
THE SAVIOR'S REJECTION: INSIGHTS FROM THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION

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The rejection of Jesus brings sadness to disciples in every age. Why do some hear His voice while others seem impervious? Why do some receive His gospel and later fall away? How could those of Jesus' day who listened to His sermons, witnessed His miracles, and saw His compassion not recognize Him as the promised Messiah? When they did recognize Him, why did some both reject His saving mission and subsequently seek His death? In a moving lament near the end of His mortal ministry, the Savior reflected on the people's lack of willingness to come unto Him: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38).¹ Mormon likewise anguished as he looked over his fallen people: "O ye fair ones, how could ye

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1. See other variations in 3 Nephi 10:4-6; D&C 10:65-66; 29:1-2; 43:24-25.

have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!" (Mormon 6:17; see also vv. 16–22). In the current biblical record, questions regarding the rejection of Jesus are difficult to answer without the enlightenment of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST).²

Aside from the JST, other Bible translations give several apparent causes for the rejection of Jesus in the meridian of time (incidentally, similar reasons were later employed to reject the whole of Christianity). It is recorded that conflict with the Savior and His teachings primarily centered around charges that He (a) blasphemed God by His declaration of divine sonship,³ (b) contradicted the supposed rights of divine inheritance through "the chosen lineage,"⁴ (c) did not fully honor the Mosaic laws and ritual,⁵ (d) profaned the temple and challenged those who governed its practices,⁶ and (e) did not meet the expected image of a Davidic deliverer from foreign oppression.⁷ In time,

2. In response to a commandment from God, the Prophet undertook an inspired translation of the King James Version of the Bible (KJV). The endeavor occupied much of his time from 1831 to 1833. Periodically thereafter until his death, the prophet sought unsuccessfully to publish the "new translation" (see Robert J. Matthews, "Joseph Smith's Efforts to Publish His Translation," *Ensign*, January 1983, 57–64). The translation manuscripts subsequently were obtained by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ) and first published in 1867 with the title *Holy Scriptures*. After 1936 the subtitle *Inspired Version* was added and became the common title used by members of both The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the RLDS church until the 1979 publication of an LDS edition of the King James Bible when the acronym *JST* was adopted.

3. Examples of this charge are found in Matthew 26:63–66; John 5:18; 6:35–69; 10:30–33; 19:6–7; Acts 5:30–33; 6:11; 7:55–59.

4. See examples in Matthew 3:9; John 8:31–40.

5. See examples in Matthew 5:17; 15:1–4; Mark 7:1–5; John 5:6–10; Acts 6:11–14.

6. See Matthew 21:12–16, 23; John 2:13–22; Acts 7:47–52.

7. See background and examples for this charge in Psalm 72:1–4; Isaiah 9:2–7; 46:3–4; Matthew 21:5–11; 27:11, 27–36; John 12:13; 18:31–37; 19:14–15, 19–22; Jacob 4:14.

frequent clashes over these spurious accusations became the rationale for rejection. Yet in light of the Restoration these charges were both incorrect and absurd. Jesus is the Firstborn and Only Begotten of the Father, who brought honor to His Father and did only those things given Him to do. He who was the "giver" of the law and who fulfilled it perfectly; who is the living temple and owner of all earthly temples built in righteousness to His name—how could He dishonor God and the law? This is Jesus, who holds the power to deliver us not only from temporal oppression but from the chains of sin.

In contrast with other translations, Joseph Smith's translation makes it clear that these charges against the Savior were surface symptoms of deeper spiritual problems among those who rejected Him. Though the charges were legitimate points around which conflict and rejection arose, the JST emphasizes that they became contentious issues as an outgrowth of underlying personal and collective transgression. To understand why the Savior was rejected, these more significant problems must be identified and their consequences understood.

The JST text clarifies that two causes of rejecting the gospel and the Savior are personal transgression and failing to hearken to living prophets. As the Savior explained in Matthew 13:1–9, sin causes hard hearts, dull ears, and blind eyes. Without the Spirit, hearers may not receive even the most sublime message nor recognize the most divine messenger, until repentance has worked its miracle of humbled hearts and opened eyes.

In contrast to rejection growing out of personal sin is the Savior's assurance, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Every mortal is given the Spirit of Christ that "he may know good from evil . . . and [be] persuade[d] to believe in Christ" (Moroni 7:16). "And every

one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father" (D&C 84:47).

The following JST citations demonstrate significant transgression in those who rejected Jesus. They focus on the conditions of personal sin and show the effects of failure to accept and follow the living prophets. These two conditions are tightly interwoven. Each leads to the other, and both spiral out of control if left without the intervention of repentance. In the following sections, I first summarize main points illuminated by the JST and then cite the sources from which those points are drawn. All citations follow the convention of showing JST additions to the KJV text in bold italics, while deletions of text are shown by strike-through.

REJECTION OF LIVING PROPHETS IS REJECTION OF JESUS

The first reference, Matthew 3:7*d*, records John the Baptist's denunciation of the disingenuous Pharisees and Sadducees who questioned his authority and criticized his teachings. In current translations, it appears that these scoffers receive a scathing rebuke prematurely upon their arrival to question John at the river Jordan where he was baptizing. The JST, however, reveals that this was not their first encounter with John. His harshness is more understandable when we know they had previously heard and rejected both John and the gospel he preached.

Matthew 3:7*d* (JST, Matthew 3:34-36)⁸

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them,

8. Each citation in this article cites the LDS edition KJV reference with a footnote letter (e.g., Matthew 3:7*d*). This letter leads the reader to the corresponding JST reference at the foot of the page. Shorter JST passages appear in the footnotes; lengthier passages appear in the appendix (e.g., JST, Matthew 3:34-36, appendix), located on pages 797-813 of the LDS KJV, just before the map section.

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Why is it that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of whom I am sent to bear record; and for your sins ye have no cloak. Repent, therefore, and bring forth ~~therefore~~ fruits meet for repentance:

And think not to say within yourselves, ~~We have Abraham to our father;~~ *We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham;* for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Even at this early stage of proclaiming the gospel and coming of Christ, certain Pharisees and Sadducees hypocritically determined that their collective genealogical right to blessings outweighed their obligation to respond personally to the Spirit. Their hardness of heart and blindness of eye grew out of sin, from which John invited them to repent.

The next two passages contain Jesus' declaration that those who rejected Him and John never truly accepted past prophets either. Additionally, these JST changes demonstrate that the rejection of living prophets destroys the bridge by which one gains access to the Savior Himself; hence, rejection of the prophets is rejection of the Master who sent them.⁹

Luke 14:34a (JST, Luke 14:35–37)

~~Salt is~~ *Then certain of them came to him, saying, Good Master, we have Moses and the prophets, and*

9. See related passages in Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16; and 3 Nephi 28:34. With trademark candidness, Brigham Young addressed a group of the Prophet Joseph Smith's critics, saying, "You cannot destroy the appointment of a prophet of God, but you can cut the thread that binds you to the prophet of God, and sink yourselves to hell." Harold B. Lee, Conference Report, April 1963, 81; see also Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 310.

whosoever shall live by them, shall he not have life? And Jesus answered, saying, Ye know not Moses, neither the prophets; for if ye had known them, ye would have believed on me; for to this intent they were written. For I am sent that ye might have life. Therefore I will liken it unto that salt which is good; but if the salt ~~have~~ has lost ~~his savour~~ its savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

Matthew 21:32d and 33a (JST, Matthew, 21:32-34)

For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, *and bore record of me*, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, *afterward*, when ye had seen ~~it~~ *me*, repented not ~~afterward~~, that ye might believe him.

~~Hear another parable:~~ *For he that believed not John concerning me, cannot believe me, except he first repent. And except ye repent, the preaching of John shall condemn you in the day of judgment.*

And again, hear another parable; for unto you that believe not, I speak in parables; that your unrighteousness may be rewarded unto you.

The teachings of John and Jesus in the above passages show that there was no cloak or legitimate justification to cover their sin of failure to hearken to John, and thus they could not receive Jesus. Those who accept past prophets are prepared and inclined to accept succeeding prophets. Because rejection of prophets is the same as rejecting the God who sent those prophets, then the people in question would have to repent of not believing John before they could accept Jesus. Clearly, their unbelief was correlated to their unrighteousness.

UNREPENTANT TRANSGRESSION LEADS TO REJECTION OF DIVINE MESSENGERS

Why did those featured in the foregoing passages reject past prophets, as well as John the Baptist and Jesus? The following

citations show that despite outward appearance, inward spiritual corruption was prevalent among those who failed to receive the true gospel and its messengers. Consequently, their failure to repent of these sins resulted in a spiritual dullness. This was a much more important factor in failing to recognize the true Savior than mistaken cultural expectations and conditioned responses that may be implied in the KJV.

The Pharisees frequently clashed with Jesus and His disciples over religious practices. After two such confrontations, the JST clarifies that there was more pomp than substance to their contentions. The Pharisees had in fact kept neither the law of Moses nor the ordinances associated with them and thereby had also rejected the prophets who transmitted them.

Matthew 9:15b (JST, Matthew 9:18–21)

Then said the Pharisees unto him, Why will ye not receive us with our baptism, seeing we keep the whole law?

But Jesus said unto them, Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law.

I receive not you with your baptism, because it profiteth nothing.

For when that which is new is come, the old is ready to be put away.

Mark 7:10a (JST, Mark 7:10–12)

Full well is it written of you, by the prophets whom ye have rejected.

They testified these things of a truth, and their blood shall be upon you.

Ye have kept not the ordinances of God; For Moses said, ~~Honour~~ Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death of the transgressor, as it is written in your law; but ye keep not the law;

The next passage is located at the conclusion of the Sermon

on the Mount when Jesus directed the disciples to teach the people regarding their propensity to judge and condemn others unrighteously and hypocritically (see Matthew 7:1a).

Matthew 7:3a (JST, Matthew 7:4-8)

And *again, ye shall say unto them, Why is it that thou beholdest ~~thou~~ the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, ~~behold,~~ canst not behold a beam in thine own eye? *And Jesus said unto his disciples, Beholdest thou the scribes, and the Pharisees, and the Priests, and the Levites? They teach in their synagogues, but do not observe the law, nor the commandments; and all have gone out of the way, and are under sin. Go thou and say unto them, Why teach ye men the law and the commandments, when ye yourselves are the children of corruption?*

~~Thou hypocrite~~ *Say unto them, Ye hypocrites, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

Hypocrisy is a damning sin. It creates an environment that retards the progress of discipleship in both the hypocrite and those who cannot see past the show; all pomp and no substance cannot bless either. The above-mentioned incidents occurred in the earlier portion of Jesus' ministry. But the following passage, given on the final day of His public ministry, shows that His persistent striving with those in question had not penetrated the hardness of their hearts.

Matthew 23:24a (JST, Matthew 23:21)

Ye blind guides, ~~which~~ *who* strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel; *who make yourselves appear unto men that ye would not commit the least sin, and yet ye yourselves, transgress the whole law.*

Taken together, these passages inform us that it is simply

not possible to accept and devote ourselves to a law as being divine without accepting the giver of the law as divine. If we fail to do the latter, we never really believed the former; hence, true followers of the "old" are always prepared for the "new." The iniquity of those being addressed is ultimately characterized by the Savior as a complete transgression of the "whole law." They had not kept the law and the commandments nor the ordinances associated with them. Jacob delighted in proving to the people the truth of the coming of Christ. He taught that "all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him [Christ]" (2 Nephi 11:4). Since the laws and ordinances point to Christ, how could those in question have fully observed them but failed to recognize the Messiah? To make matters worse, they hypocritically tried to cover their lack of belief, faithfulness, and disobedience so as to appear to others as being innocent of the least sin.

EFFECTS OF HYPOCRISY AND CORRUPTING THE SCRIPTURES

The final four citations note the extreme state of spiritual degradation to which those rejecting Jesus had descended. The JST focuses on the effects of hypocrisy and tampering with holy scripture in those who should have been edified as they sought the kingdom of God on the earth. Finally, the Savior exposes the faithless thoughts and willful rebellion of these adversaries. How revealing to find that the leaders in question had persisted in sin so long that they had actually lost their belief in the very God they accused Jesus of blaspheming.

Matthew 23:15a (JST, Matthew 23:12)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than *he was before, like unto yourselves.*

Matthew 23:36a (JST, Matthew 23:34–35)

Ye bear testimony against your fathers, when ye, yourselves, are partakers of the same wickedness.

Behold your fathers did it through ignorance, but ye do not; wherefore, their sins shall be upon your heads.

Even in their efforts to proselyte, these leaders had harmed rather than helped converts. Moreover, there was no lack of accountability. All these things were done knowingly and willfully, and therefore those in question were worthy of the Lord's stern rebuke.

Luke 11:52c (JST, Luke 11:53)

Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge, *the fulness of the scriptures*; ye enter not in yourselves *into the kingdom*, and ~~them that~~ those *who* were entering in, ye hindered.

Tampering with the scriptures entails serious and far-reaching effects. Whether the records themselves were corrupted or their full meaning obscured, the result was the same: those wishing to enter the kingdom of God on earth were hindered by lawyers who corrupted the divine word of God and who themselves would not enter the kingdom.

Further insight as to why they would not enter follows:
Luke 16:16a (JST, Luke 16:16–23)

And they said unto him, We have the law, and the prophets ~~were until John~~, but as for this man we will not receive him to be our ruler; for he maketh himself to be a judge over us.

Then said Jesus unto them, The law and the prophets testify of me; yea, and all the prophets who have written, even until John, have foretold of these days.

Since that time, the kingdom of God is preached, and every man *who seeketh truth presseth into it.*

And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail.

And why teach ye the law, and deny that which is written; and condemn him whom the Father hath sent to fulfill the law, that ye might all be redeemed?

O fools! for you have said in your hearts, There is no God. And you pervert the right way; and the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence of you; and you persecute the meek; and in your violence you seek to destroy the kingdom; and ye take the children of the kingdom by force. Woe unto you, ye adulterers!

And they reviled him again, being angry for the saying, that they were adulterers.

Here we see that those "who seeketh truth" do press into the kingdom, but the leaders in question were not seeking the truth; in fact, they denied the existence of God, perverted the right way, and did violence to the kingdom and the meek who sought entrance. All this was done to control the children of God unrighteously.

SUMMARY

Like so many other subjects, the rejection of Jesus in the New Testament is more clearly illuminated by the JST. Current translations primarily preserve the symptoms of Jewish rejection and touch only lightly on the most prominent reasons for the cause. As is, these translations may lead the reader to link much of the rejection to what could otherwise seem almost acceptable, or at least understandable cultural reasons for the failure to recognize Jesus for who He is, the promised Messiah.¹⁰ But in the Joseph Smith Translation, the rejection of the Savior is linked primarily to sin. This relationship

10. In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Jacob teaches: "But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed

highlights an essential principle in the gospel plan: willful and persistent sin diminishes faith, belief, and spiritual sensitivity. Rejection of Jesus, His gospel, and prophets is therefore evidence that personal transgression is present. Such transgression, and its resulting spiritual insensitivity, inevitably manifests itself in rejection of the divine.¹¹ Even now, as in times past, those who contend against the gospel of Jesus Christ (whether from within the Church or outside it) give every reason but the real one for their lack of discipleship. In D&C 84:49–54 the Lord has made it clear that “whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin.”

On the other hand, faithful response to the light granted us leads to recognition and acceptance of Jesus, His gospel, and prophets.¹² In this truth is preserved the courage and confidence necessary to preach Jesus in all the world. If, as current translations indicate, Jesus was rejected by a nation looking for the Messiah but unable to adequately recognize

the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by *looking beyond the mark*, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble . . . [and] by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation” (Jacob 4:14–15; emphasis added). It should be noted that “looking beyond the mark” was consequential (not causal) to their stiffneckedness and rejecting both the words of the prophets and the prophets themselves. Therefore, they began looking for a messiah of their own creation. For more on this, see Robert L. Millet, “Looking Beyond the Mark: Insights from the JST into First-Century Judaism” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Nyman and Millet (Provo, Utah: Religious Study Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 23–50. Also see commentary by Bruce R. McConkie in *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–81), 1:238 and 2:392.

11. Other examples are found in John 3:19–20; Acts 7:51–53; 2 Nephi 25:12; D&C 21:9 and 121:16–19.

12. See elaborations of this principle in Moroni 7:16, 19; D&C 84:36–38, 46–48; Matthew 16:13–18; Acts 17:11–12; 18:28.

Him due to conflicting cultural expectations, then what hope have we to take the gospel to all the world—much of whom have little or no cultural context that would incline them to receive the Savior? If such were the case, how could our members and missionaries hope to share the gospel to varied cultures and peoples of the world to whom even the basics of Christianity are foreign? Lucifer would favor such a dilemma and want to proffer the discouraging idea of a divine Messiah as relative and unrecognizable to many throughout the world. He would like to de-emphasize the importance of personal righteousness and the role of living prophets who lead us to divine truths. Nonetheless, the holy scriptures touched by the divine hand of restoration emphasize that obedience to the promptings of the Spirit leads one to recognize and accept truth more powerfully than culture, time, tradition, and personal past can lead one away. It can overcome all obstacles if the hearts and minds of those encountering it are softened by personal integrity to the light within: "For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit giveth light to *every man* that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, *that hearkeneth* to the voice of the Spirit. And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father" (D&C 84:45–47).¹³

The promise of the gospel is sure and encompassing—all who so desire may recognize eternal truths and be led to the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. The plan of salvation is plain and easy to be understood by all of the children of God who are able to seek truth and conform their lives to be in harmony with that portion granted to them, for the Lord "doeth

13. See also Moroni 7:16–17.

nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him. . . . And we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name" (2 Nephi 26:33; Alma 19:36).¹⁴

14. This article focuses on the salient reasons for the rejection of Jesus in the meridian of time and in any age but in doing so does not suggest that there are no causes other than willful transgression for failure to come unto Christ. In the instances cited, Jesus' clear denunciation of His detractors shows they had agency and adequate knowledge but chose not to come unto Him. They were therefore worthy of His condemnation. There are times, however, when the true gospel is not accessible or conditions exist which may lead to a constriction of agency and therefore a lack of condemnation. For example, such conditions may have existed prior to the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. There can also be situations in individual lives, families, or communities that may obscure exposure to truth or harm individuals in a manner that results in their inability to grasp the gospel or feel the Spirit even when present (e.g., D&C 74:4; 76:75; 93:39; 123:7-8). Additionally, we cannot with our mortal understanding discern elements of "divine timing" wherein the Lord governs when the confirming spirit of testimony is granted to individuals. As mortals, we may not be able to accurately discern reasons for rejection, but the Lord may do so. When He does, it is worth taking note and learning from His dealings with those who reject Him.