

The Inspired Version

By Israel A. Smith

About the Inspired Version The Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., was inspired to correct the King James Version of the Bible. With Sidney Rigdon acting as his scribe, he spent much time between 1830 and 1833 in this endeavor. The Inspired Version was first published in 1867 by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints under the leadership of Joseph Smith III. While Israel A. Smith was prophet-president of the Church, he published the following as an article in the Saints' Herald for January 28, 1957, page 18-20. In this present edition, the editors of Price Publishing Company have changed some of the punctuation and added titles.

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"Thou shalt ask, and my Scriptures shall be given as I have appointed, and they shall be preserved in safety; and it is expedient that thou shouldst hold thy peace concerning them, and not teach them until thou hast received them in full. And I give unto you a commandment, that then ye shall teach them unto all men; for they shall be taught unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people" (Doctrine and Covenants 42:15).

In visiting the congregations of the Church I generally try to talk about matters that are distinctly Latter Day Saint. About ten or twelve years ago I got an outline of my own, which satisfied me at the time, with respect to the Inspired Version of the Bible, recommending it to the saints at various places and giving my views in regard to and support of it. The recent coming out of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible has revived my interest in the Inspired Version. How fortunate it was, as I view it, that Joseph Smith wrote into the first "Epitome of Faith" that we believe the Bible "contains the word of God in so far as it is correctly translated," at a time when so many churches -- practically all of them -- were taking the position that the Scriptures were infallible, that every word in the Holy Bible was divine, and that their members should abide by everything in the record.

When this new Bible came out about three years ago, I found this statement [in it] with respect to the King James Version, which was a popular version and the one which was in use by Joseph Smith. (We have in our vault in the Auditorium the very Bible which he used in the work of correcting the Scriptures.)

Defects in the King James Version. I find it interesting to note the following statements in this new Bible [the Revised Standard Version]:

"The King James Version had grave defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of Biblical studies and the discovery of many manuscripts more ancient than those upon which the King James Version was based, made it manifest that these defects are so many and so serious as to call for a revision of the English translation."

Another statement is this:

"The King James Version of the New Testament was based upon a Greek text that was marred by mistakes, containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying. It was essentially the Greek text of the New Testament as edited by Beza, 1589, who closely followed that published by Erasmus, 1516-1535 - which was based upon a few medieval manuscripts. The earliest and best of the eight manuscripts which Erasmus consulted was from the tenth century, and he made the least use of it because it differed most from the commonly received text."

You can see from these statements that Joseph Smith must have been inspired - at least once in his life - when he said, "We believe the Bible contains the word of God in so far as it is correctly translated." So we find the world -- the ecclesiastical world -- continues to get out new translations, which is but a compliment to the far-reaching wisdom of the prophet in that early day. Therefore we, who are supposed to be a peculiar people, have what many people might designate a "peculiar" Bible.

The Inspired Version Is the Church's Official Version. What is its relationship to the Church and how is it treated by us? In Section 42:15 of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord said: "My Scriptures shall be given as I have appointed"; and then when received in full, "I give unto you a commandment, that then ye shall teach them unto all men; for they shall be taught unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people."

Now of course this has not been fully complied with, especially with respect to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people; and it has not been fully complied with by our own ministry. Not many years ago I learned that one of our apostles hesitated to mention the Inspired Version. If, however, we believe in the inspiration of the revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants, we are under the obligation imposed upon us by commandment that when these Scriptures were received in full we should teach, use, and promote the Inspired Version. I do not think that there is any question about the validity of that statement.

The Inspired Version Restored Scriptural Truths. The Book of Mormon is another so-called spiritual "prop" on this point. In 1 Nephi 3:168-170, we find these statements: "Behold, [speaking of a church which was to be in existence] they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious.... And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord."

We as Latter Day Saints also believe in the twenty-second Section of the Doctrine and Covenants which is profitable for all of us to read from time to time. In this Moses tells that he was allowed by the Lord to see the extent of creation, and he was very insistent to know how all these things happened.

I have done a little studying of a scientific work written by a man who was sustaining the idea of a Divine Mind being back of our creation. He made the statement that the man who wrote the Book of Genesis must have been inspired of God. That is something which we fully believe. Section 22 says that words would be taken from the record which Moses would write. And in this latter time these words would be restored among the children of men, among even as many as shall believe.

The Antiquity of the Gospel. We have some early comments written by some of the spiritually minded men of the Reorganized Church of an early day. I remember one very well which was written by Isaac Sheen; in it he speculated as to how long the Christian religion had been in the world. He said there was evidence that it had been on the earth as far back as Abraham's day. We find that there were some things added to the Book of Genesis by Joseph Smith in conformity with this prophecy, a statement made by the Lord in which He said that the gospel was preached to Adam, and all things had been confirmed to him.

No Plurality of Gods. There is a sidelight in which I believe some will be especially interested inasmuch as one faction of the church [LDS] that went West cleaves to the doctrine of a plurality of gods. Somebody got hold of a little inside history of the minutes of their Council of Twelve Apostles - held in 1866, I believe it was. They discussed the question whether the plurality of gods doctrine was "Scriptural," and after a lengthy discussion they took a vote and a majority of them voted to the effect that it was Scriptural, that a belief in plurality of gods could be supported by the King James Version of the Bible.

It is strange to contemplate, but interesting to me at least, that in 1867, the next year, our Church came out with the Inspired Version which destroys the idea of a plurality of gods. Revelation 1:6 of the Inspired Version says: "And unto him who loved us, be glory; who washed us from our sins in his own blood, and bath made us kings and priests unto God, his Father." The King James records this "hash made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." This implies there is a father of God. In the Inspired Version there is

a comma after "God." The word "and" is left out, and it speaks of "God, his Father," which is quite different.

The Gospel in the Beginning and in the End. Also worthy of consideration are the words restored in some of the books written by Moses. The world has speculated on the authorship of the first five books of the Bible. No other people or church has the secret of how Moses wrote that record. The twenty-second Section of the Doctrine and Covenants says he wrote by direction of the Lord; and if the Lord gave him the history of this earth, it would be correct. But this was added to the fifth chapter of Genesis; it was one of the things restored by Joseph Smith to the Bible: "And thus the works of darkness began to prevail among all the sons of men. And God cursed the earth with a sore curse, and was angry with the wicked, with all the sons of men whom he had made, for they would not hearken unto his voice, nor believe on his Only Begotten Son, even him whom he declared should come in the meridian of time; who was prepared from before the foundation of the world. And thus the gospel began to be preached from the beginning, being declared by holy angels, sent forth from the presence of God; and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam by an holy ordinance; and the gospel preached; and a decree sent forth that it should be in the world until the end thereof; and thus it was" (Genesis 5:42-45).

I think that is a pretty good starting point for the gospel. We have a right to assume that "all things" meant all things in respect to the gospel were confirmed unto Adam. Does not this particular language remind us of the first Section or the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants? "And the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:3c).

Here is the statement to Moses, according to the twenty-second Section of the Doctrine and Covenants: "And now, Moses, my son, I will speak unto you concerning this earth upon which you stand; and you shall write the things which I shall speak. And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught, and take many of them from the book which you shall write, behold I will raise up another like unto you, and they [the words which have been taken out] shall be had again among the children of men, among even as many as shall believe" (Doctrine and Covenants 22:24).

So we find that something would be restored to the Scriptures which had been taken away wrongfully. The question is asked, "Is this prophecy being fulfilled? That is, have certain things been restored to the Bible, and if so who has added anything?" The answer is "Joseph Smith only!" He added many verses to the beginning chapters of Genesis and Matthew, for example.

The Inspired Version Compared to Various Translations. Now my statistics are at least ten years old, but then there were fifty - and we know that there is one more since then—complete, different translations of the Bible; and more than one hundred and fifty translations of the New Testament. That certainly indicated there was much question about the validity of the record. Of the Old Testament alone there are approximately sixty-five; and of the Gospels, approximately two hundred different translations.

Joseph Smith is the only one, so far as I know, who ever added anything to the Bible as it was during his day. P. Marion Simms, in his book, *The Bible from the Beginning*, paid his respects to this Inspired Version when he said: "This much, at least, may be said of many of the changed readings found in the Bible of the Reorganized Latter Day Saints: its author had the courage to alter the text, and made it say clearly what many Bible students succeed in getting by theological legerdemain or theological 'slight of hand.'" Evidently Mr. Simms did not approve of that method.

Again he said, "Had these additions favored the doctrinal position of his church the explanation would have been easy, but they do not seem to serve any denominational or sectarian purpose." Mr. Simms wrote another book called, *The Bible in America*, and in speaking about our Inspired Version and Joseph Smith he paid what was, I think, in the light of our experience and belief, a tribute to the founder of the Church:

"He did not hesitate to alter the Bible and make it read to suit his own pleasure. We wonder why he did not slip in a few passages at least that would favor his peculiar doctrines. There seems to be none such.... Could this Bible have been in exclusive use in an early day, there would have been no witch hunting since the famous passage relied on for an authority to put them to death, in Smith's Bible reads, "Thou shalt not suffer a murderer to live" (Exodus 22:18).

The King James Version reads: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." That was quite a remarkable change, wasn't it?

The History of the Inspired Version. Now following briefly the history of the work of the Inspired Version: As early as December, 1830, we find the Lord telling Sidney Rigdon, "Thou 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" (Doctrine and Covenants 34:5). This would indicate that these Scriptures were going to be of some benefit to the saints.

Then in February the following year, the Lord said, "Thou shalt ask, and my Scriptures shall be given as I have appointed, and they shall be preserved in safety; and it is expedient that thou shouldst hold thy peace concerning them, and not teach them until thou hast received them in full. And I give unto you a commandment, that then ye shall teach them unto all men; for they shall be taught unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

"Thou shalt take the things which thou hast received, which have been given unto thee in my Scriptures for a law, to be my law, to govern my church; and he that doeth according to these things, shall be saved, and he that doeth them not shall be damned, if he continues" (Doctrine and Covenants 42:15-16).

Today we are teaching the Inspired Version with the changes made by Joseph Smith. Members of the Utah Church apologized for not publishing it. They tried to rationalize that inasmuch as Joseph Smith had not completed all that was to be done, they should not use any of it. In March, 1831, the Church was told to "Keep these things from going abroad . . . until it is expedient in me, that ye may accomplish this work in the eyes of the people and in the eyes of your enemies" (Doctrine and Covenants 45:15a). And in January, 1832, they were commanded to "translate again, and, inasmuch as it is practicable, to preach in the regions round about until Conference, and after that it is expedient to continue the work of translation until it be finished" (Doctrine and Covenants 73:2a).

In May, 1833, they were told to hasten the work of translation. And a place was indicated for the location [in Kirtland] of a "house . . . for the work of the printing of the translation of my Scriptures" (Doctrine and Covenants 91:3a), which would indicate to me that the Lord considered the work of Joseph Smith as having been completed.

In January, 1841, a revelation was directed to William Law which says, "If he will do my will, let him from henceforth hearken to the counsel of my servant Joseph, and with his interest [money] support the cause of the poor, and publish the new translation of my holy word unto the inhabitants of the earth" (Doctrine and Covenants 107:28). It is peculiar that the Lord would direct the publication unless the work had been completed. On the second day of February, 1833, they finished the work of correcting the New Testament record. Six months to a day, on July 2, 1833, the Old Testament was finished according to a letter which was written by Joseph Smith from Far West back to Kirtland to the saints there. So much for the history and record of the production of the Inspired Version!

The Explanation of the First Chapter of John Shows the Excellency of the Inspired Version. There are things which I could present showing the excellencies of the Inspired Version. I would not take much space for that, but I have heard the statement made that the first chapter of the gospel according to St. John is the most profound passage ever written by any man of any age - that is, the opening statement of the first chapter of John. In the King James Version it reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Now that certainly requires a lot of explanation. But in the

Inspired Version it says: "In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God." That was a much better explanation and a much more satisfactory statement than the one in the King James Version. The Inspired Version Was Finished. The question has been raised as to whether or not the work of the Inspired Version was completed. I feel that we can establish quite satisfactorily that the work was completed. We have a record in the Millennial Star, fourteenth volume, of the statement made by Joseph Smith: "After Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer had departed for Jackson County, Missouri, I resumed the translation of the Scriptures, and I continued to labor in this branch of my calling." Here he says that the correction of the Scriptures was a "branch" of his "calling, " with Sidney Rigdon as his scribe.

And then, when the first patriarch of the Church, Joseph Smith, Sr., was in his last sickness, he called his sons and daughters and blessed them. In the blessing of Joseph, Jr., he used this language: "Joseph, my son, you are called to a high and holy calling. You are even called to do the work of the Lord. Hold out faithful, and you shall be blessed and your children after you. You shall even live to finish your work" (Joseph Smith The Prophet And H's Progenitors, p. 338).

Now I believe that those two statements in connection with each other, the latter of which is found in Lucy Smith's history, would indicate that Joseph Smith did finish his work with respect to the correction of the Scriptures.

The Manuscript Was Preserved Intact. In an earlier statement, the Lord told them that the work they were to do would be preserved in safety. That is, the work of correction which consisted of a manuscript - quite voluminous, because it was used in connection with a large Bible - and the marked Bible. In this Bible he was to be shown wherever there was to be an insert or a word to be stricken out and another word used, and the whole work included both records - the Bible, as it was marked, and the manuscript which went with it. This manuscript therefore, to the Church, was really valuable.

Emma's Faithful Stewardship of the Manuscript. During the troublesome times in Missouri, my grandmother [Emma Smith] was forced to take her children and go across the state of Missouri to find refuge in Illinois - and she carried this manuscript in her dress. In those days, the women wore voluminous skirts. Grandmother had a belt or a girdle made, with this manuscript of the Inspired Version suspended from it. She considered it so sacred a trust for her to save, that she went across the state of Missouri in winter time with the manuscript. Later on, emissaries from Utah came and demanded that she turn over this manuscript to them, claiming to represent the Church. She refused. But when members of a committee from the Reorganized Church went to her and said they had been instructed by a General Conference to print the book, she very gladly gave it to them, as well as the marked Bible which was necessary to be used in connection.

Joseph Smith III's Poem About the Inspired Version. Father has written some inspired songs—enough, I believe, for us to consider that he had the poetic instinct. And when this Inspired Version was finally published, my father wrote quite a long poem. I will not attempt to present it all, but I think there is something in it worth noting here. In speaking of the pages of this Book he says: "And when these pages with their truths sublime Are placed within the hands of Israel's hosts, My father,' smiling on his earthly son, Will shout the victory over death and hell, And, pointing with his spirit hand to earth, Will ask the Master, 'Is my crown now won Through faithful ministry of wife and son? Or must the years of unrequited care Prove but the effort of a barren love?' Then will the Savior, Brother, Crowning Friend, Turn to His Father,' and with holy pride, While joy beams in His eye, 'See, Father, see! My brides while yet adorning waits for me! Now let the Word go forth, Thy Spirit free - Thy gospel must be preached."

This reminds us of that decree, mentioned in one of the verses [5:45] added by Joseph Smith in Genesis, "and a decree sent forth that it [the gospel] should be in the world until the end thereof."

The Need for the Inspired Version. Was there a need [for the Inspired Version]? Alexander Roberts, in the English Revised Version of the New Testament (published in 1881), said: "Of the varieties of readings of

the New Testament there were 30,000 in the last century and 150,000 at the present day. Of the original texts he said, "There were and are words in the professed original for which no divine authority can be pledged."

And in the Preface of the Revised Version he said: "We recognize from the first the responsibility of the undertaking; and through our manifold experience of its abounding difficulties we have felt more and more, as we went forward, that such a mark can never be accomplished by organized efforts of scholarship and criticism, unless assisted by divine help."

Here is a statement in which men claimed inspiration in connection with their work. Was it any more presumptuous for Joseph Smith to claim the benefit of Divinity - inspiration of the Lord - in making corrections, than it was for Alexander Roberts and some of the other men?

One of the Mormon apostles who died less than a year ago wrote an article about the Inspired Version in the Improvement Era, one of their official publications, and he closed it with this sentence (after comparing a number of statements from the different versions): "Such comparisons might be multiplied; all would show the great service the Prophet Joseph Smith rendered in correcting Biblical errors and making the statement of the Holy Scriptures more understandable to the human mind. The Inspired Translation is one of the mighty evidences of the prophetic power of Joseph Smith."

Here is a thought which I would like to close with, written by a great lawyer and statesman of this country, Daniel Webster: "If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust; but if we work upon immortal souls, if we imbue them with immortal principles, with a just fear of God and a love of their fellow men, we engrave on those tablets something which will brighten all eternity."