

Behold I

Kent P. Jackson

On two occasions while he worked on his New Translation of Genesis in 1830, the Prophet Joseph Smith dictated to his scribe Oliver Cowdery a word combination that in English is awkward and ungrammatical, though in the Hebrew it is not: “Behold I.” The first occurrence reads, “Behold I I am the Lord God Almighty.”¹ The second reads, “Behold I send me.”² Both passages are in the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, but “Behold I” is not found in either of those passages today because, after the time of Joseph Smith, each was edited out of the text:³

“Behold, I am the Lord God Almighty” (Moses 1:3; from 1867 to present)

“Behold, here am I, send me” (Moses 4:1; from 1902 to present)

I propose that both occurrences of “Behold I” were once found in the Hebrew text of Genesis. I have argued elsewhere that we need not view all of the Joseph Smith Translation changes as restorations of original text, because many changes probably were made for other reasons.⁴ But in this case, I must conclude that the only reasonable explanation for the two occurrences of “Behold I” is that they were at one time part of a Hebrew narrative from which the early chapters of today’s text of Genesis derive, a narrative that was restored (at least in part) in 1830 by the Prophet Joseph Smith through divine revelation.

The first occurrence appears in Moses chapter 1, an extended passage that does not have a counterpart in the Bible. Ironically, that same chapter includes an important prophecy in which the Lord foretells a time when people would reject and remove some of Moses’ words, which would subsequently be restored by a later prophet (Moses 1:40–41). The second

“Behold I” is also found in a Joseph Smith Translation addition that has no biblical counterpart, Moses 4:1–4. Both Moses 1 and Moses 4:1–4 are critically important for understanding the biblical material that follows them, and thus both were probably among those parts of an original text that were taken from Moses’ record, as had been prophesied.

In my judgment, the best explanation for “Behold I” is found in the grammar of the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew construction *hinēnî* is found in about 180 locations in the Old Testament. It means “Behold I.” The construction contains the word *hinnēh*, “behold,” to which is affixed the suffix *-nî*, which is a first-person-singular pronoun. The word *hinnēh* does not translate easily into today’s English. It is not a verb and thus does not mean

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Many ancient poetic forms found in LDS scriptures support the belief that Joseph Smith received power from God to translate ancient texts. Notwithstanding this, some people propose explanations as to how he somehow knew about those forms and through extraordinary genius could mimic Hebraic literary stylistic elements. This short study by Kent P. Jackson demonstrates for the first time another type of Hebrew word combination, found in Moses (“Behold I”), that is so tiny and obscure in its detail that it becomes all the more compelling. One might argue that a genius imposter could invent sweeping poetic forms that, in a general way, mimic the great Israelite prophets of the past, but to include a Hebraism so unknown in the English translations confirms, in my mind at least, that Joseph was working in an inspired medium that brought to light the pure and original meaning and, in this case, the original wording of an ancient text.



—James T. Summerhays, *BYU Studies*

“behold” in the sense of “to look” or “to see.” It can be described best as an exclamatory particle that has the purpose of drawing the attention of the hearer to the speaker. In some places in the King James Version, it is translated with the English word *lo*, a nonverbal exclamatory that reproduces better the intent of the Hebrew, as in “Lo, I die” (Gen. 50:5).⁵

In most instances in the Hebrew Bible, *hiněni*, “Behold I,” is found preceding a participle. Whereas finite verbs in Hebrew identify the subject in the conjugation itself and do not need pronouns to be understood (for example *’amar* = “he said”), participles need pronouns, nouns, or names to identify the subject of the sentence. Thus the pronoun suffix *-ni* is added to *hinneh*, “behold,” to identify the first-person speaker, yielding *hiněni*, “Behold I.” The following passages are my translations from the Hebrew:

hiněni [Behold I] *měbi’* [bringing] *rā’á* [evil]
 “Behold, I am bringing evil” (2 Kgs. 21:12)

hiněni [Behold I] *bôre’* [creating] *šamayim* [heaven] *hădāšim* [new]
 “Behold, I am creating a new heaven” (Isa. 65:17)

Much less frequently, *hiněni* is used with finite verbs:

hiněni [Behold I] *’amút* [I will die]
 “Behold, I will die” (1 Sam. 14:43; KJV, “Lo”)

hiněni [Behold I] *nišba’ti* [I have sworn]
 “Behold, I have sworn” (Jer. 44:26)

In over twenty instances, *hiněni* stands alone as a statement of response or identification. The King James translation renders it in the following ways, listed in order of frequency:⁶

“Here *am* I” (2 Sam. 1:7)
 “Behold, *here am* I” (Gen. 27:1)
 “Here I *am*” (1 Sam. 22:12)
 “Behold me” (Isa. 65:1)
 “Behold, *here I am*” (Gen. 22:1)
 “Behold, *it is* I” (Isa. 52:6)
 “Behold, here I *am*” (1 Sam. 12:3)

The only reasonable explanation I know of for the two occurrences of “Behold I” is that they were at one time part of a Hebrew narrative.

Sometimes *hiněni* precedes a prepositional phrase:

hiněni [Behold I] *'imkâ* [with you]
 “Behold, I am with you” (1 Sam. 14:7)

hiněni [Behold I] *'ălayik* [against you]
 “Behold, I am against you” (Ezek. 26:3)

In fewer cases it is used in conjunction with the independent pronoun *I*, placing emphasis on the identity of the speaker:

wa'ăni [And I] *hiněni* [behold I] *mėkım* [establishing]
 “And I, behold, I am establishing” (Gen. 9:9)⁷

The first example of “Behold I” in the Joseph Smith Translation also emphasizes the identity of the speaker. It is at the very start of God’s words to Moses, in which God introduces himself to begin his discourse: “Behold I, I am the Lord God Almighty.”⁸ The repetition of the first-person pronoun serves to highlight the speaker and introduce him with clarity and force. In the Old Testament, there are numerous examples of God prefacing or finishing his words with a self-identification, as in these two examples from the King James translation: “I, even I, am the Lord” (Isa. 43:11), and “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh” (Jer. 32:27).

John Whitmer, one of the scribes for the Joseph Smith Translation, received an assignment to transcribe for the Prophet, that is, to make copies of manuscripts (see D&C 47:1). When he made a copy of the dictated Genesis manuscript in March 1831, he copied the passage in Moses 1:3 precisely as written: “Behold I I am the Lord God Almighty.” But some time later, a different hand lined out the first *I* with hatch marks in pencil. It is impossible to know when and by whom the text was changed.⁹ When the publication committee of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints made preparations for the printing of the 1867 *Inspired Version*, they had before them both the dictated manuscript and John Whitmer’s copy. Unfortunately the original draft of their editing of Moses 1 is no longer extant, but the final printer’s manuscript has the reading, “Behold, I am the Lord God Almighty.”¹⁰ The same wording is found in the 1878 Pearl of Great Price, which took its Book of Moses text from the 1867 *Inspired Version*.¹¹ All later editions of the Pearl of Great Price have had identical wording in this passage, and thus the *I* of “Behold I” is no longer in the Book of Moses.

In all of the occurrences of *hiněni* cited above, and indeed in the vast majority of occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, the first-person pronoun

suffix anticipates the *subject* of the sentence. But in some instances, as in the following examples, it anticipates or reenforces the *object* of the sentence:

hinēni [Behold I/Behold me] *ya'āšeh* [let him do] *li* [to me]
 “Behold, let him do to me” (2 Sam. 15:26)

hinēni [Behold I/Behold me] *šēlāhēni* [send me]
 “Behold, send me” (Isa. 6:8)

The second occurrence of “Behold I” in the Joseph Smith Translation is of this type: “Behold I send me” (Moses 4:1). It draws the listener’s attention to the speaker, yet at the same time it anticipates the speaker’s role as the direct object of the sentence that follows (“send me”). When John Whitmer copied the dictated manuscript, he preserved the words intact and added punctuation: “Behold I, send me.” It appeared as “behold me; send me” in Franklin D. Richards’s 1851 Liverpool *Pearl of Great Price*, printed from a manuscript copy derived from the dictated text, obviously edited. And it appeared as “Behold I, send me” in the 1878 Salt Lake City edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*, copied accurately from the RLDS *Inspired Version*. In his preparation of the 1902 edition, Professor James E. Talmage made the text more grammatically coherent in English by inserting the words “here am,” yielding, “Behold, here am I, send me.”¹² This wording was followed in the 1921 edition and in the current (1981) edition.

The Prophet is not recorded elsewhere as ever using “Behold I,” and thus it is unlikely that the Moses text represents his own speech pattern.

That the unexpected combination “Behold I” appears in two places in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis suggests strongly that neither occurrence was a scribal error or an inadvertent misstatement by Joseph Smith. The Prophet is not recorded elsewhere as ever having employed such a construction, and thus it is unlikely that it represents his own speech pattern. Moreover, it is not a construction that is found in the Book of Mormon or in the King James Version of the Bible.¹³ Consistent with English usage, “Behold I” was translated out of the English Bible, just as it was edited out of the Book of Moses. Whereas the King James translation was a significant model for the language of the Prophet’s revelations and translations, it clearly was not the model for “Behold I.” I suggest that both occurrences of “Behold I” in the New Translation were once in the Hebrew text of Genesis—in passages that were lost since antiquity but were restored anew through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

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1. Old Testament Manuscript 1, page 1, line 6, Library-Archives, Community of Christ, Independence, Missouri; Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 83.

2. Old Testament Manuscript 1, page 6, line 23; Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 90.

3. The Book of Moses is Genesis 1:1–6:13 of the Joseph Smith Translation, including Moses’ introductory vision (Moses 1).

4. See Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 8–11.

5. The word *hinnēh* appears over one thousand times in the Hebrew Bible. In about 90 percent of the cases, the King James translators used *behold*, and in about 10 percent they used *lo*. Words like *hey* and *yo*, sometimes used in modern American street vernacular, have somewhat equivalent meanings. For the uses and translation of *hinnēh*, see Francis I. Andersen, “Lo and Behold! Taxonomy and Translation of Biblical Hebrew *hinnēh*,” in *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. F. J. Baasten and W. Th. van Peursen (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 25–56.

6. The italics shown are as in the current LDS edition of the King James translation. In the 1611 first edition, only the examples in 1 Samuel 12:3 and Isaiah are as shown; the other examples had no italics.

7. Two passages in the Hebrew Bible show a special redundant emphasis: *hinēni* [Behold I] *’āni* [I] *wēdāraštī* [and I will seek] = “Behold, I, I will seek” (Ezek. 34:11); and *hinēni* [Behold I] *’āni* [I] *wēšāpattī* [and I will judge] = “Behold, I, I will judge” (Ezek. 34:20).

8. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 83, punctuation added. See also Moses 1:3.

9. The original writing was apparently intact when the Prophet made additional corrections to the page with Sidney Rigdon as scribe. That work was done in ink. Verse numbers were added to the page, also in ink, probably by one of the Prophet’s Kirtland or Nauvoo clerks. Pencil was used on the page for the later insertion of some punctuation, as well as for some small line numbers written down the left margin. Perhaps someone, thinking that there was an error, lined out the *I* during one of those processes, or perhaps it was lined out for the same reason during the preparation of the 1867 *Inspired Version*. Moses 1 was first printed as “A Revelation to Joseph Smith, jun. given June, 1830” in “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 4 (January 16, 1843): 71–73, which is the source for the text in the 1851 Liverpool *Pearl of Great Price*. The *Times and Seasons* text differs from the original manuscripts in several places, and thus it is impossible to tell from it how the text read at the time.

10. "A Revelation, given to Joseph the Seer, June, A.D. 1830," in 1866–67 Committee Manuscript, 1, Library-Archives.

11. See Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 33–34.

12. Because the original intent likely was to anticipate the object of the sentence, rather than the subject, "Behold, send me" would be both accurate and sufficient in this instance.

13. It is not found in the Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, for which see Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2001). 2 Nephi 28:3 repeats the pronoun *I* in two consecutive sentences with the phrase "I, I am the Lord's." The first example follows the word *behold*, but its absence in the second suggests to me that the phrase simply repeats independent pronouns for emphasis.