

Institute 4-21-20 Honoring of the 200th Anniversary of the First Vision—Answers to Hard Questions in Joseph’s History
Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible: Why, How, What, and When

(Recordings of the past 13 institute classes and handouts are posted on: LynneHiltonWilson.com)

Main Sources on JST: Robert Matthews, *A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary*. Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1975). *BYU Studies* 56:4; “Joseph Smith Translating Genesis.”

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>; others added to text

JST Time Line 1830-1833

- Sept 21, 1831—Moroni quotes Malachi different than KJV
- June 1829—Joseph learned of changes were made to biblical record in 1 Nephi 13:24, 28-29, 39; 14:23
- Jun-Oct 1830—Genesis 1:1–4:18 (Moses 1:1–5:43), Oliver acted as scribe until he left on mission.
- Oct 21-Nov 30, 1830—Genesis 4:18–5:11 (Moses 5:43–6:18), John Whitmer scribed
- Dec 1, 1830—Genesis 5:12–21 (Moses 6:19–52), Emma Hale Smith scribed
- Dec 2-6, 1830—Moses 6:52–7:1, John Whitmer scribed
- Dec 7, 1830—Genesis 5:22–32 (Moses 7:2–8:30) Sidney Rigdon called as a scribe (D&C 35:20)
- Dec30, 1830—D&C37:1, “It is not expedient in me that ye should translate any more until ye shall go to the Ohio”
- Jan 18, 1831****Painesville Telegraph* published evidence that John Whitmer arrived in Ohio with draft of changes to Genesis account of the creation
- Feb-Mar 7, 1831—Gen 6(?) - 24:41 (when Rebekah provides water for Abraham’s camels) Sidney scribed
- Mar 8, 1831—D&C 45:60 calls to stop translating the OT and to begin the NT translation now
- Mar 8, 1831—NT begun in Matt 1. Sidney scribed
- Feb 16, 1832—John 5:29, received D&C 76 with Sidney
- Jul 1832—System of recording shortened to only changes
- Jul 1832-Jul 2, 1833—John 7-Malachi; Sidney scribed most of the NT and Fredrick Williams finished OT.
- Aug 1832, Apr 1833—published excerpts from Enoch in Ohio newspaper: *Evening and the Morning Star*
- Jul 2, 1833—Joseph wrote to Missouri, “We this day finished the translating of the Scriptures for which we returned gratitude to our heavenly father” (*JosephSmithPapers.org*)
- 1833 Sidney proof-read against the Bible for publication
- 1835 Portions published in the second Lectures on Faith
- 1851, Franklin D. Richards published Genesis excerpts in *Millennial Star* and British Mission booklet *The Pearl of Great Price*
- 1867 RLDS publication of *Inspired Version* (using OT2)
- 1878 Pearl of Great Price used copy from *Inspired Version* for Book of Moses
- 1880 Canonized Pearl of Great Price which included: *Book of Moses* (JST Genesis 1-4)

Check your Sources

You don’t have to be a scholar to be wise in selecting accurate sources for your questions and answers. Be careful what you trust. Here are some I trust:

*<https://bookofmormoncentral.org/> John W. Welch and I started this web site for this very purpose—to have a scholarly, honest place to find carefully researched answers to nearly all of the 400+ attacks against the Book of Mormon. Please use it to find your answers. Some answers will be easily found by watching a podcast, others you’ll need to dig into our archives of thousands of books. Also see
*JopsehSmithPapers.com *MHA=Mormon History Assoc.
*BYU Studies; * Interpreter *FAIRMormon
*Neal A. Maxwell Institute *Illinois Press
*Gospel Topics Essays (ChurchofJesusChrist.org)
*Encyclopedia of Mormonism *RSC=Religious Study Center

It is really sad and unnecessary for anyone to step into the many historical and theological rat-traps set to injure faith. Recently, too many people have digested the satanic sewage of the “**CES Letter[s]**.” I added the [s] because it is now a thriving money-making business of wolves dressed in sheep's clothing. Frankly, the CES Letters are sophomoric and silly in their attempt to pretend to be accurate and scholarly. For detailed answers, I’d start with:
**FAIRMormon <https://www.fairmormon.org/blog/2019/09/30/fairmormon-conference-podcast-43-scott-gordon-ces-letter-proof-or-propaganda>.

****Painesville Telegraph*

January 18, 1831

Mormonism — A young gentleman by the name of *Whitmer*, arrived here last week from Manchester, N. Y. the seat of wonders, with a new batch of revelations from God, as he pretended, which have just been communicated to Joseph Smith. As far as we have been able to learn their contents, they are a more particular description of the creation of the world, and a history of Adam and his family, and other sketches of the ante-deluvian world, which Moses neglected to record.

WHY did Joseph Translate the Bible?

Altering the Bible was not an action that was inspired by 19th C. Americans. As discussed in previous lessons, most of the new citizens not only believed the Bible was infallible, but they valued the text as their source of authority, the Spirit, and knowledge.

From 1777 to 1833 there were more than 500 separate editions of the Bible published in America, but none added to or took away from the sacred text (Nyman and Millet, *The Joseph Smith Translation*, 25). Joseph's claim that there were errors that needed to be changed was highly offensive—let alone altering more than 3,000 verses. This is another issue where Joseph did not fit into his environment. It will not be for several decades that textual biblical scholarship arises in Germany, where they point out discrepancies between authors. Even translations into modern languages did not add phrases and chapters, or cut out words.

The Lord told Joseph “why” he wanted him to translate or offer a new rendition of the Bible in June 1830. Even before, that while translating 1 Nephi 13:24, 28-29, 39; 14:23 Joseph learned that the Bible needed repairing. Not only was there a loss of priesthood, ordinances, and documents, but essential teachings about God, the fall, atonement, repentance, and the Spirit had also been lost. Much vital information was still to be restored. In the *History of the Church*, Joseph said he felt it was “a branch of my calling” (HC, 1.238). Six months later when Sidney in Dec 1830, the Lord explained that he wanted to reveal “the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect” (D&C 35:20). We needed clarifying scripture for our salvation.

In early 1832, Joseph explained: “From sundry revelations which have 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.” In a sermon in Nauvoo, Oct 15, 1843, Joseph explained: “I believe the bible, as it ought to be, as it came from the pen of the original writers” (Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 256).

HOW Did He Translate?

The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* described Joseph's process as “a revelatory experience using only an English text . . . [which] appears that he would read from the KJV and dictate revisions to a scribe” (2.765). This explanation is a summary of first hand references from Joseph himself, the scribes, and by examining the two original manuscripts. When Orson Pratt asked Joseph why did he not use the Urim and Thummim as he did for the Book of Mormon, “Joseph explained to him that the experience he had acquired while translating the Book of Mormon by the use of the Urim and Thummim had rendered him so well acquainted with the Spirit of Revelation and Prophecy, that in the translating of the New Testament he did not need the aid that was necessary in the 1st instance” (*Minutes of the School of the Prophets*). This also helps to explain why Joseph initially used the golden plates, but later did not as we discussed in earlier lessons.

We also mentioned earlier when discussing May 15, 1829, Joseph's statement about the gift of revelation after his baptism: “Our minds being now enlightened we began to have the Scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us, in a manner which we never could attain to previously” (*JosephSmithPapers.org*, History, ~June-Oct 1839, 1). Joseph's intense scripture study during these three years became at a time of immense revelation. It was the JST that opened up most of the questions that became doctrinal additions to the canonized revelations received after June 1830. Doctrines as important as the kingdoms of glory came while translating the NT. The original manuscript of John 5:29 has an ink blot and pen drop right where the vision opened up to Sidney. The correlation between Joseph's Bible translation opened the way for much of the revelations in the D&C. I hope the same can be said about our scripture study.

Initially, as Joseph read the Bible and felt inspired to add or take away words, his scribe wrote every word down. From Genesis 1-24 and Matthew through John 6, the entire biblical text was written out in full (even when some chapters had no changes). From that point on, after John 6, only the changes were written out in full, with markings in the Bible to notify the scribe that changes were made. This quicker system was not complete until the scribe later wrote out the text for publication.

WHAT is the JST or Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible?

Joseph's translation of the Bible did not start with its original languages of Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT) as technical translations do. In this way, the JST is more of a revision of certain passages. Many Joseph felt inspired to change, others were just modernizing the grammar. As we study the things Joseph felt inspired to change, we can observe three trends:

1. He felt pure inspiration and recorded the words that came to him (i.e. D&C 76. Moses 1, 6, 7, 8; etc.)
2. He wanted to make it clear in English and added a first name to a pronoun, or modernized the English occasionally (i.e. changing “what” to “who,” or “greet each other with a holy kiss” to “a holy salutation.” These are only in our footnotes when they make a substantial addition, otherwise they are left out).
3. He received insight to the areas where he had questions (i.e. Matt 24).

The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* explains: “The Prophet Joseph Smith claimed a divine appointment to make an inspired rendition or, as he termed it, a ‘new translation’ of the Bible. . . . After laboring off and on for ten months on the early chapters of Genesis, Joseph Smith received a revelation from the Lord on Mar 7, 1831, directing him to begin work on the New Testament” (2.764). I see the JST as an expansion of the Eighth Article of Faith.

What is its Value? Why do we not use it exclusively?

We can see how important they were to Joseph by watching how great care he and Emma gave to the manuscripts. She highly valued them and kept them with her. When the saints were driven from Missouri, Emma sewed pockets onto her petticoats and

placed them there as she carried her babies across the Mississippi River to Quincy IL, and up to Nauvoo, while Joseph was in Liberty Jail. Emma felt a sense of ownership. Once after she and her home was spared from a fire, she felt that it was the Lord protecting the manuscripts. She had them published as the *Inspired Version*, by the Reorganized Latter Day Saints (RLDS) church in 1867.

We do not use them as our Bible because we did not have access to the manuscripts after 1844. From the time of Joseph's death and the majority of the saints left Nauvoo, it wasn't until 100 years later, in the 1960s, that a new historian of the RLDS church first allowed access for a BYU faculty to examine the manuscripts. Robert Matthews had been studying them for decades and became the first member of our faith to see and study them for a century. His work is stellar and covers over fifty years of scholarship on the JST. This is why it was not until 1981 that we were able to add the JST (Joseph Smith Translation) additions to our edition of the Bible.

What are the many different names for it?

The Doctrine & Covenants referred to Joseph's rewritten portions of his Phinney Edition of the KJV Bible, as a "New Translation" (D&C 124:89). When it was first published by the RLDS in 1867, it was called "*Inspired Version*." When the RLDS allowed our historians permission to publish the text as part of our new scripture edition in 1981, church historians wanted to use Joseph's original title. But the abbreviation, "NT" was not clear as a biblical footnote, because NT is a universal abbreviation for the New Testament. So those in charge chose the abbreviation JST and the name: Joseph Smith Translation.

Was Joseph ever finished?

The prophet worked on his "New Translation" of the Bible through 1844. Evidences of his fine-tuning are seen on the original manuscripts, just as he had the Book of Mormon. He added verses and made spelling changes, and clarifications for a decade after its completion. In August, 1833, Joseph wrote to the Missouri saints: "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." He hoped to be publish it multiple times between 1833 and 1844, but a lack of funding and other priorities delayed the work. He felt it was ready for publication—but that does not mean he did not give other biblical commentary. Just as he published the D&C as it came along, he intended more revelation to follow. The most vital portions were published in the local newspapers. Excerpts from Genesis in the Kirtland, the *Evening and the Morning Star* and later in in Nauvoo, *Times and Seasons*, were used in the Pearl of Great Price as Moses.

What did Joseph actually change?

Of the over 3,000 verses that Joseph changed, we see the Lord using Joseph's scripture study to help him learn what he needed to restore and build the kingdom of God on earth. Fifty-four of the sixty-six books in the Bible were changed. Joseph left twelve unchanged (i.e. Ruth, Ecclesiastes, etc.), with Song of Solomon ignored as he felt it was "not inspired writing." Currently we have 600 footnotes in the Bible from the JST, and that is about one-third of Joseph's translation. Much is in the Pearl of Great Price and hence not repeated—including the Book of Moses and JST Matthew. The grammatical changes are not repeated often, but the footnotes focus on changes that affected the doctrine. For a full account of the JST see either the *Inspired Version*, or a more extensive analysis: Scott H. Faulring and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: Electronic Library* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2011).

Genesis: Focusing on the changes in Genesis, Joseph made far fewer changes in the second half of than he did in the first half. Several of the later chapters received no changes at all: chapters 27, 31, 33–36, 40–43, and 45–47. Then chapter 48 had lots added to Jacob's blessing to Manasseh and Ephraim. Similarly, in Gen 50, when Joseph mourns over his father's death, and he returns to bury Jacob in Palestine, and reassures brothers of his loyalty, until Joseph dies at 110—asking his brothers to return his bones.

In the changes made to the first few chapters of Genesis 1-14 (which we refer to as Moses 1-8), Joseph Smith added major doctrinal content to the existing verses. We find:

- God's purpose in creating humanity and human relationship and responsibility to God (Moses 1)
- Origin and objectives of Satan (Moses 1:12–24)
- Adam knew of the gospel, focused on Christ as our Creator and Redeemer, and preached the same message along with the priesthood, ordinances, covenants, and calling to his posterity and through prophets through each dispensation
- Creation text in first person with multiple changes from Genesis (Moses 2–3)
- Adam and Eve's revised experience in the Garden of Eden (Moses 4)
- Enoch's life and teachings expanded from 119 biblical words to 4,726 in JST Genesis (Moses 6:26–8:2, 19)
- Expanded nature of "covenant and the purpose and destiny of the house of Israel" (Gen 9; 48; 50)
- Melchizedek's role as the Great High Priest following Enoch (Gen 14)

The Prophet Joseph referred to the extra visions of Moses as a "precious morsel" which God revealed, "who well knew our infantile and delicate situation." *Times and Seasons* 4 (January 16, 1843): 71. Kent Brown summarizes the legacy of the Prophet Joseph Smith's additions to Genesis:

I believe that it can be stated safely that Joseph Smith's Genesis text is the most important part of his New Translation of the Bible. Indeed, it is one of the great treasures of Mormonism, containing material that makes the beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unique among Christians. . . . Perhaps the most singular contribution to Latter-day Saint theology is the remarkable assertion in Joseph Smith's Genesis that the Christian gospel was known and believed from the

beginning of human history. This is shown in the explicit depictions of Adam and Eve as Christians, as well as of Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and Moses. Joseph Smith's dramatic reinterpretation of Genesis thus makes it a thoroughly Christian book—another testament of Jesus Christ” (Kent Brown, “Joseph Smith Translating Genesis,” *BYU Studies* 56:4). It was the translation of the Bible that taught Joseph the principles and doctrines of the restoration that needed to be restored (or changed from the rest of Christian thought).

Why so much addition on Enoch?

In the Bible we have very little on this great prophet—only 119 words in the entire Bible. (There is another person named Enoch in Gen 4:17, but he is Cain's son, several centuries earlier—not the prophet Enoch.) No centuries of preaching repentance, economic cooperation, no poor among them, no righteous city translated with Enoch, etc. The Lord inspired Joseph to add approximately 5,240 words on Enoch across the whole Bible. It was very important that Joseph learn the Lord's way of establishing a city of righteousness as Enoch did. Unlike the world's experimentation with communistic options (including the Kirtland “Family” which some converts had previously lived), the Lord's economic program to Enoch was restored to Joseph Smith in first D&C 42. Enoch's record was Joseph's introduction to at least twenty sections of the D&C.

The Lord's timing of the revelation was part of the miracle. The Lord commanded Joseph to stop translating until he moved to Kirtland. There Joseph received through revelation the Law of Consecration just as Enoch had (D&C 42). The timing of the translation corresponded perfectly. The miracle is in the timing!

Unique Information or Features in the JST

1. Jesus healed the servant's ear by touching it *with his finger* (Compare Mk 14:47; 14:53 JST).
2. The disciples fled *because they heard this saying* (Mk 14:50; 14:56 JST).
3. The young man who fled was *a disciple* (Mk 14:51; 14:57 JST).
4. The young man who fled *saved himself from the arresters* (Mk 14:52; 14:57 JST).
5. Jesus answered Pilate, *“Thou sayest truly; for thus it is written of me”* (Mt 27:11; 27:12 JST).
6. Jesus answered Pilate, *“I am, even as thou sayest”* (Mk 15:2; 15:4 JST).
7. Pilate's wife had a *vision* (Mt 27:19; 27:20 JST).
8. Pilate told the Jews, *“See that ye do nothing unto him”* (Mt 27:24; 27:26 JST).
9. Golgotha means *“place of burial”* (Mt 27:33; 27:35 JST; Mk 15:22; 15:25 JST; Jn 19:17; 19:17 JST).
10. In his words from the cross, Jesus expressly forgave only *the soldiers* who crucified him (Lk 23:34; 23:35 JST).
11. Pilate *himself* wrote the title, *“King of the Jews”* (Mt 27:37; 27:39 JST; Mk 15:26; 15:29 JST).

For more information:

- *Scott H. Faulring and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: Electronic Library* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2011).
- *Robert Matthews, *A Plain Translation: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary*. Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1975).
- *Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith's Cooperstown Bible: The Historical Context of the Bible Used in the Joseph Smith Translation,” *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 41–70;
- *Kent P. Jackson and Scott H. Faulring, “Old Testament Manuscript 3: An Early Transcript of the Book of Moses,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 5 (Fall 2004): 113–44;
- *Paul W. Lambert and Thomas A. Wayment, “The Nature of the Pen and Pencil Markings in the New Testament of Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 87–106;
- *Religious Educator, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2009), 169–81; “New Discoveries in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,”
- *Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible,” in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet and Seer*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2010), 51–75.
- *Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Mo.: Department of Religious Education, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1969), 70–193; and altered, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development*, 2d ed. (Independence, Mo.: Herald, 1995), 49–136.