
Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible

D&C 35: Introduction

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. . . . Many points touching the salvation of men, [have] been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled."¹ In writing the Articles of Faith, the Prophet reiterated his belief: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Article of Faith 8). The purpose of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible was to restore truths lost through the ages. The word *translation* refers to "copying, editing, adding to, taking from, rephrasing, and interpreting" the Bible.

From June to October 1830 Joseph Smith worked on the Bible translation with Oliver Cowdery. From October to December 1830 John Whitmer was his scribe. When John left from Fayette, New York, to journey to Ohio, Joseph Smith turned to Sidney Rigdon. By revelation the Prophet Joseph learned that Sidney "shalt write for him, and the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect" (D&C 35:20).

With Sidney Rigdon at his side and a large edition of the King James Version of the Bible printed in 1828 in Cooperstown, New York, open on a table, Joseph proceeded to translate the plain and precious truths missing from the Bible. In so doing, he made hundreds of notations in the Cooperstown Bible. Although scholars have searched for years to understand every notation, many still beg for an explanation.

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–April 1844], 1755.

Joseph Smith started his translation with Genesis, completing through Genesis 19:35 before a revelation received on March 7, 1831, directed him to translate the New Testament (D&C 45:60–61). His translation of the New Testament began the next day, March 8. For nearly two years the Prophet Joseph dictated as Sidney Rigdon scribed the New Testament translation. Joseph then wrote, “I completed the translation and review of the New Testament, on the 2nd of February, 1833, and sealed it up.” He then returned to translating the Old Testament. On July 2, 1833, Joseph wrote, “We [Joseph and Sidney] this day finished the translating of the Scriptures, for which we returned gratitude to our Heavenly Father.”² When finished, the Joseph Smith Translation manuscript totaled 477 pages. When “the manuscript was later reviewed and prepared for publication, further revisions, refinements, and alterations were made.”³

As to the publication of the Joseph Smith Translation, excerpts were first published in Latter-day Saint newspapers. The entire text was published in 1867 as the *Holy Scriptures* by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The 1867 edition of the Joseph Smith Translation has been “amended to correct typographical and judgment errors” in later editions. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not published the entire Joseph Smith Translation. Beginning in 1979, the Church published the King James Version of the Bible with hundreds of footnotes and a seventeen-page appendix from the Joseph Smith Translation.

² Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:324, 368.

³ “Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” 2:766.