

Joseph Smith Translating Genesis

Kent P. Jackson

Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible was one of his signature projects as founder and prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (originally called the Church of Christ). He began it sometime in June 1830, just three months after the first copies of the Book of Mormon came out of the bindery of the Howard and Grandin Company in Palmyra, New York. The Bible project lasted three years, until July 1833, when he dictated the last pages and declared the work finished.¹ The venture was formidable, eventually producing seven manuscripts totaling 446 pages. Two of those manuscripts were preliminary drafts, and the remaining five constitute the copy of the entire Bible that Joseph Smith prepared for publication.

The Prophet and his contemporaries called the resulting text the “New Translation,” and he identified his work on it as “translating.”² Yet it was not a Bible translation in the sense of rendering ancient Hebrew

1. Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 119, line 5, in *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible—Original Manuscripts*, ed. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 851.

2. For the title, see “Books!!!” *Times and Seasons* 1 (July 1840): 140; “History of Joseph Smith (Continued),” *Times and Seasons* 5 (January 1, 1844): 754; “History of Joseph Smith (Continued),” *Times and Seasons* 6 (February 15, 1845): 801; “History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1 [2 November–31 July 1842],” 1083, 1093, 1155, 1275, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/search?query=%22new%20translation%22&uri=/published/jsp/expanded/papers/43990773/43990773-0449.xml>; and “Revelation, 19 January 1841 [D&C 124],” 10, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-19-january-1841-dc-124/8> (D&C 124:89).

Kent P. Jackson

In March 1995, I was presented with an opportunity that changed the course of my academic career. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) had offered BYU an invitation to prepare and publish transcriptions of one of the prize RLDS archival collections—the original manuscripts of Joseph Smith’s Bible translation. I was publications director of BYU’s Religious Studies Center (RSC) at the time, and I was asked if the RSC would be interested.



We were. This was an opportunity to bring the Joseph Smith Translation fully to light and make its original pages available to all for study and research.

In accordance with the details of an agreement between the RLDS Church, the LDS Church, and BYU, the RLDS Church archive made available the original manuscripts; the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies scanned and photographed them; the RSC prepared a transcription of all the writing on the documents; the LDS Church archive cleaned, repaired, and deacidified the pages; and the RSC published the research findings and transcriptions in a book.

The result was an 851-page volume published in 2004: *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible—Original Manuscripts*. Seven years later, the BYU Press published an electronic collection that contains the 2004 book and much more, including grayscale and color images of all the manuscript pages. Then, in recent years, the LDS Church’s Joseph Smith Papers website has posted the images and transcriptions for anyone with Internet access to see.

Good research and the better availability of historical documents almost always lead to new discoveries. And often new discoveries necessitate the abandonment of old ideas. This article on Joseph Smith’s translation of Genesis highlights our findings from the original manuscripts and shows that some readings and historical interpretations we once assumed were correct must now be considered inaccurate. Thanks to the availability of the original manuscripts, the process of discovery continues.

and Greek words into a modern language.³ Instead, he was recasting the text into a new form—often creating something new from words already found in the English Bible and sometimes adding whole new narratives and discourses with no biblical counterparts. Latter-day Saints in his own time as well as today have viewed the process and its resulting documents as part of Joseph Smith’s prophetic mission.

Of the various sections of the Bible, Joseph Smith’s Genesis revision has the most complex history as far as the documents are concerned. In this study, I will focus on that history and outline the process by which the Mormon prophet produced his translation of Genesis from the earliest dictation of the text to its final state on the document prepared for publication. I will also show that he intended to publish the translation and how he went about preparing it with that aim in mind.

THE MANUSCRIPTS

To put the translation of Genesis in context, we first must understand the history of the manuscripts on which it was written. The New Translation documents have been known among Latter-day Saints since the days of Joseph Smith, but they have been available for academic study only in the past few decades. When the Prophet died in 1844, they were retained by his widow, Emma Smith. She and the documents remained in Illinois when Brigham Young led the majority of Joseph Smith’s followers to the West, eventually to settle in what became Utah Territory. In the early 1860s, she gave the manuscripts to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS, now Community of Christ), and since then, they have been housed in that church’s archival collection.⁴ None of the participants in the Bible revision—neither Joseph Smith nor any of his scribes—were with the main body of Saints in their westward move.⁵ As a result, Mormons in Utah had very little institutional memory about the revision and no access to its original documents for

3. A contemporary dictionary lists “to interpret; to render into another language” only as the sixth definition of *translate*. The more common usages had to do with conveying something from one place, person, or form to another. See Noah Webster, ed., *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “translate.”

4. For the history of the manuscripts after Joseph Smith’s time, see Ronald E. Romig, “The New Translation Materials since 1844,” in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 29–40.

5. Joseph Smith died in 1844. Scribes Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Emma Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Jesse Gause did not go west, and Frederick G. Williams died in 1842.

well over a century. Joseph Smith III, the Prophet's son, published the revised Bible in 1867. Now commonly called the *Inspired Version*, it was edited heavily for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, and it contains some errors that resulted from misunderstanding the history of the manuscripts.⁶ Chapter and verse divisions were created so the book would be printed to resemble the King James translation. The *Inspired Version* has been in print since then, but the manuscripts themselves were not subjected to serious academic study until many decades later.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Professor Robert J. Matthews of Brigham Young University gained access to the original documents and examined their content. The manuscripts themselves remained unpublished, but Matthews's research was published and answered many questions.⁷ During roughly the same time period, RLDS Church Historian Richard P. Howard explored some significant questions relative to the translation.⁸ Then, in 2004, Brigham Young University's Religious Studies Center published a thorough study of the New Translation that included a transcription of all the original documents, making them openly available for academic research for the first time.⁹ This *editio princeps* was followed by an electronic edition in 2011 that contains all the material in the 2004 volume as well as grayscale and color images of all the manuscript pages and much more.¹⁰ Yet even with these publications, it is safe to say that the study of the New Translation manuscripts is yet in its infancy. It is a new discipline with many

6. See Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005), 20–33.

7. Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible—a History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975). Matthews's work was a groundbreaking examination of the manuscripts and was the starting point for later research that led to the 2004 and 2011 publications of the New Translation. These more recent publications and others clarify and correct many matters in Matthews's 1975 work.

8. 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. Robert Matthews's 1975 volume corrected numerous preliminary interpretations in Howard's book. Howard later published a revised edition that was much influenced by Matthews's work: *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development*, 2d ed. (Independence, Mo.: Herald, 1995), 49–136.

9. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*.

10. Scott H. Faulring and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: Electronic Library* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2011).

possibilities. Research since these publications has revealed much, and the process is ongoing.¹¹

OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPT 1

The first draft of Joseph Smith's revision of Genesis is recorded on a document labeled by archivists "Old Testament Manuscript 1" (OT1).¹² Like the other sections of the New Translation, it was recorded on the common writing paper of the early nineteenth century, "foolscap" paper, approximately sixteen by thirteen inches in dimension. The New Translation manuscripts were made of gatherings folded in the middle and stitched at the fold, making booklets measuring about eight by thirteen inches. OT1 is a gathering of fifty-two pages (with one page blank) and eight other pages that were once part of another gathering, thus totaling

11. See 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 Peter M. Jasinski, "The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible," *BYU Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003): 35–64; 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; Jackson, *Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*; Kent P. Jackson and Charles Swift, "The Ages of the Patriarchs in the Joseph Smith Translation," in *A Witness for the Restoration: Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Andrew C. Skinner (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2007), 1–11; 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; Kent P. Jackson, "New Discoveries in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible," in *By Study and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2009), 169–81; and 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.

12. Editors of the *Joseph Smith Papers* have labeled it Old Testament Revision 1 and have published the first few pages of it in Michael Hubbard MacKay and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 152–56. Complete images and transcripts of Old Testament Revision 1 and Old Testament Revision 2 are available on the Joseph Smith Papers website, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/1>; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-2/1>.

fifty-nine pages of writing. It includes the narrative called “Visions of Moses” and Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 24:41. The text on the first twenty pages (through Genesis 6:13) has been accepted in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as part of its canonized scripture, now called the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price.¹³

The first draft of Genesis was developed in three stages. First, Joseph Smith dictated the Visions of Moses, dated June 1830. Then he dictated a revision of Genesis 1–24, starting sometime in the summer or fall of 1830 and finishing on March 7, 1831. Finally, some limited edits were made to the text during and after the time of the initial recording.

The Visions of Moses

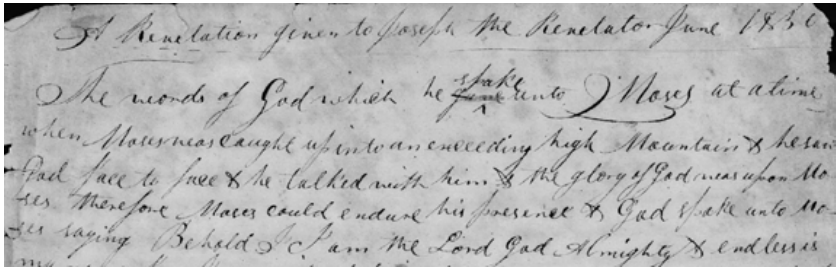
The title “Visions of Moses” for the text on the first two and one-half pages came into use in the late nineteenth century. This text narrates a series of visions Moses had prior to the revelation of the Creation account with which Genesis begins. In the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery, the text on the manuscript is one of the most significant documents of Mormonism.

At the top of page 1 is a heading that Cowdery perhaps supplied himself: “A Revelation given to Joseph the Revelator June 1830.” The account itself starts with a different title, “The words of God which he gave <spake> unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceeding high Mountain. . . .”¹⁴ The text has no biblical counterpart, nor is it an expansion of any Bible passage. It is followed immediately by a new rendering of Genesis 1, but it is not certain whether Joseph Smith and his scribe knew at the time it was dictated that it would be the beginning of a revision of the Bible. In any case, as time progressed, it became clear that the Visions of Moses was the prologue to the biblical Creation account.¹⁵

13. For a summary of how the book of Moses became part of the Pearl of Great Price, see Jackson, *Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*, 18–20.

14. OT1, page 1, lines 1–4 (Moses 1:1). All quoted excerpts are from the transcripts in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*.

15. These brief paragraphs summarize a longer discussion of these matters in Kent P. Jackson, “The Visions of Moses and Joseph Smith’s Bible Translation,” in *To Seek the Law of the Lord: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, Utah: Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 161–69.

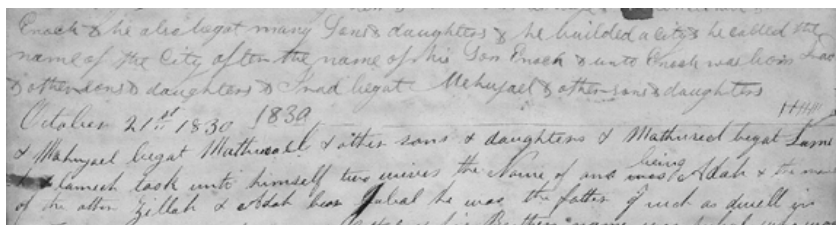


The beginning lines of Old Testament Manuscript 1, page 1, the first page of Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible, in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery (Moses 1:1–3).

No contemporary source tells us where Joseph Smith was when the Visions of Moses originated. Candidate locations include Harmony, Pennsylvania, and Colesville and Fayette, New York. The words on the first two and one-half pages are probably the text written from dictation, rather than a copy of an earlier draft. But this is not certain.

Genesis 1–24

After the Visions of Moses, the text is a revision of the Genesis chapters in order, continuing through chapter 24, verse 41. Even if the text on the first pages of OT1 is a copy of an earlier draft, beginning at Genesis 1:1, OT1 is clearly the original dictated manuscript. Some dates are written on the pages where scribal hands change. Oliver Cowdery was the scribe to the top of page 10. An inscribed date of June 1830 marks the beginning of his scribal work, but there is no end date. His writing, which includes the Visions of Moses and Genesis 1:1–4:18 (Moses 1:1–5:43), was certainly finished by October 1830, when he left on a mission to preach to the American Indians in Missouri. Early on page 10, John Whitmer's handwriting begins with the date "October 21st 1830." Halfway down the same page, Whitmer dated the manuscript "November 30th 1830" and continued writing until near the bottom of page 11. His writing includes Genesis 4:18–5:11 (Moses 5:43–6:18). Emma Smith's hand begins with "Dec 1st" and continues to the top of page 14, covering Genesis 5:12–21 (Moses 6:19–52). John Whitmer wrote from the top of page 14 through almost half of page 15 (Moses 6:52–7:1), where Sidney Rigdon's handwriting begins. Rigdon had arrived in Fayette early in December, and soon thereafter Joseph Smith began working with him as scribe. Rigdon



Excerpt from Old Testament Manuscript 1, page 10, showing the transition between the writing of Oliver Cowdery and that of John Whitmer, with the date on which Whitmer began writing (Moses 5:42–45).

continued to write for the rest of the manuscript, writing Genesis 5:22–24:41 (including Moses 7:2–8:30).

In tracing the timeline of OT1's creation, our next approximate date comes not from the manuscript but from historical sources. In early January 1831, John Whitmer left New York to oversee the Church's new converts in Ohio. Before he left, he made a copy of the Genesis manuscript as far as it had been dictated at that time, which was at a paragraph break at the top of page 20 following eight pages of new text about Enoch. Whitmer later wrote in his history that he had been instructed to "carry the commandments and revelations" with him to Ohio; his copy of the Genesis translation was among those "commandments and revelations."¹⁶ Whitmer's arrival in Ohio was noted in the local *Painesville Telegraph* on 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.¹⁷

16. "John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847," 10, in Karen Lynn Davidson, Richard L. Jensen, and David J. Whitaker, eds., *Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories, 1831–1847*, vol. 2 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 22, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#). For Whitmer's Genesis manuscript, see Jackson and Faulring, "Old Testament Manuscript 3."

17. "Mormonism," *Painesville Telegraph* 2 (January 18, 1831).

The *Telegraph* article, despite its sarcastic tone, summarizes correctly the content of Joseph Smith's Genesis to that point. The Genesis revision included a more detailed description of the Creation than was found in Genesis, more about Adam and Eve and their family, and much more about the world before the flood. There is no question that the writer of the *Telegraph* article had seen or had heard details regarding Whitmer's copy.

According to Joseph Smith's 1838–39 history, “soon after the words of Enoch were given,” God instructed him to set the translation aside for a while.¹⁸ The date of that revelation is December 30, 1830, and the words “soon after the words of Enoch were given” places the stopping point at the top of page 20 in the OT1 manuscript. Whitmer's departure around the turn of the new year and Joseph Smith's revelation on December 30 set the extent of the translation then at the end of Genesis 5.

After Joseph Smith's arrival in Kirtland, Ohio, the translation work started again. At about the beginning of February 1831, he resumed his revision with Rigdon still serving as scribe. They started where they left off and worked on Genesis until March 7, when the Prophet received a revelation in which he and his scribe were instructed to set aside Genesis and start revising the New Testament instead.¹⁹ By that time, they had arrived at page 61 of the manuscript, and they had translated through Genesis 24:41, which is where OT1 ends. The following day, March 8, 1831, they started working on the New Testament. Joseph Smith and his scribes would work on the New Testament until July 1832, when they would return to Genesis.

Edits to the Text

The third stage in the development of the OT1 Genesis draft includes revisions that were made after the original dictation. These are quite limited, and there never was a careful review or systematic edit of the text. The revisions can be dated to three time periods:

18. “History of Joseph Smith (Continued),” *Times and Seasons* 4 (October 15, 1843): 352; “Revelation, 30 December 1830 [D&C 37],” 49, in MacKay and others, *Documents, Volume 1*, 227, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#) (D&C 37:1).

19. “Revelation, circa 7 March 1831 [D&C 45],” 75, in MacKay and others, *Documents, Volume 1*, 279, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#) (D&C 45:60–61).

Edits Made by Early January 1831. Examples of changes made to the text not long after the original writing include:

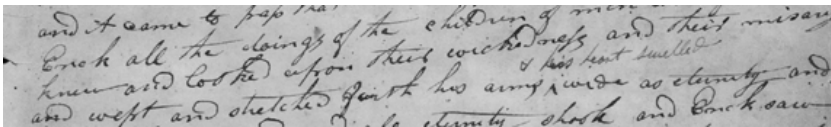
and he beheld also things which were not ~~present~~ <visible> (OT1, page 13, line 6 [Moses 6:36])

the posterity of all the sons of ~~Adam~~ <Noah> should be saved with a temporal salvation (OT1, page 17, lines 46–47 [Moses 7:42])

The first of these edits is a word change that makes the meaning more vivid, and the second seems to be correcting what was considered a writing error. These changes, and some others like them, are reproduced in John Whitmer's early-January copy of the manuscript, indicating that they had been made in OT1 by the beginning of 1831 when Whitmer made his copy.

Edits Made between Early January and Mid-March 1831. An insertion was made in OT1 that alters substantially the meaning of the text:

Enoch . . . wept and stretched forth his arms <& his heart swelled> wide as eternity (OT1, page 17, line 44 [Moses 7:41])



An insertion in the text of Old Testament Manuscript 1, page 17 (Moses 7:41).

This change is not on Whitmer's early January copy, but it was already on OT1 by the time Whitmer made a second copy, Old Testament Manuscript 2 (OT2), beginning in March.

Edits Made after Mid-March 1831. Six small changes written on OT1 appear to be in the hand of Joseph Smith. They must have been made no earlier than mid-March 1831, because they were not on OT1 when John Whitmer copied its content onto OT2. These two examples are typical:

heard the voice of the Lord God <as they were> walking in the garden (OT1, page 7, line 4 [Moses 4:14])

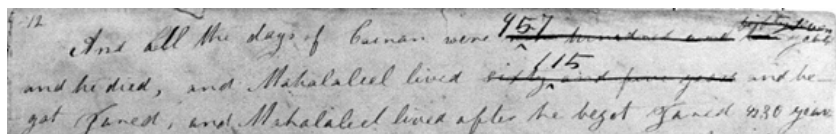
& hast eaten of the <fruit of the> tree of which I (OT1, page 7, line 24 [Moses 4:23])

Other changes were made to OT1 no earlier than the summer of 1831. They are in the hand of Oliver Cowdery, who was away from the manuscript from the time of his departure for Missouri in October 1830 until his return to Ohio in the summer of 1831. The changes are revisions

to the listed ages of the patriarchs from Adam to Methuselah.²⁰ There are fourteen such changes in all, of which the following are illustrative:

& all the days of Enos were ~~905~~ <940> years (OT1, page 11, line 39 [Moses 6:18])

And Cainan lived ~~70~~ <117> years and begat Mahalaleel (OT1, page 11, line 42 [Moses 6:19])



Changes made to the ages of Cainan and Mahalaleel on Old Testament Manuscript 1, page 2 (Moses 6:19–20).

The changes in the ages of the patriarchs are internally consistent, but there is no discernable pattern to the changes collectively, and nothing in the original Genesis text itself invites changes like these. Like the small revisions apparently in the hand of Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Cowdery made these changes after OT2 was written. This will become important in the continuing history of the manuscripts.

OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPT 2

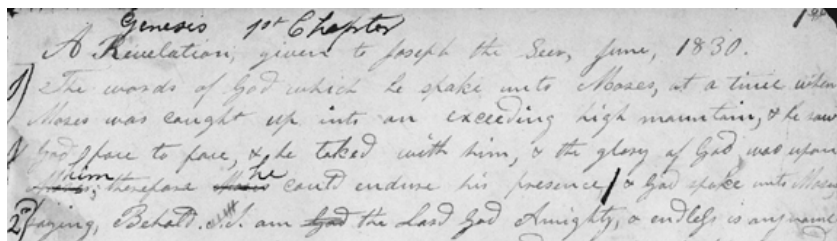
Old Testament Manuscript 2 (OT2) is made up of three gatherings totaling 119 pages. The book of Genesis is found on the first 65 pages.

This manuscript began as a duplicate of OT1 and was probably intended from the start to be the “fair copy” of the text, that is, the master copy for publication, because it was prepared systematically to go to press. In a revelation dated March 8, 1831, at the time Joseph Smith started his work on the New Testament, John Whitmer was instructed to “assist my servant Joseph in Transcribing all things,”²¹ that is, to make copies. He accordingly copied the Old Testament manuscript, and later he made the master copies of Joseph Smith’s revelations and the first New Testament manuscript.²² The text on OT2 from page 1 to

20. See Jackson and Swift, “Ages of the Patriarchs,” 1–11.

21. “Revelation, circa 8 March 1831–B,” 80, in MacKay and others, *Documents*, Volume 1, 286, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#) (D&C 47:1).

22. See Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile edition, vol. 1 of the Revelations and



The top of Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 1 (Moses 1:1–3). The text is in the hand of John Whitmer, but Sidney Rigdon inserted the heading at the top and some word changes in the text.

the top of page 59 is a transcription of OT1, which Whitmer began when Joseph Smith started working on his translation of the New Testament. The date Whitmer finished copying OT1 onto OT2 is written at the end of OT1: “April 5th 1831 transcribed thus far.” With that, work on Genesis stopped until it was taken up again over a year later.

The resumption of the Genesis translation is noted in a letter of July 31, 1832, from Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps. The Prophet wrote, “Brother Frederick [G. Williams] in [is] employed to be a scribe for me of the Lord—we have finished the translation of the New testament . . . , we are making rapid strides in the old book and in the strength of God we can do all things according to his will.”²³ In the preceding days, the work on Genesis had begun again. Frederick G. Williams was the new scribe, and he would continue to write for Joseph Smith through the completion of the Old Testament revision almost a year later. We have no definitive way of dating when they finished Genesis, but because the translation of Genesis ends only seven pages after it was resumed in the last week of July 1832, it seems likely that it was completed near the beginning of August. Thus, Genesis was translated in two time periods: June 1830–March 1831 (Gen. 1:1–24:41) and July–August 1832 (Gen. 24:41–50:26).

Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 4–5; and Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 231–32.

23. “Letter to William W. Phelps, 31 July 1832,” 5, in Matthew C. Godfrey and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 267, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#).

Joseph Smith had dictated the text of Genesis 1–24 in full, and his scribes had written the entire dictation in longhand, including verses that had no changes from the King James translation. When he resumed his Genesis translation on OT2, he finished the dictation of chapter 24. In chapters 25–29 he dictated entire verses when a change was to be made, but he skipped verses not in need of any correction. Then, at Genesis 30, he shifted to a system he and his scribes had developed earlier while they worked on the New Testament.²⁴ He marked in his printed Bible the insertion points for changes (but not the changes themselves) and dictated to Williams the words to change or add, which Williams recorded on the manuscript pages. The rest of the Old Testament translation was done that way, with only references and new wordings recorded on the manuscript. These examples at Genesis 37:2 and 39:8 are typical:

2^d Verse And this is the g hystory of the generations of Jacob (OT2, page 61, line 36)

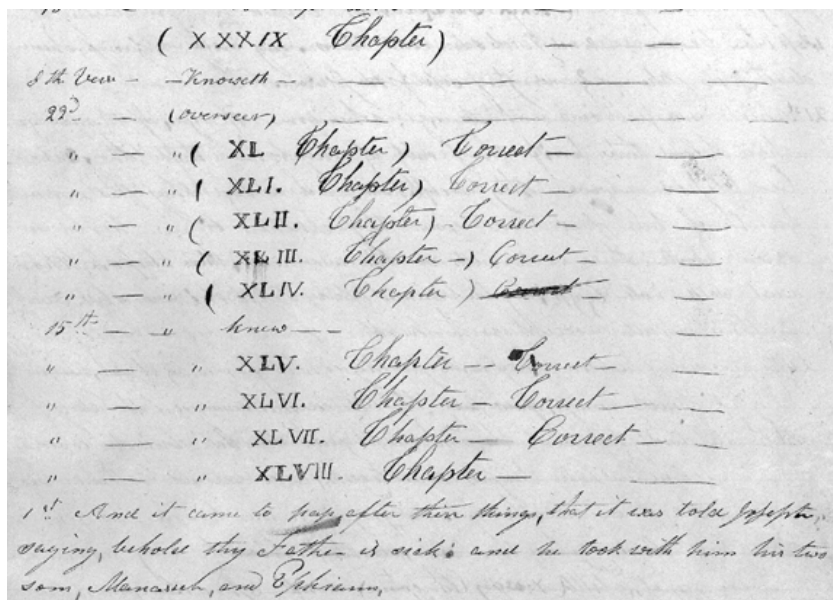
8th Verse — Knoweth (OT2, page 62, line 9)

Joseph Smith made fewer changes in the second half of Genesis 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. The chapters between those received only few changes, but chapter 48 was expanded substantially, and chapter 50 received about eighty more lines of text. In both of those chapters, Joseph Smith added major doctrinal content to the existing verses.

PREPARING THE FAIR COPY FOR PUBLICATION

Joseph Smith spoke and wrote frequently about his desire to publish the New Translation, and there is considerable evidence on the manuscript pages to show that he deliberately prepared the text on OT2 with that end in mind. Nowhere is this more evident than on the Genesis pages. When he returned to Genesis after the New Testament translation was finished, OT2 was the live copy on which the rest of the Old Testament translation was continued and on which refinements were made to bring the text to a publishable form. This is obvious in processes that

24. See Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 422, 455.



Excerpt from Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 62, showing Genesis 39–47 with few revisions. A large addition to Genesis 48 begins in the lines at the bottom of the image.

were intended to assure that the text was accurate in comparison with its underlying sources, OT1 and the Bible.

There was a concerted effort to correct OT2 against OT1. Corrections in John Whitmer's hand show that he proofed OT2 fairly systematically, and in the process he restored on OT2 some passages he had inadvertently omitted in his transcription from OT1. Some of the omissions were the result of haplography, the eyes of the copyist skipping from a word in one line to the same word in a later line, resulting in the loss of text between them.

There was also an effort to correct OT2 against the Bible. In a few places, it appears that while Joseph Smith was reading out of the Bible and dictating the text to his scribe, he inadvertently skipped a phrase or a verse, sometimes as a result of lines ending with the same word(s). Those omissions were then carried over onto OT2. Virtually all of the corrections of this sort are in the hand of Sidney Rigdon, who apparently proofed OT2 against the Bible, restoring some missing words.²⁵

25. For example, compare OT2, page 8, line 16, with Genesis 3:3–5.

called upon men by the Holy Ghost every where & commanded them
that they should repent & as many as believed in the Son & repented of
their sins should be saved & as many as believed not & repented not should
be damned & the words went forth out of the mouth of God in a firm decree

that they should repent & as many as believed in the Son & repented
of their sins should be saved & as many as believed not & repented not
should be damned & the words went forth out of the mouth of God in a firm decree. ^{wherefore, they must be pure}

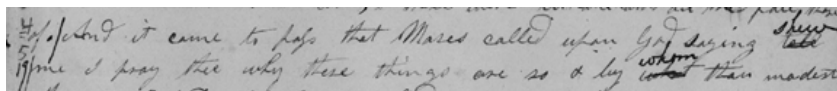
Excerpts from Old Testament Manuscript 1, page 8 (top) and Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 11, showing haplography in the transcription of the text. When copying the text from OT1, John Whitmer's eyes skipped from *repented* on the second line (second word from right) to *repented* on the third line (third word from right), resulting in the loss of the text between them. Whitmer restored the lost text when he proofed OT2 against OT1.

of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it,
neither shall ye ^d touch it, lest ye die.
4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall
^e not surely die :
5 For God doth know, that in the day ye eat

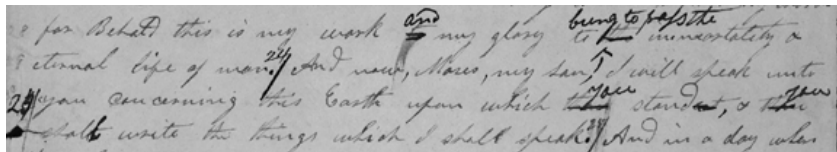
the garden, God hath said ye shall not eat of it, neither
shall ye touch it, lest ye die, for God doth know that in
the day ye eat of it ye shall surely die

Genesis 3:3–5 in the H. & E. Phinney Bible (top) and the corresponding text on Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 8. The word *die* is at the end of verses 3 and 4 in the Bible, and Joseph Smith's eyes skipped from the first one to the second one when he read from the Bible and dictated the words to his scribe. Sidney Rigdon restored the missing words when he corrected the OT2 text against the Bible.

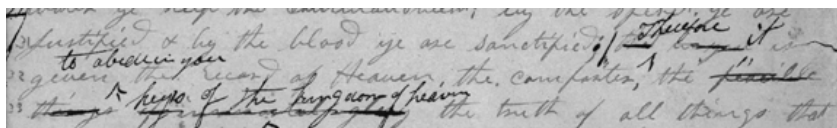
In addition to these procedures to proof the text against its underlying original sources, the Prophet also made some significant edits to what he had dictated before to refine and clarify wording and to add further insights. In this process, he revised both word choices and the meaning of the text, rather than merely repairing transcription errors. These changes sometimes have significant doctrinal implications, and it seems safe to say that they represent his latest thinking on the text. In the Genesis pages, Sidney Rigdon was the scribe for almost all of those changes, but in other parts of the translation, similar after-dictation rewordings are in the hand of Frederick G. Williams, and some are in the hand of Joseph Smith himself.



Two word edits on Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 3 (Moses 1:30).



Edits on Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 3 (Moses 1:39–41) include some that appear in the book of Moses and others that do not. On the first line, one can see the original dictated wording of a familiar passage and Joseph Smith's later revision of it.



A significant revision was made on Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 18 (Moses 6:60–61), changing the line to read, “Therefore it is given to abide in you the record of Heaven, the Comforter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

The text of Genesis also shows evidence of traditional copy editing, including the insertion of punctuation and corrections in the capitalization of letters. Some capitalization changes may have been made during the process of refining the wording, but in many cases a difference in ink suggests a separate pass to make those changes.

Other changes made to prepare the text for publication were the additions of chapter and verse divisions. At the top of page 1 of OT2, Sidney Rigdon wrote the words “Genesis 1st Chapter.” John Whitmer had divided the text into chapters as he transcribed from OT1 to OT2, but almost all of his chapter numbers, and some of his chapter divisions, were later changed by other hands.

Verse numbers start at the beginning of the manuscript and continue through Genesis 24. Inserted in more than one hand, they are written in the left margin and are usually followed by slashes. Often slashes were also inserted in the lines of the text, sometimes with verse numbers, showing where a particular verse was to begin. The verses created by the inserted numbers are on average approximately four times as large as those in traditional Bibles. This seemed to be Joseph Smith's preference

for sacred texts, because later when the Doctrine and Covenants and the book of Abraham were prepared for publication, their texts were divided into large, paragraph-length verses instead of small intrusive verses like those found in the Bible.²⁶

Some of Joseph Smith's Genesis changes were never included on the fair copy. After Genesis had been transcribed onto OT2, the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery made some revisions to the text on OT1, as noted above. It is not clear why they wrote the changes on OT1 instead of on OT2; it may simply be that they pulled the wrong manuscript off the shelf. The changes include the six small word revisions that appear to be in Joseph Smith's hand and the fourteen changes to the ages of the patriarchs. There is every reason to believe that the Prophet intended those changes to be part of his New Translation of Genesis, yet because they were written after OT2 had been created, they were not passed on and never became part of the finished translation. They were forgotten until recent years when the manuscripts became available for serious research.²⁷

All together, the extensive revisions made to OT2—corrections against the original manuscript and against the Bible, the insertion of refinements and rewordings in the text, the correction of capitalization, and the insertion of punctuation and chapter and verse divisions—demonstrate that the document was prepared systematically for publication. It was the intended final copy of Joseph Smith's translation of Genesis. The text thus prepared was ready to go to press, and historical sources tell us that the intent was to print it as soon as possible.²⁸ These considerations are important for understanding the later history of the Genesis translation, because the current text of the book of Moses comes not from OT2—Joseph Smith's corrected and final copy of the translation—but mainly from his preliminary draft, Old Testament Manuscript 1.

26. The small verses in today's Doctrine and Covenants date to 1876, and those in today's book of Moses were created for the 1902 edition. For the book of Abraham, see *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 704–6.

27. See Jackson and Swift, "The Ages of the Patriarchs in the Joseph Smith Translation."

28. Many orthographic inconsistencies remained. It was likely assumed that the spelling would be standardized in the typesetting process.

FINISHED

A misconception that survived among Latter-day Saints for over a century and a half is that Joseph Smith never finished his Bible translation.²⁹ A more recent misconception is that he continued to make modifications to it until the end of his life.³⁰ Neither of these ideas is true. The evidence is clear that in July 1833 Joseph Smith finished his revision of the entire Bible, and he considered it ready to go to press either then or shortly thereafter. At the end of the final Old Testament manuscript, his scribe Frederick G. Williams wrote, “Finished on the 2d day of July 1833.”³¹ On the same day, the Prophet and his two counselors, Williams and Sidney Rigdon—both of whom were scribes for the New Translation—wrote to Church members in Missouri and announced, “We this day finished the translating of the Scriptures for which we returned gratitude to our heavenly father.”³² Beginning at that point, Joseph Smith no longer talked or wrote of *translating* the Bible but of *publishing* it. In August, he and his counselors wrote again to Missouri, “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.”³³ His efforts thereafter were to find the means to print it, and he encouraged Church members to donate money so he could do so. But he was never able to publish the work because of lack of funds and because other priorities, persecutions, and circumstances took precedence. Yet even in the last years of his life, publishing his translation was something he wanted and intended to do.³⁴

29. See, for example, “Which Bible Version?” *Church News*, November 14, 1970, 16; and “The Inspired Version,” *Church News*, November 16, 1974, 16.

30. Both of these inaccuracies are reflected in the “Joseph Smith Translation” entry in the Bible dictionary in the English Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible and in the Guide to the Scriptures in many languages.

31. OT2, page 119, line 5.

32. “Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 2 July 1833,” 51, in Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2014), 166, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#).

33. “Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 6 August 1833,” 3, in Dirkmaat and others, *Documents, Volume 3*, 233, and [on the Joseph Smith Papers website](#).

34. See Robert J. Matthews, “Joseph Smith’s Efforts to Publish His Bible Translation,” *Ensign* 13 (January 1983): 57–64. This important compilation

PUBLICATIONS

Individual Latter-day Saints made private copies of parts of the Genesis translation,³⁵ and sections were published in the *Evening and the Morning Star* and the *Times and Seasons*.³⁶ Passages were also published in the second lecture of the Lectures on Faith in 1835.³⁷ These printings were based ultimately on the draft text of OT1 and did not contain the changes Joseph Smith made to the translation when he refined Genesis for publication on OT2. In 1851, Franklin D. Richards published excerpts from Genesis in the *Millennial Star* and in his British Mission booklet *The Pearl of Great Price*.³⁸ Those excerpts came from the earlier periodicals and from a manuscript copy.

shows that to the end of his life, Joseph Smith expended much effort to find time and raise money to print the Bible translation. Matthews believed that Joseph Smith made modifications to the text until the end of his life because Matthews assumed the accuracy of Richard Howard's conclusion that the edits on the manuscripts were in the hand of Joseph Smith. Robert J. Matthews, personal communication with the author; see Howard, *Restoration Scriptures*, 1st ed., 122–23. Such is not the case. Many technical corrections are in the hand of John Whitmer, but the content edits are in the hands of Sidney Rigdon (who made the majority of edits) and Frederick G. Williams, who were no longer serving as Joseph Smith's scribes after the mid-1830s and were no longer in his confidence by the end of that decade. Only a few are in the hand of Joseph Smith. See Jackson, "New Discoveries," 176–78.

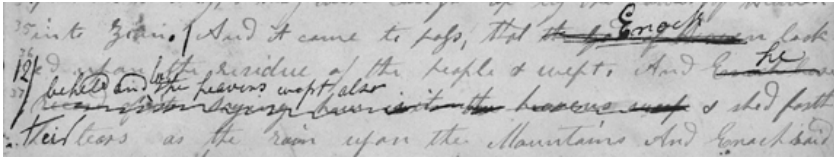
35. In addition to Whitmer's early January 1831 copy, Edward Partridge made a copy of OT1, probably in February. See "1831 Edward Partridge Genesis Copy," in Faulring and Jackson, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: Electronic Library*. Some of the Genesis excerpts in the 1851 *Pearl of Great Price* had never been printed before, so when preparing that volume, Franklin D. Richards must have had a manuscript copy of at least parts of Genesis.

36. "Extract from the Prophecies of Enoch," *Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (August 1832): 18–19; "The Church of Christ," *Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (March 1833): 1; "The Church of Christ," *Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (April 1833): 1–2; "History of Joseph Smith (Continued)," *Times and Seasons* 4 (January 16, 1843): 71–73.

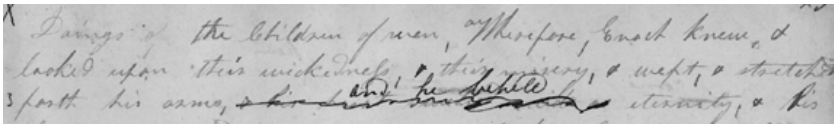
37. "Lecture Second," in *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams and Co., 1835), 13–18.

38. "The First Part of the Book of Genesis," *Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star* 13 (March 15, 1851): 90–93; Franklin D. Richards, ed., *The Pearl of Great Price: Being a Choice Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narrations of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851).

When the RLDS publication committee prepared to print the translation in 1867 (commonly called the *Inspired Version*), they had access to both of the Old Testament manuscripts. But the evidence shows that they misunderstood the relationship between the two documents. In general, the committee retained the grammatical refinements that were written on OT2, but they did not include the Prophet's edits in which he changed the meaning or added new insights. Thus, some significant revisions were lost from what would become a continuing trail of printings.³⁹



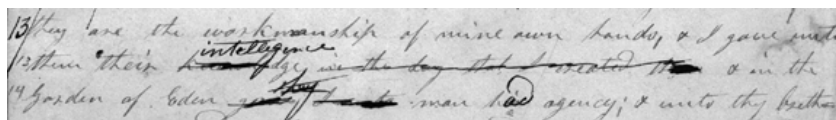
Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 21 (Moses 7:27–29), contains this reading that was not included in the RLDS *Inspired Version* and thus is not in the book of Moses.



An edit not in the book of Moses, from Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 23 (Moses 7:41).

The 1878 Salt Lake City edition of the Pearl of Great Price drew its Genesis material (today known as the book of Moses) directly from the 1867 *Inspired Version*, the best text available to the compilers at the time. The 1902 edition of the Pearl of Great Price used the 1878 book of Moses material but edited it to be more consistent with the early printings in the *Evening and the Morning Star* and the *Times and Seasons* (which were based on OT1), thus moving the text farther away from Joseph Smith's final wording. The 1902 edition also includes other edits that are not based on any earlier manuscripts or printings. The English 1921, 1981,

39. The details are spelled out in Jackson, *Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*, 20–33.



Changes on Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 22 (Moses 7:32–33) that have doctrinal significance.

and 2013 editions preserve the text of the 1902 edition with only slight variations.⁴⁰

In all, today's book of Moses differs in over two hundred places from the text Joseph Smith prepared and wanted to publish. Most are simple word differences of little consequence for the message and meaning of the text, but some differences are of greater interest.

THE LEGACY OF JOSEPH SMITH'S 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. When he introduced the Visions of Moses in his history, Joseph Smith called it a "precious morsel" that God, "who well knew our infantile and delicate situation," revealed to bless his Saints.⁴¹ And as the revelations of Enoch were being recorded, the Lord promised that "the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect."⁴²

The Visions of Moses and Genesis 1:1–6:13 of the New Translation have been, since the canonization of the Pearl of Great Price in October 1880, part of the Latter-day Saint canon. This text provides an unparalleled view of the scope of God's creations (Moses 1:27–39), unique teachings about the origin and objectives of Satan (Moses 1:12–24), a recast text of the Creation (Moses 2–3), a dramatically revised narrative of the experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Moses 4),

40. See Jackson, *Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*, 143–71.

41. "History of Joseph Smith (Continued)," *Times and Seasons* 4 (January 16, 1843): 71.

42. "Revelation, 7 December 1830 [D&C 35]," 47, in MacKay and others, *Documents, Volume 1*, 223, and on the [Joseph Smith Papers website](#) (D&C 35:20).

and an account of the life and teachings of Enoch that is found nowhere else (Moses 6:26–7:69). Later in Genesis, the New Translation adds an expanded theology of the nature of covenant and the purpose and destiny of the house of Israel (Gen. 9; 48; 50).

But 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. It also places the religion he founded in the nineteenth century within a framework that spans the entire length of human history, making the message of Genesis and the message of the Restoration one and the same.

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His research interests include Latter-day Saint scripture, doctrine, and history, with emphasis on the intersection of Mormonism and the Bible. He has authored or edited *Joseph Smith's Commentary on the Bible*, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*, and *The King James Bible and the Restoration*.

Professor Jackson is a former associate dean of Religious Education and former associate director of the Brigham Young University Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies.