws pertaining to both the ancient and the future Zion. The first introduction to these things was in November and December 1830 while the Prophet was translating from Genesis. In the next few months came the revelations in Doctrine and Covenants 42–43, 45–51, and 57–59 (February–August 1831). Can you see what a marvelous prelude the prophecy of Enoch in JST Genesis chapter 7 (Moses 7) was in laying the foundation for these later revelations? In length alone it is impressive. The information about Enoch and Zion, as revealed to Joseph Smith in November and December 1830 while he was translating the Bible, is eighteen times as long as all of the Enoch material that is contained in the King James Version. Thus, if we want to get a correct historical perspective of how the Lord educated His Prophet and His people about Zion, we must first read the revelations that were received while Joseph was translating the Bible. This is perfectly proper, because that is the order in which they were given. It is only in publishing them in different books that we have created an artificial separation between JST 6–7 and Doctrine and Covenants 42–59. In other words, if one is studying the Doctrine and Covenants and wishes to get a proper orientation about the sections dealing with consecration and the establishment of Zion and the New Jerusalem, an appropriate procedure would be to first study JST Genesis 6–7 (Moses 6–7) about Enoch and his people who were called Zion, their laws, their absence of poverty, and their glory, before reading Doctrine and Covenants 38–59. From the vantage point of the information about Enoch and Zion, as first presented in the translation of the Bible, the next twenty sections or so of the Doctrine and Covenants fall neatly into place. JST Genesis 7 is an overview of the glory and greatness of Enoch’s Zion given to the Church as a prelude before the Lord revealed in detail the laws and requirements that would enable the Latter-day Saints to build a similar Zion.

Note this sequence: In October 1830 (D&C 32) the Lord sends Oliver Cowdery and others to Missouri. In November and December in New York, the Lord reveals extensive information about Enoch and his Zion while the Prophet is translating Genesis. Later in December (D&C 37) the Lord tells the Prophet to move to Ohio, which he does in January 1831. In February (D&C 42) the Lord

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promises that in due time the exact spot for the city of Zion shall be revealed. Also, in this same revelation the law of consecration and other economic provisions that pertain to Zion are set forth. In June 1831 several of the elders are sent to Missouri. In July a conference is held in Missouri and the site for the city of Zion or the New Jerusalem is at last made known (D&C 57). Thus, we see in the winter and spring of 1830 to 1831, the Lord was about to reveal the law that pertains to Zion so that Zion could be established and the New Jerusalem could be built. That is, before He gave the particulars outlining the details of the law for use in this Church, He gave to Joseph Smith and to the Church an informative overview and historical backdrop or pattern by means of the “prophecy of Enoch” obtained in November and December 1830 while the Prophet was translating the Bible.

The Enoch material from Genesis gave them the “big picture,” or the necessary perspective. This is borne out by various comments in the Doctrine and Covenants revelations. For example, there is a reference to Enoch in Doctrine and Covenants 38:4 that says, “I am the same which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom.” This passage, dated January 2, 1831, would hardly be meaningful without the information about Enoch and his translated city, which had just been obtained a few days before from the JST. Two months later, in March 1831, the Lord again makes reference to Enoch and his city. This is a very pointed reference to the JST Enoch material and says, “Wherefore, hearken ye together and let me show unto you even my wisdom—the wisdom of him whom ye say is the God of Enoch, and his brethren, who were separated from the earth, and were received unto myself—a city reserved until a day of righteousness shall come—a day which was sought for by all holy men, and they found it not because of wickedness and abominations” (D&C 45:11–12).

Both of these passages in the Doctrine and Covenants would be deprived of much of their meaning if they had not been preceded by the information in JST Genesis; without the JST these Doctrine and Covenants comments would have no reference since the King James Version offers none of this information about Enoch or his Zion.

We would have a clearer, richer, fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the way this dispensation was unfolded if we were

to take the revelations received during the translation of the Bible and place them in their proper chronological order between the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. For example, Moses 1 would be just before section 25; JST Genesis 1–5 (Moses 2–5) would be just before section 29; JST Genesis 6 (Moses 6) would be just before section 35; and JST Genesis 7 (Moses 7) would be just before section 37. We were not able to think of this idea until quite recently because we did not have access to the original JST manuscripts and did not know the dates that are written thereon.

THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

In Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28, the age of accountability is explained as beginning at the age of eight years, at which time it is stated that baptism should be administered and that parents have a responsibility to teach this to their children. This is the only mention of this in the Doctrine and Covenants and is dated November 1831. However, the eight-year-old age of accountability is recorded in the JST in connection with Genesis 17:11. According to the dates on the JST manuscript, this was recorded sometime between February 1831 and April 1831 and was received, therefore, from six to nine months earlier than it appears in the Doctrine and Covenants.

A careful reading of Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28 demonstrates that the declaration of the eight-year-old accountability at that instance does not sound like a “first-time” announcement anyway, but more like a reaffirmation or a reminder. And indeed that was the case, for, as we have seen, the concept was already written in the translation of the Bible many months before it was reiterated in the Doctrine and Covenants. Without the original JST manuscripts which contain the dates, we would never have been able to reconstruct this relationship which provides a broader background to this pan of the Doctrine and Covenants.

PRESERVATION OF ANIMAL LIFE

A prohibition against the people of the Lord wasting or unnecessarily taking animal life is given in both the JST and the Doctrine and Covenants. The dates of these two sources are not exact, but are close together in 1831, with the stronger evidence that the JST was given first.

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Genesis 9 recounts instructions from the Lord to Noah soon after the flood, dealing with human and animal life. Note the comparison of the King James Version (KJV) and the JST.

KJV, Genesis 9:

- 3 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.
- 4 But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.
- 5 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

JST, Genesis 9:

- 9 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.
- 10 But, *the blood of all flesh which I have given you for meat, shall be shed upon the ground, which taketh life thereof, and the blood ye shall not eat.*
- 11 And surely, *blood shall not be shed, only for meat, to save your lives; and the blood of every beast will I require at your hands.* (Bible appendix; emphasis added)

The emphasis against wasting animal life and flesh is totally lost in the KJV but comes across clearly in the JST, and it even calls for man having to give an account for the taking of animal life.

The manuscripts of the JST place all of Genesis chapters 7–24 (which would include this material) between December 1830 and April 1831. Intervening chapters have to be within these dates. Since we know Joseph Smith did not translate during January,⁴ a conclusion tends toward chapter 9 being sometime in February or March 1831.

In March 1831 the revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 49 was received, which contains this statement about not wasting animal life: “For, behold, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance. . . . And wo be unto man that sheddeth blood or that wasteth flesh and hath no need” (D&C 49:19, 21).

Taken together, the JST and the Doctrine and Covenants give the reader a view that man has a stewardship for the animal kingdom. The dating of these two utterances draws our attention to their complementary relationship.⁵

THE VISION OF THE DEGREES OF GLORY

In the process of the translation, the Prophet, with Sidney Rigdon as scribe, came to the fifth chapter of John in the New Testament. It was while translating this chapter and pondering over verse 29 about the Resurrection of the just and the unjust that the vision of the degrees of glory was revealed. The relationship of the JST to this revelation can be seen in the following excerpts. In his journal the Prophet recorded: "Upon my return from Amherst conference, I resumed the translation of the Scriptures. From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of man had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled. It appeared self-evident from what truths were left, that if God rewarded every one according to the deeds done in the body, the term 'Heaven,' as intended for the Saints' eternal home, must include more kingdoms than one. Accordingly, while translating St. John's Gospel, myself and Elder Rigdon saw the following vision."⁶

Within the revelation we read the following: "For 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, which was given unto us as follows—speaking of the resurrection of the dead, concerning those who shall hear the voice of the Son of Man: and shall come forth; they who have done good, in the resurrection of the just; and they who have done evil, in the resurrection of the unjust. Now this caused us to marvel, for it was given unto us of the Spirit. And while we meditated upon these things, the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about" (D&C 76:15–19).

THE JST AS A FORERUNNER

Based on the line of thinking given in this article, it is evident that many of the important doctrines and practices of this Church were made known to the Prophet Joseph Smith during the course of his

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translation of the Bible and were subsequently incorporated into the later revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. The reason the Kirtland period was such a great revelatory period may certainly be because it was the time in which the Prophet was engaged in the translation of the Bible. Time prohibits a discussion of each instance, but this concept includes revelations on at least the following subjects: the New Jerusalem, plural marriage, Zion, powers of the priesthood, quorums and councils in the Church, quorum organization and duties, the Fall of Adam, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the spirit world, resurrection, exaltation, age of accountability, agency, and the nature of the devil, of man, and of God.

In addition to the doctrinal associations discussed in this paper, the Doctrine and Covenants has other close ties to the JST. The selection of Sidney Rigdon as scribe is given in Doctrine and Covenants 35:20. Interestingly, at this same time (December 1830) the manuscript of the JST begins to be in Rigdon's handwriting. Instructions to pause temporarily (see D&C 37:1), to resume translating (see D&C 73:3), to hasten the work (see D&C 93:53), or to publish the translation (see D&C 94:10; 104:58; 104:89) are also found in the Doctrine and Covenants. A perusal of the headnotes and the footnotes of the 1981 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants shows that there are many relationships of the Doctrine and Covenants to the JST.

CONCLUSION

What, then, is the conclusion to the whole matter? That the Prophet's work with the Bible was a primary source for much of the doctrinal content and the instructional information of the Doctrine and Covenants. Consequently, one could not adequately understand either the background or the content of those parts of the Doctrine and Covenants 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 they give the reader insight as to how divine revelation comes. Underlying the whole process is the bold demonstration that revelation comes through a careful study of the scriptures. As the Prophet labored with the translation of the Bible, additional revelation was given to him. That this is one of the purposes of the JST is stated in Doctrine and Covenants 45:60–62, wherein the

Lord said in effect, if you want more knowledge, translate the New Testament, for in it “all these things shall be made known.” Thus we see enacted a gospel truth: when we study the revelations already given, new revelation comes to enlarge our spiritual understanding. And that is, after all, our reason for searching the scriptures.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 324.
2. The reader is reminded that the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price is an extract from the JST up to JST, Genesis 8:18.
3. December 1830 was the correct date for the material known as Moses 7, but chapters 2–6 were earlier and chapter 8 was later.
4. This conclusion is reached by combining the statement in Doctrine and Covenants 37:1 (December 1830), which instructed the Prophet not to translate further until he had moved to the Ohio (where he arrived on February 4, 1831). Doctrine and Covenants 42:56–58, received on February 9, 1831, instructed him to continue with the translation. Thus it appears he did not translate during January 1831.
5. At another time the Prophet expressed the view that men should not needlessly kill animals and that the animal race will not lose its vicious disposition as long as the servants of God make war upon it (see Smith, *Teachings*, 71).
6. 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), 1:245.