

JOSEPH SMITH'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION
AND THE KING JAMES TRANSLATION
IN PARALLEL COLUMNS

Religious Studies Center,
Brigham Young University



Published by the Religious Studies Center and BYU Press, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, in cooperation with Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah.
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Cover and interior design by Emily V. Rogers.

ISBN: 978-1-9503-0421-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021037718

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JOSEPH SMITH'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

This book contains the text of the Bible revision made by Joseph Smith, the Latter-day Saint prophet and founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is based on many years of careful research in the Prophet's original manuscripts and presents the text as he prepared it, but with modernized punctuation and spelling. This is the first printing of the revised Bible in finished form and scripture format with the original chapter and verse divisions created by the Prophet and his scribes. In Joseph Smith's lifetime, he and his contemporaries referred to this work as the New Translation.¹ Since the late 1970s it has most often been called the Joseph Smith Translation.

Joseph Smith viewed revising the Bible to be a branch of his prophetic calling.² In a revelation he recorded in December 1830, the voice of God

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1. For the title "New Translation," see "Books!!!" *Times and Seasons* 1 (July 1840): 140; "History of Joseph Smith (Continued)," *Times and Seasons* 5 (January 1, 1845): 754; 6 (February 15, 1845): 801; "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," pp. 1083, 1093, 1155, 1275, josephsmithpapers.org; and Doctrine and Covenants 124:89.
 2. See Joseph Smith, "History of Joseph Smith (Continued)," *Times and Seasons* 5 (May 1, 1844): 513.

states that by means of the Bible revision, “the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect.”³ Written by a scribe at the top of the first Old Testament manuscript are the words “A Revelation given to Joseph the Revelator.”⁴ The same scribe wrote a few pages later, “A Revelation given to the Elders of the Church of Christ.”⁵ And atop the first New Testament manuscript are the words “translated by the power of God.”⁶ These statements illustrate the respect that those who worked with Joseph Smith on the Bible revision had for it.

The Prophet labored on the Bible project from June 1830 until July 1833. The manuscripts show evidence of an initial dictation of the text followed by refinements he made to it and also the insertion of punctuation, capitalization, and chapter and verse divisions. He called his work with the Bible “correcting”⁷ but most often “translating,” and even “translating the fulness of the scriptures.”⁸ Among the meanings of the verb *translate* in his time were: “carry or remove from one place to another,” “transfer,” “convey from one to another,” and “change.”⁹ It is in light of definitions like these that we can best understand his use of the word. He worked through the entire Bible and made changes in all but fifteen of the books.¹⁰ In some sections he revised extensively, and in others he

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3. Doctrine and Covenants 35:20.
 4. Old Testament Manuscript 1, p. 1, in Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds. *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 83.
 5. Old Testament Manuscript 1, p. 3, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, 86.
 6. New Testament Manuscript 1, p. 1, in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, 159.
 7. “God may correct the scripture by me if he choose.” Discourse, 13 April 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p. [125], josephsmithpapers.org.
 8. “Minute Book 2,” p. 13 (October 25, 1831); josephsmithpapers.org.
 9. See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “translate” and “translation.” Conveying words from one language to another is, of course, also listed among the definitions.
 10. The following books received no changes: Ruth, Ezra, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi, 2 John, and 3 John. Most of those were noted with phrases like this: “Micah—Correct.” Ecclesiastes is the only book not mentioned at all, and at the Song of Solomon, Joseph Smith's scribe wrote the following: “The Songs of Solomon are not Inspired writings.”

made only very few changes. In some instances, primarily in Genesis, he inserted large additions of new text, but in many other places he made small changes to clarify or expand existing words in the King James Bible, which was the common Bible of his time and served as the base text for much of the revision. He dictated the text in full, including passages with no revisions, for the entirety of Genesis 1:1–24:41, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John 1–5. Elsewhere he dictated to his scribes only isolated words or sentences along with the chapter and verse numbers where those changes were to be inserted into the biblical text. He marked insertion points in his printed Bible so typesetters would know where to make the revisions. In all he made changes to approximately 3,600 biblical verses, in addition to adding approximately 10,000 words of new text that has no biblical counterpart.¹¹

The New Translation makes significant contributions to Latter-day Saint beliefs, particularly in the early chapters of Genesis. Key topics in which the Old and New Testament revisions are the source of significant Latter-day Saint beliefs include the nature of God, the universal impact of God's work, the plan of salvation, the character and motives of Satan, the Fall of Adam and Eve, the antiquity of Christianity, the creation of an ideal community called Zion, the purpose of the law of Moses, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In addition, revisions throughout the Bible alter the wording of existing verses in many ways that make the text more clear and understandable.

The Latter-day Saint scriptural book called the Pearl of Great Price contains two excerpts from the New Translation. Selections from the Book of Moses is the revision of Genesis 1:1–6:13, preceded by an account of some visions of the biblical prophet Moses. Joseph Smith—Matthew is the revision of Matthew 23:39–24:51. These are the only parts of the revision that have been canonized, but many additional passages have been placed in Bible footnotes or in a collection of selected verses in Latter-day Saint scriptures in English and other languages.

11. The Prophet made changes in almost 1,100 verses in the Old Testament and in over 2,500 verses in the New Testament.

