

PDF version of the lesson notes.

I. The Joseph Smith Translation

- Today, the lesson covers the Joseph Smith Translation of the Matthew 24. Joseph Smith–Matthew and the Book of Moses comprise the canonized portion of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

A. Some Background

- Joseph Smith "translated" or revised the bible during the three–year period from June 1830 to July 1833.[1] Joseph Smith began translating the gospel of Matthew, after receiving D&C 45, on March 8, 1831 and the first gospel was completed in September of that same year.[2]
- The Joseph Smith Translation is not a translation in the conventional sense. Joseph Smith did not translate from one language to another. In some ways it probably makes more sense to think of it as an inspired revision. However, Joseph Smith consistently refers to it as a "New Translation" of the Bible and it is called a translation in the Doctrine and Covenants.[3] Consequently, it is usually referred to as translation within the church.
- In general, what kind of changes or revisions did Joseph Smith make to the King James Version of the Bible? There are probably three main types of changes. First, many of the changes are modernizations of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. "Most Latter–day Saints are unaware of this aspect of the Joseph Smith Translation because the footnotes in the Latter–day Saint Bible are generally restricted to those changes that make doctrinal or historical contributions. In many places the Prophet changes 'ye', 'thee,' and 'thou' to 'you,' with plural forms being changed more frequently than singular forms." [4] Second, Joseph Smith made clarifying changes; For example, sometimes he changed pronouns to proper names. Third, Joseph Smith made changes that introduced new content or changed the meaning of passages. Among, the this last category, Robert J. Matthews has suggested the following types of revisions:[5]
 1. Restoration of the original text that is lost or missing from the King James Version of the Bible.
 2. Revelation or restoration of historical events that were never part of the original text.
 3. Inspired commentary that elaborated or adapted passages to a latter–day situation.
 4. Harmonization with latter–day doctrinal concepts or other scriptures.

- The revision process was very dynamic, and not a word for word restoration. For example, there are two passages that Joseph Smith translated independently twice (Matthew 26 and 2 Peter 2:4–6). The translations are not the same. They are similar, but there are substantial differences. The changes are similar in the sense that they frequently reflect similar matters or concerns. However, the changes usually do not use the same words and sometimes are not inserted in the same locations.[6]
- Was the translation finished? Joseph Smith said that he was finished with the translation of the Bible. However, he refers to errors in the Bible (not corrected by his revision) in sermons and discourses between 1833–1844. Also, there is some circumstantial evidence that Joseph Smith planned to do more translating as late as 1840.[7]

B. Why the Translation?

- I think D&C 45:60–61 is helpful in terms of understanding the purpose or goal of the translation. Read D&C 45:60–61:

(60) And now, behold, I say unto you, it shall not be given unto you to know any further concerning this chapter, until the New Testament be translated, and in it all these things shall be made known; (61) Wherefore I give unto you that ye may now translate it, that ye may be prepared for the things to come.

- What do these verses tell us about the purpose of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible? In what sense did the translation prepare Joseph Smith "for the things to come?" How did the translation affect Joseph Smith?
- Do you think there is a generalizable principle about scripture study or about the way we should approach the scriptures? Could adopting an approach similar to Joseph Smith help us prepare "for things to come?"

II. General Impressions

- Joseph Smith Matthew deals with or talks about both the destruction of Jerusalem (particularly the temple) and the second coming of Christ. *What is your general impression of this chapter? Do you find it useful, inspiring, or instructive? Are its contents worrisome or bothersome?*
- I must admit that I am often ambivalent about apocalyptic discourse or literature. *I often wonder how useful they are? Isn't it enough that I try my best to follow the commandments and turn to Christ for strength and grace so that I can follow him? Why am I wrong? In what sense do you think it is important to prepare specifically for Christ's return? How is Joseph Smith Matthew useful in that regard?*
- Joseph Smith clearly thought it was important. He made many changes to Matthew 24. *Do you think this reveals that Joseph Smith believed that the subject matter of Matthew*

24 was particularly important to the latter-day saints? Why

- One thing that always worries me from an empirical perspective (I am after-all an empirical economist so I really can't help myself) is the "matching of signs" methodology people focus on and use to suggest the second coming is close. Most of the signs in scripture are general enough or at least can be interpreted in a general enough way that they can be applied to virtually every moment in history (and it seems like they have been). *What am I missing in terms of the usefulness of things like "signs" of the second coming? Why might they be important? Does Joseph Smith Matthew focus on the importance of signs or is the chapters focus on something else?*
- In the last few chapters of Matthew (21–23), Jesus enters Jerusalem as the King and then cleansed the temple. He confronts and contends with the temple hierarchy and other leaders in the community. In chapter 23, Jesus strongly preaches against hypocrisy and condemns the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. *Do you think the backdrop of the last few chapters is important in terms of understanding Matthew 24 and Joseph Smith Matthew?*

III. The Temple

- Read JS–M 1:2–3:

(2) And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple; and his disciples came to him, for to hear him, saying: Master, show us concerning the buildings of the temple, as thou hast said—They shall be thrown down, and left unto you desolate. (3) And Jesus said unto them: See ye not all these things, and do ye not understand them? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here, upon this temple, one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.

- Read Matthew 24:1–2

(1) And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. (2) And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

- One difference between the two is that the disciples are the ones showing Jesus the buildings of the temple in the Matthew account, but that is not the case in the JST. *Is this difference significant? How does it change the story?*
- In the JST, the disciples specifically ask about the temple being thrown down. *What does the initial response of Jesus tell us about their question? What is Jesus referring to when he says, "See ye not all these things, and do ye not understand them?"*

- "Herod's newly ornamented temple was famous for its gleaming beauty." [8] *Does this help explain why the disciples seem confused or a little bit puzzled?*

IV. Deception

- Read JS–M 1:5–11

(4) And Jesus left them, and went upon the Mount of Olives. And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying: Tell us when shall these things be which thou hast said concerning the destruction of the temple, and the Jews; and what is the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world, or the destruction of the wicked, which is the end of the world? (5) And Jesus answered, and said unto them: Take heed that no man deceive you; (6) For many shall come in my name, saying—I am Christ—and shall deceive many; (7) Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations, for my name's sake; (8) And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another; (9) And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many; (10) And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold; (11) But he that remaineth steadfast and is not overcome, the same shall be saved.

- *Why the Mount of Olives? Is it important that this discourse happens on a mountain in general and the Mount of Olives in particular?*
- Well, it certainly provides some literary symmetry. Matthew is often viewed as emphasizing five main discourses by Jesus. The first is the Sermon on the Mount and the last is this discourse or sermon on the Mount of Olives. In both discourses, the audience follows Jesus to the mountain and he teaches them in the sitting position (the typical Jewish position during this time for teaching). The Mount of Olives, I believe, gives them a view of the temple which seems important given the nature of the discourse. This must have provided powerful imagery to the disciples. However, I wonder if the Mount of Olives has symbolic importance as well? Read Zech 14:1–4:

(1) A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. (2) I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. (3) Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. (4) On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

- The disciples link in their question about the destruction of the wicked with the end of the world. Are they confused about that? Or is that correct? Could the destruction of the

world and the wicked be a general concept instead of specific event? Could it apply to us even if we do not live to see the second coming? Jim Faulconer suggests that "end of the world" can be translated as "fulfillment of the age or generation." Does that change how you view this passage?

- *Does Jesus really answer the disciples question? Are you surprised by the answer and the focus of the passage?*
- *I must say I find the specifics of verses 6–11 a little confusing. They clearly focus on deception or being lead astray, but I am unsure how verse 6 is linked with 8–10. It seems like verse 7 suggest that the rise of false Christs in verse 6 will lead to the situation in verses 8–10 or at least the situation in verses 8–10 follows the situation in 6? Is that right? Or do we have parallel descriptions of the same thing?*
- *Why the focus on deception? Does the text give any clues about the nature of the deception? Is this an important theme in this chapter? Is this a general concern (that includes us) or a particular concern for the young Christian community?*
- *Most commentators see a shift at verse 21 in Joseph Smith Matthew from a discussion about the impending destruction of Jerusalem to a discussion of the second coming. I think it is interesting that the "second coming" discussion begins with a similar warning. Read JS–M 1:22–26:*

(22) For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant. (23) Behold, I speak these things unto you for the elect's sake; and you also shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all I have told you must come to pass; but the end is not yet. (24) Behold, I have told you before; (25) Wherefore, if they shall say unto you: Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: Behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not; (26) For as the light of the morning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, and covereth the whole earth, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

- *Do these two passages suggest anything about what we should focus on in terms of the second coming? Does it suggest something about the universality of these concerns?*
- *Does Jesus suggest why concerns over false prophets should be a focus?*
- *When Jesus says, "Behold, I speak these things unto you for the elect's sake," what things do you think he is referring to?*
- *What about verse 26? What does the imagery suggest and how is it related to the previous verses?*

V. Stand in the Holy Place

- Read JS–M 1:12–17:

(12) When you, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, then you shall stand in the holy place; whoso readeth let him understand. (13) Then let them who are in Judea flee into the mountains; (14) Let him who is on the housetop flee, and not return to take anything out of his house; (15) Neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes; (16) And wo unto them that are with child, and unto them that give suck in those days; (17) Therefore, pray ye the Lord that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day;

- The imagery is interesting here. Verse 12 exhorts to "stand in the holy place" but it is followed by descriptions of flight. *What is going on here? Are these two images contradictory? Do they apply or describe different people?*
- *In the context of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, what does it mean to "stand in the holy place?" How can the people stand in the holy place if the temple is going to be destroyed? What can the holy place refer to?*
- It is hard not to think of D&C 101:22–23. This revelation was given to Joseph Smith in the aftermath of the eviction from Jackson County Missouri. Read 101:22–23:

(22) Behold, it is my will, that all they who call on my name, and worship me according to mine everlasting gospel, should gather together, and stand in holy places; (23) And prepare for the revelation which is to come, when the veil of the covering of my temple, in my tabernacle, which hideth the earth, shall be taken off, and all flesh shall see me together.

- *What do these two passages have in common? Does the similar background of tribulation give us a hint at the role of standing in holy places?*
- *What does it mean for us to stand in holy places? What does it mean for a first century Christian or Jew to stand in the holy place? Do you think it is important that D&C refers to "holy places" but the JS–M only refers a singular holy place?*
- *Do verses 17–21 of D&C 101 help us understand or give context to the command to "stand in holy places?"*

(17) Zion shall not be moved out of her place, notwithstanding her children are scattered. (18) They that remain, and are pure in heart, shall return, and come to their inheritances, they and their children, with songs of everlasting joy, to build up the waste places of Zion. (19) And all these things that the prophets might be fulfilled. (20) And, behold, there is none

other place appointed than that which I have appointed; neither shall there be any other place appointed than that which I have appointed, for the work of the gathering of my saints. (21) Until the day cometh when there is found no more room for them; and then I have other places which I will appoint unto them, and they shall be called stakes, for the curtains or the strength of Zion

Endnotes

1. Matthews, Robert J., December 1972, The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, *Ensign*, 61.
2. Millett, Robert, 1985, Joseph Smith and the Gospel of Matthew, *BYU Studies*, 25:3, 68.
3. Matthews, Robert J., 1971, The "New Translation" of the Bible, 1830:–1833: Doctrinal Development During the Kirtland Era, *BYU Studies*, 11:4, 400.
4. Jackson, Kent P., and Peter M. Jasinski, 2003, The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, *BYU Studies*, 42:2, 35–64.
5. Millett, Robert, 1985, Joseph Smith and the Gospel of Matthew, *BYU Studies*, 25:3, 68–69.
6. Jackson, Kent P., and Peter M. Jasinski, 2003, The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, *BYU Studies*, 42:2, 35–64.
7. Barlow, Philip, 1990, Joseph Smith Revision of the Bible: Fraudulent, Pathological, or Prophetic?, *Harvard Theological Review*, 83:1, 54.
8. Hagner, Donald A., 1988, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, Nelson Reference and Electronic, 600.