

Review of *Joseph Smith's  
Revision of the Bible*



ROBERT J. MATTHEWS. *Joseph Smith's Revision of the Bible*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1969, 86 pp. \$1.50.

(Reviewed by Sidney B. Sperry, professor of Old Testament languages and literature at Brigham Young University. The author of numerous books and articles, Dr. Sperry is one of the most widely known writers on the scriptures of the Church.)

Since the reviewer and his pupil, Merrill Y. Van Wagoner, made their limited studies on the "Inspired" revision of the Bible about thirty years ago, much useful labor on the same book has been accomplished by their younger successors. One needs only consult Page 86 of Dr. Matthews' present work to find the names of those responsible for scholarly investigations that have added much to our knowledge of the history of the Revision, its doctrines, and general value. I would especially call attention to the work of Calvin H. Bartholomew, James R. Clark, Reed C. Durham, and Robert J. Matthews whose latest pamphlet, small as it is, should be a handy reference work for every earnest student of LDS scripture. It is unfortunate that Dr. Reed C. Durham's Ph.D. dissertation, "A History of Joseph Smith's Revision of the Bible" is not yet available in printed form.

In addition to his short introduction and "suggested readings" (p. 86), Dr. Matthews has divided his little book into seventeen chapters. In his introduction he says, "This pamphlet concerning the Inspired Revision deals with some of Joseph Smith's great contributions toward understanding and interpreting the Bible, and attempts to give an appreciation for this particular phase of the Prophet's divine mission."

Chapters 1-3, as also Chapter 7, may be said to deal with the mechanics of the Inspired Revision. Chapters 1-3 are especially valuable. Chapter 1 alone, dealing as it does with "A Chronological History of Joseph Smith's Labors in Making the Inspired Revision of the Bible," is worth the price of the pamphlet for reference purposes. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss "The Original Manuscripts of the Revision" and "The Reliability of the Printed Editions of the Inspired Revision" respectively. They are of great interest to the scholar and present many facts not found in most publications dealing with the Inspired Revision.

Most of the remaining chapters of the pamphlet (through Chapter 15) are of special interest in their handling of doctrinal issues by the Revision. Such interesting topics as the mission and power of Christ, the nature of God and the nature of man are treated, not to mention the important contributions the Revision makes to the lives and teachings of such men as Paul, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and John the Baptist.

Dr. Matthews devotes Chapter 16 to quotations of the opinions of a number of the General Church Authorities, past and present, concerning the Inspired Revision. And in Chapter 17, he concludes by giving us a

one-page estimation of his own concerning the significance of the Revision. His main conclusions will be perceived in the following quotations:

1. The Prophet's work of revision of the Bible has contributed much to two of the Standard Works of the Church, as well as having influenced the thinking and doctrinal teaching of the Prophet himself.
2. The total value of the Revision extends beyond the Bible itself and its fullest impact is felt in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the multitude of revelatory experiences that came to the Prophet in the process.
3. There is much to be gained in understanding the Bible, through a study of the Inspired Revision. . . . Although the work [the Revision] is very evidently unfinished, it has value as a guide and supplement to the King James Version.

The reviewer wishes that Dr. Matthews could have devoted a chapter to the problem of why the Prophet made so little revision in many important Old Testament books. Why, for example, did Joseph practically pass by the book of Hosea, the most textually corrupt book in the Old Testament? One hopes that someday Dr. Matthews or Dr. Durham (or both) will provide us with a full length book on the Inspired Revision.