



THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE PLATES OF BRASS, AND THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

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Prophets from the Book of Mormon referred often to biblical events during their sermons. How could they be so familiar with the Old Testament? Why is the version of their accounts more detailed than the one available in our current Old Testament? As recorded by Nephi, the plates of brass contained more information and doctrinal truths than the biblical texts existing today (see 1 Nephi 13:23).

As Latter-day Saints, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” (Article of Faith 1:8). For this reason the Lord commanded the Prophet Joseph Smith to work on a new translation of this sacred record, as another step toward the restitution of all things spoken of by the Apostle Paul (see Acts 3:21).

1. PLAIN AND PRECIOUS TRUTHS REMOVED FROM THE BIBLE

The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors” (*Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1993], 369).

“In a vision narrated by an angel, Nephi was shown the history of the Bible after the New Testament was written. Recorded in 1 Nephi 13 and 14, his is the clearest, most accurate, and most reliable statement regarding the history of the Bible manuscripts that we have any knowledge of at this time. Without the viewpoint of the Book of Mormon, neither scholar nor layman, even in the Church, would sense the magnitude of the depletion of the Bible. . . .

“The angel declared to Nephi that the deletions from the Bible were deliberate, made with intent to deceive and to lead people away from ‘the right ways of the Lord.’ That does not refer to honest errors that translators and copyists make because of human frailty and the difficulties of transcription and translation. That is telling us that soon after the New Testament was written there were persons among the Gentiles who systematically, with wicked motives and evil intent, removed portions of the sacred word and took from the Bible much very important doctrinal information” (Robert J. Matthews, “What the Book of Mormon Tells Us,” in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon: The 1991 Sperry Symposium*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top [1992], 95–96).

“Ours is a story of intrigue. One in which precious jewels are taken from the crown of salvation and worthless stones left in their stead. It is one of betrayal, fraud, deceit, and murder. It is

one in which the words of scripture are changed, and entire books disappear; it is one in which spurious writings become almost as common as the false prophets and teachers who author them. In lieu of truths ‘plain’ to the understanding we now have incomprehensible mysteries; in place of the ‘precious’ we are left with the vulgar; and in the stead of sacred ‘covenants,’ meaningless ritual. The plot is an international one and spans ages. No one who loves truth has been left unaffected by it. Because of it, Nephi told us, ‘an exceedingly great number do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them’ (1 Nephi 13:29)” (Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Restoring Plain and Precious Truths,” in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews [1995], 16).

2. THE PLATES OF BRASS

“The brass plates obtained from Laban contained the five books of Moses (apparently similar to the first five books of the Bible—the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), a record of the Jews from the beginning down to Zedekiah, and the prophecies of the prophets from the beginning down to Jeremiah. (1 Nephi 3:3–20; 5:11–13.) This would explain how the biblical stories were known by the American Indian groups even before the arrival of the Catholic fathers and their Bibles after the time of Columbus. Historians have concluded the American Indians knew the story of the creation, the flood, etc., before the time of Columbus, although they have not been able to explain how the Indians came into possession of this knowledge” (Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* [1976], 98–99).

“The account of the creation and placement of life on earth, as well as the subsequent fall from paradisiacal and Edenic glory, is given in our present biblical record with little detail and even less context. Very frequently the Bible will tell us *what* happened, while the more thorough and complete accounts (as given in the JST or as taught in the brass plates) will tell us additionally *why* it happened” (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 1—First and Second Nephi* [1987], 49).

“The perfected Bible of the future will surely include all that was on the brass plates of Laban. Indeed, Lehi prophesied ‘that these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed. Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time.’ (1 Nephi 5:18–19.)

“More than five hundred years later Alma testified that they should ‘be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon,’ and that they would ‘retain their brightness.’ (Alma 37:4–5.)

“Someday the Lord will raise up a prophet, who will also be a seer and a translator, to whom he will give the brass plates that they may be translated for the benefit and blessing of those in all nations” (Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrinal Restoration,” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet [1985], 15–16).

3. THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

“For December 1, 1831, Joseph Smith wrote the following note in his journal: ‘I resumed the translation of the Scriptures, and continued to labor in *this branch of my calling* with Elder Sidney Rigdon as my scribe.’ [*History of the Church*, 1:238.] This is a most important comment because it reveals how the Prophet himself viewed his work of translating the Bible—it was part of his divine calling as a prophet of God” (Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* [1985], 3).

Key Dates in the History of the JST

- 1829 During the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith learned that many plain and precious things had been removed from the Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:20–40).
- 15 May 1829 At the time of their baptisms, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery experienced a great spiritual outpouring regarding the content of the scriptures (see Joseph Smith—History 1:74).
- 8 Oct. 1829 Joseph and Oliver purchased a large pulpit-style King James Version of the Bible from Egbert B. Grandin in Palmyra, New York, for \$3.75.
- June 1830 Joseph and Oliver began the translation of the Bible; Moses 1 was followed by the inspired translation of Genesis.
- Dec. 1830 Sidney Rigdon joined the Prophet as a scribe (see D&C 35:20); translation of Moses 7 began.
- 7 Mar. 1831 Translation of the Old Testament was interrupted at Genesis 19:35; the Lord commanded the Prophet to begin the translation of the New Testament (see D&C 45:60–61).

- 1831 While translating material concerning Old Testament prophets who had entered into plural marriage, Joseph inquired about and received the revelation on eternal and plural marriage (see D&C 132).
- 16 Feb. 1832 While translating John 5:29, Joseph and Sidney received “The Vision” (see D&C 76).
- 2 Feb. 1833 The translators finished the New Testament and returned to the Old Testament.
- July 1833 The translators finished the translation of the Bible.
- 1833–44 The Prophet Joseph Smith worked until the time of his death to prepare and publish the translation.
- Dec. 1867 The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now known as the Community of Christ) published the first edition of the Joseph Smith Translation, which was called the Holy Scriptures and referred to as the inspired version.
- 1979 The Church released the new LDS edition of the KJV Bible, containing many excerpts from the JST as footnotes and appendix.

“To meet space limitations in selecting JST passages for the LDS edition of the Bible, the following guidelines were used:

- “1. Selections must be doctrinally significant.
- “2. Selections must contribute something not readily apparent in the other standard works, thereby avoiding duplication and saving space for unique JST contributions.
- “3. Priority should be given to passages clarifying the mission of Jesus Christ, the nature of God, the nature of man, the Abrahamic covenant, the priesthood, the antiquity of the gospel, and the latter-day restoration.
- “4. Excerpts up to eight lines in length should be placed in the footnotes, and longer items should appear in a special appendix” (Robert J. Matthews, “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, June 1992, 29).

4. THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE PLATES OF BRASS AND IN THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION

“Book of Mormon prophets make numerous references to what we would call Old Testament matters. There can be no doubt that the knowledge of many of these things came through the information contained on the brass plates. We definitely know this to be true in those instances wherein the brass plates or the prophets of the brass plates are mentioned specifically. We might also suppose that in those cases in

which the brass plates are not mentioned but in which new or unique details are given in the Book of Mormon pertaining to biblical events, the speakers or writers are drawing upon an additional source, of which the brass plates are a prime candidate” (Robert L. Millet, *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon* [1994], 21).

TOPIC	OLD TESTAMENT	BRASS PLATES	JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION	NEW TESTAMENT
Adam and Eve; the Fall	Genesis 3	2 Nephi 2:18–25; Alma 12:22–27; 42:2–10	Moses 4–5	
Enoch	Genesis 5:18–24		Moses 6:21–8:1	Jude 1:14–15
Noah and the Flood	Genesis 6–8	Alma 10:22	Moses 8	
Tower of Babel	Genesis 11	Omni 1:22	JST, Genesis 11	
Abraham	Genesis	Jacob 4:5; Alma 13:15; Helaman 8:16–17	JST, Genesis 15:9–12	John 8:56
Melchizedek	Genesis 14:18–20	Alma 13:14–19	JST, Genesis 14:25–40	Hebrews 7
Jacob (Israel)	Genesis	Alma 46:24–26	JST, Genesis	
Joseph	Genesis 50	2 Nephi 3	JST, Genesis 50:24–38	
Moses	Exodus	1 Nephi 17:24; 22:20–21; Mosiah 13:5; Alma 45:19	Moses 1; JST, Exodus	
The Brazen Serpent	Numbers 21:8–9	2 Nephi 25:20; Alma 33:19–22; Helaman 8:14–15		John 3:14–15
The Ten Commandments	Exodus 20	Mosiah 12:33–13:33		
David and Solomon	2 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 11	Jacob 1:15; 2:23–24	JST, 2 Samuel 12:13; JST, 1 Kings 11	
Isaiah	Isaiah 2–14, 29, 48–54	1 Nephi 20–21; 2 Nephi 6–8; 12–24; 27; Mosiah 14; 3 Nephi 22	Joseph Smith changed 178 verses in Isaiah	

5. CONCLUSION

“The Joseph Smith Translation, or Inspired Version, is a thousand times over the best Bible now existing on earth. It contains all that the King James Version does, plus pages of additions and corrections and an occasional deletion. It was made by the spirit of revelation, and the changes and additions are the equivalent of the revealed word in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants” (Bruce R. McConkie, “The Bible: A Sealed Book,” *A Symposium on the New Testament, 1984 Supplement* [1984], 5).

“There should be no doubt about the current status of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. *It is a member of the royal family of scripture.* While the Joseph Smith Translation does not enjoy the sovereign status of canonized scripture (except those chapters included in the Pearl of Great Price), as a member of the royal family of scripture it should be noticed and *honored* on any occasion when it is present” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Scripture Reading, Revelation, and Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible,” in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored*, ed. Millet and Matthews, 13; italics added).