JOSEPH SMITH AND THE FIRST VERSE OF THE BIBLE

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i. introduction

Joseph Smith as the great prophet of the latter-day restoration of original Christianity often used his prophetic gift to correct or clarify the Bible. One of the most interesting texts that we find him returning to again and again during the course of his prophetic career is Genesis 1. In the present article we will be examining Joseph Smith's differing treatments of one of the key verses in that chapter, the very first verse of the Bible.

ii. genesis 1:1 in the joseph smith translation/book of moses

On 26 March 1830, scarcely two months after the Book of Mormon arrived at Egbert B. Grandin's bookstore, Joseph Smith was in hot pursuit of his second great revelational project, the "Inspired Version," also called the Joseph Smith Translation (= jst). In many ways this second project was even more ambitious than the first. According to the Book of Mormon, the Bible had gone forth, "from the Jews in purity, unto the Gentiles," but had afterward been corrupted, so that "many plain and precious things" were taken from it (1 Nephi 13:25 and 28). So it now fell to Joseph as latter-day prophet to put things right again by restoring the Bible to its original purity. In a prophesy given in June 1830, which now appears in a part of Mormon Scripture called the *Pearl of Great Price* Book of Moses (= Moses) God is presented as speaking directly to Moses about the future coming of one who would restore the Scriptures.

> And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shalt write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee; and they shall be had again among the children of men—among as many as shall believe (Moses 1:41).

This passage undoubtedly refers to Joseph Smith's own project of restoring the Bible, indeed it stands as a prophetic introduction at the beginning of his restored Bible. In carrying out his task Joseph used as his base text a copy of the King James Bible published in 1828 by H. & E. Phinney, Cooperstown, New York, which he and Oliver Cowdery had purchased from Palmyra

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printer and bookseller Grandin on 8 October 1829. The text of Gen 1:1 in that Bible reads:

> In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Joseph Smith's "restored" version of this verse now appears in the JST 1:3 (= Moses 2:1), which reads in the original handwritten OT MS 1:

> . . . in the beginning *I* created the Heaven & the Earth. . . . (italics added)

The replacement of the KJV's "God" with "I" recasts the verse in the first person, so that God speaks directly to Moses. This modification is carried on throughout the larger passage of Gen 1:1–2:3 where the KJV's "God" is repeatedly expanded to read "I God" (34x). Here in 1:1, however, "I" actually replaces "God." In English the replacement of "I" for "God" requires the changing of one word only. In Hebrew it would also be necessary to replace the third person singular form of the verb *created* ברא (*bara'*) with a first person singular form בראתי (*bara' ti*).

The most significant thing, however, to notice about Smith's insertion of the first person pronoun *I* here and throughout the larger passage (58x) is that by doing so he is affirming that *Elohim,* the name of God in Genesis 1, though plural in form, is nevertheless being used as a singular noun, accompanied by singular verbs. If he had understood *Elohim* to be plural in the context, he would have written, not, "in the beginning *I* created . . . ," but, "in the beginning *we* created. . . ."[1] The importance of this will become clear later.

III. THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

The second text we will look at is from the Book of Abraham (= Abraham), which is also found in the *Pearl of Great Price*. Abraham was first published in the official LDS Church paper *Times and Seasons*, beginning with the 1 March 1842 issue. It was touted as a prophetic translation of some ancient Egyptian papyri Smith had purchased from the wandering antiquities dealer Michael H. Chandler in July of 1835. The *Times and Seasons* introduced it as follows:

> Of some ancient Records that have fallen into our hands, from the Catecombs [sic!] of Egypt, purporting to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt, called the BOOK OF ABRAHAM, written by his own hand, upon papyrus. (p. 704)

Since Abraham was published with facsimiles of certain portions of the papyri from which it was supposed to have been translated and with explanations of what the various items on them supposedly meant, it was not long before the scholars examining the work were declaring that it had nothing to do with Abraham, and that Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles

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[1] The English transliteration *Elohim* does not occur at all in any of the LDS standard works. See Boyd Kirkland, "The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God," in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine* (ed. Gary James Bergera; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1989) 36.

had nothing to do with their real meanings. That early scholarly consensus has remained firm to the present and was strengthened even further after the recovery in 1967 of some of the actual papyri represented in the facsimiles.[2]

The fourth chapter of Abraham contains what is purported to be a vision of the creation received by the patriarch Abraham. This portion was first published in the 15 March 1842 issue of *Times and Seasons* (pp. 720–22). In addition to the fact that Abraham does not really derive from the Egyptian papyri, as Joseph had claimed, and that we are therefore compelled to seek another explanation for its origin, three facts in particular indicate that the best solution is to consider it a reworking of the biblical creation account as we find it translated in the KJV.

First, there is the fact that much of the KJV creation story is carried over unchanged into the Abraham creation story. So, for example, 647 of the 864 words in KJV Gen 1:1–2:3 are retained in the Abraham account, with almost all of the original KJV word order retained as well. In addition to the 647 words retained, many other KJV words have simply had their tenses or persons adjusted into the plural in order to make them conform to the new doctrine of creation by a plurality of gods, which, as we shall see in a moment, is one of the principal concepts governing Abraham's reworking of the chapter.

Second, it is not the mere fact that KJV singular verbs have been retained in plural form that is alone significant as proof that Abraham is dependent on the KJV. Also very important are places where in copying the story out of the KJV Joseph Smith or one of his scribes accidentally forgot to change the tense or person from the singular to the plural when he should have. This occurs twice in the section as it originally appeared in the *Times and Seasons*, once in connection with the plurality of gods idea and again in relation to a simple tense change.

Genesis 1:16 (KJV) reads: "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also." The parallel verse in Abraham (4:16) reads: "And the Gods organized the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; with the lesser light he set the stars, also."

The mistake in copying relates to the making of the stars. The KJV says: "God made two great lights . . . *he* made the stars also." The third singular personal pronoun "he" refers back to "God" at the beginning of the verse. In contrast the Book of Abraham says: "the *Gods* organized the two great lights . . . *he* set the stars, also." The KJV "he" should have been changed in Abraham to "they." That this was an error is shown by the fact that it had

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[2] For the early period see the statements collected in the chapter "Opinion of Scholars upon the Book of Abraham," in Franklin S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator* (Salt Lake City, UT: Arrow, 1912) 23–31. For a convenient overview see Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999) 278–84. More recently see Robert K. Ritner, "The 'Breathing Permit of Hor': Thirty-Four Years Later," *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000 [= 2002]) 97–117, and Edward W. Ashment, "Joseph Smith's Identification of Abraham in Papyrus JS1, the 'Breathing Permit of Hor,'" *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000 [= 2002]) 121–26.

already been corrected to read "*they* set the stars also" in the 1851 first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* (p. 26).

The second example is KJV Gen 1:20, which contains God's command that the waters "bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life." The parallel passage in Abraham (4:20) reads instead: "moving creatures that hath life."

Since Abraham replaced the KJV's singular "creature" with the plural "creatures," it should also have replaced the third person singular form "hath" with the third person plural form "have." Perhaps Smith was not familiar enough with older English usage to have noticed that in retaining "hath" he was making the same mistake a modern person would if he said: "the moving creatures that has life." Again this was corrected in the first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*.

The third reason for regarding KJV Genesis 1 as the source of the Abraham creation story is that some of the departures from the KJV text appear to have been inspired by the Hebrew study Joseph Smith undertook during the winter of 1835–1836 under Joshua Seixas, and also his use of Seixas's *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* (1834). Perhaps one of the reasons Joseph returned so often to Gen 1:1 was that that passage is the first one used in the "Exercises in Translating" section of Seixas's *Grammar*.[3] The most conspicuous influence of Seixas's *Grammar* on the Abraham creation story is the translation of the Hebrew תהו ובהו (*tohu webohu*) (1:2) and רקיע (*raqia'*) (1:6, 7[3x], 8, 14, 15, 17, 20). The KJV translates תהו ובהו "without form and void," but the word list in Seixas defines תהו as "empty" and בהו as "desolate."[4] Following Seixas, Abraham has "empty and desolate" in place of the KJV's "without form and void." In addition, the KJV consistently translates רקיע "firmament." But again in the same word list in Seixas the Hebrew word is defined "an expanse." And so, following Seixas once again, Abraham has "expanse" in the places the KJV had "firmament." That this is what Smith was actually doing becomes especially clear when we consider that one of the items on the facsimiles included with the Book of Abraham (Facsimile 1) is described in a note as representing "Raukeeyang," signifying, expanse, or the firmament over our heads . . ." (Fig. 12). "Raukeeyang" is the way Seixas's grammar transliterates רקיע.[5] In other words, Joseph is modifying the KJV text of Genesis 1 in light of what he had learned about the underlying Hebrew text as a student of Seixas. He is not translating an independent story of the patriarch Abraham. One way of bringing this out in some relief is by describing the facts as follows. There is evidence that Abraham's vision of creation is dependent on Moses' account as translated by the King James translators except where corrected in light of Joseph Smith's Hebrew studies. Such a chronology runs backwards. In history Abraham came first, then Moses, then the King James

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[3] J[oshua] Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* (2d ed.; Andover: Gould and Newman, 1834) 85 (facsimile edition by Sunstone Foundation with Introduction by Louis C. Zucker, Ph.D; Salt Lake City, UT, 1981).

[4] Ibid. 78. These are the only definitions given for the two words in the word list.

[5] Ibid. 12.

translators, then Joseph Smith. It would be absurd to suggest that Abraham was influenced by Joshua Seixas via Joseph Smith.

Having established that Abraham is dependant on KJV Genesis 1, we may now discuss Joseph Smith's rendering of that chapter's opening verse.

1. *Genesis 1:1 in the Book of Abraham.*   The passage parallel to Gen 1:1 is Abraham 4:1, which reads:

> . . . they went down (1) at the beginning, and they organized and formed, (that is, the Gods,) the heavens and the earth."

There are three things in particular that should be noticed:

First, the "*in* the beginning" of the KJV and Moses has become "*at* the beginning." In Hebrew the entire phrase consists of only one word with an attached preposition: בראשית (*bereshit*). The preposition ב is translated "in" in the Bible and Moses and "at" in the Book of Abraham. Joseph Smith might have replaced "in" with "at" here on the basis of his study of Hebrew, but we cannot be sure. Seixas's grammar defined ב: "*In, with, by, over,* among, when, throughout, for, through, against, on, to, under, etc."[6] So Joseph does not get his definition directly from it. However, he may have gotten it from the mouth of Seixas or from a Hebrew lexicon. Since the preposition ב can be legitimately translated both "in" and "at," this change is not very significant.

Second, "God created" in KJV Gen 1:1, which became "I created" in Moses 2:1, now becomes "they organized" in Abraham 4:1. Both "they" and "organized" require comment. But we will discuss them in reverse order, with the latter first.

The reason Joseph replaces "created" as the translation of ברא (*bara'*) with "organized" is not made explicit in Abraham itself. But we learn elsewhere that it is because of a conviction that matter is eternal, and that therefore it is not *created*, at least not *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). "The word create came from the word *baurau*," Smith will say in his 7 April 1844 King Follett Discourse, "which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials to build a ship." And he goes on to explain:[7]

> Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time he had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed.

We now turn to the "they" in "they organized." By using "I" in Moses, Joseph Smith clarified the fact that in the context of Genesis 1, אלהים *Elohim,* the word the KJV translates as "God," was, as Seixas's *Grammar* says, "a sing. noun with a *plur. form*."[8] As we have seen, this clarification was carried on throughout the larger passage by changing the simple reference

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[6] Ibid. 19.

[7] *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (comp. Joseph Fielding Smith; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret, 1976) 350–52.

[8] Seixas, *Grammar* 85.

to "God" in Gen 1:1–2:3 to read instead "I God" (34x). Now in Abraham, however, Joseph makes a complete turnaround by treating אלהים as a plural noun, which he translates "Gods" 35 times in Abraham 4:1–5:3. So then, where Moses was clarifying אלהים in the direction of unity, "I God," Abraham is clarifying it in the opposite direction, in the direction of plurality, "the Gods."

Given the fact that Joseph Smith was dependent on and in agreement with Seixas at a number of points in Abraham, why does he depart from his old teacher in so radical a way at this point? He does not leave us completely in the dark. It may well be, in fact, that he was referring to Seixas when he says in a sermon given on 16 June 1844:[9]

> I once asked a learned Jew, "If the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in *heim* in the plural, why not render the first *Eloheim* plural?" He replied, "That is the rule with few exceptions; but in this case it would ruin the Bible." He acknowledged I was right . . . In the very beginning the Bible shows there is a plurality of Gods beyond the power of refutation. It is a great subject I am dwelling on. The word *Eloheim* ought to be in the plural all the way through—Gods."

2. *The Book of Abraham champions a new and different view of God.*   In treating אלהים as a plural Smith is also departing radically from his earlier doctrine of God as represented in Moses and the Book of Mormon. It has often been pointed out that the doctrine of God in the Book of Mormon reflects a more or less traditional doctrine of the Trinity, but one that has been tainted by modalism. Modalism is a view that describes the Trinity not as three persons in one God but as one person in three different roles or expressions. We find numerous passages in the Book of Mormon that seem to reflect a modalistic idea, such as, for example, Ether 3:14: "Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son," and 3 Nephi 1:14: "Behold, I come unto my own . . . to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh" (cf. Alma 11: 26–29, 38–39; Mosiah 3:5, 8). The idea seems to be, in the second passage at least, that the spirit of Jesus is the Father and the body of Jesus is the Son, similar to a heretical understanding of the incarnation condemned by the early church known as Patripassionism.

That Joseph was still thinking along these lines at the time he was working on the JST, of which Moses is a part, is seen in the way he changed Luke 10:22. The KJV of that passage read: "no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son." Joseph Smith changes this to read instead: "no man knoweth that the Son is the Father, and the Father is the Son" (JST Luke 10:23).[10]

We may perhaps see a bridge between the modalistic trinitarianism of the Book of Mormon and Moses on the one hand and the plurality of gods doctrine of Abraham on the other in a work called the *Lectures on Faith*, which

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[9] Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 6.475–76; *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 372.
[10] See further Dan Vogel, "The Earliest Mormon Concept of God," in *Line Upon Line* 17–33.

was included in the original 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* but was officially decanonized in 1921. It was the *Lectures on Faith* that were referred to by the word "*Doctrine*" in the title *Doctrine and Covenants*. In the fifth lecture we are told that there are two "personages" in the Godhead, the Father, a "personage of spirit," and the Son, "a personage of tabernacle," and that the Holy Spirit is not a separate personage but rather the common mind shared by the Father and the Son.[11] Another possible reading of this passage is that it is not yet a bridge between Smith's earlier and later doctrines of God, but merely a clarification of his earlier doctrine. Such might be suggested, for example, by its statement that Jesus "is called the Son because of the flesh," which sounds very much like what we have already seen in 3 Nephi 1:14 in the Book of Mormon. But in either case the description of God in this portion of the original edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* makes it clear that at least as late as 1835 the teaching that "the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" and that the Holy Spirit "is a personage of Spirit," which Joseph would present on 2 April 1843 (D&C 130:22), had not yet been conceived.

Traditional orthodox trinitarianism accepts neither modalism nor the plurality of gods. The Athanasian Creed, for example, put it this way:

> We worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For the person of the Father is one; of the Son, another; of the Holy Spirit, another. But the divinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one.

The chief concern of modalism is with safeguarding the unity, the oneness of God. But it seeks to do so by "confounding the persons." We see this concern in operation in the Book of Mormon, Moses, and the *Lectures on Faith*. But if it is possible to err in the one direction, to lose the distinction between the divine persons in the process of trying to preserve the divine oneness, it is also possible to err in the opposite direction by losing sight of the divine oneness in trying to safeguard the distinction between the divine persons, or, as the Athanasian Creed puts it, to "divide the substance." And that is the turn the Mormon doctrine of God begins to take in Abraham. The interesting thing to note in this shift is that the earlier Mormon doctrine of God was to the right of traditional orthodox trinitarianism, while the later and current Mormon doctrine of God is to the left of it. The first confounded the persons, the second divided the substance. So, where the 1830s Joseph Smith

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[11] *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of God* (Kirtland, OH: F. G. Williams, 1835) 52–53: "There are two personages who constitute the great, matchless, governing and supreme power over all things. . . . They are the Father and the Son: The Father being a personage of spirit, glory and power: possessing all perfection and fulness: The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle, made, or fashioned like unto man, or being in the form and likeness of man, or, rather, man was formed after his likeness, and in his image;— he is also the express image and likeness of the personage of the Father: possessing all the fulness of the Father, or, the same fulness with the Fathe[r] . . . and is called the Son because of the flesh. . . . possessing the same mind with the Father, which mind is the Holy Spirit, that bears record of the Father and the Son, and these three are one. . . ."

would have faulted traditional trinitarians for giving too much attention to the distinctness of the divine persons and not enough to the oneness of God, the 1840s Joseph Smith would have faulted them for giving too much attention to the oneness of God and not enough to the distinctness of the divine persons.

IV. GENESIS 1:1 IN TWO LATE SERMONS

In his final months Joseph Smith again turned his attention to the first verse of the Bible in two important sermons: (1) the King Follett Discourse (7 April 1844); and (2) his last public sermon, preached on 16 June 1844, which we shall call the Plurality Sermon. Both sermons say similar things, but unfortunately the manuscript reports of the latter are too fragmentary to attain certainty with regard to its unique details.

1. *The King Follett Discourse.* In treating this discourse we rely on the version edited by Thomas Bullock and published in the *Times and Seasons* (15 August 1844) 614–15.[12] Although the prophet did not actually live long enough to see the sermon in print, he was alive when Bullock was entrusted with the task of editing it on 10 April 1844. In King Follett Joseph translates only the first three words of Gen 1:1:

The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods.

He then gives as the fuller meaning:

Thus the head God brought forth the Gods in the grand council.

With the introduction of a novel translation of the first word of the Bible, בראשית, Smith departs significantly from what he had earlier done in Moses and Abraham. In the former Joseph had followed the KJV in translating בראשית "in the beginning," in the latter, "at the beginning." As already noted, both the "in" and the "at" translate the preposition ב. Now, however, he effectively rules out both of his earlier translations by asserting that the ב was not in the original "when the inspired man wrote it," but had been added, he says, by an "old Jew without any authority." What he is doing, in other words, is removing the ב from בראשית, making it ראשית. He then removes the "grammatical termination" ית so as to get ראש, which he translates as "head" in "head one of the Gods." The way Joseph takes בראשית apart is again strongly reminiscent of the analysis of the word in Seixas's *Grammar*.[13] What he does with it afterward, however, is not supported by

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[12] There are two reasons I have chosen to use Bullock's report instead of Stan Larson's "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 193–208: (1) some of the discussion that follows relates specifically to Bullock's report; and (2) the fact that Bullock not only heard the sermon given, but was also entrusted with preparing it for publication, so that he could inquire into points of obscurity if he needed to, makes it likely that his report is the most accurate representation of what Joseph Smith intended to communicate that we have.

[13] "[בראשית] *in the beginning*. For the prefix ב see §9, with the Note. For the termination ית see §11. See Lexicon [בראשית] (Seixas, *Grammar* 85).

Seixas or any other conventional Hebrew grammar. In most standard editions of the Jewish and Christian Bible, בראשית is taken to represent an adverbial phrase, relating to the main clause in the sentence: "God created the heaven and the earth." בראשית describes its temporal setting: "In the beginning." In stark contrast to this, Smith after dropping the ב makes "head" the subject of the sentence instead of אלהים, the latter being removed from its position as subject, which it had in Moses and Abraham, to serve instead as the direct object of the verb ברא, so that ברא אלהים is now translated "brought forth the gods."

One problem here, as Kevin L. Barney has pointed out, is that "the use of *bārā'* for 'bring forth' (in the sense of a call to assembly) is . . . lexically unprecedented."[14] In other words, the Hebrew word ברא does not mean "bring forth." Barney also notices that the explanatory statement in the printed versions of the King Follett Discourse ("*Baurau* signifies to bring forth") does not appear in any of the four manuscript reports from which the printed versions derived.[15] He also notes that the manuscript reports do contain the remark later in the sermon that agrees with Abraham by saying that "*baurau* . . . means to organize."[16] From this he concludes that Joseph's words must have been misunderstood as a result of his scribes' not knowing Hebrew. By studying the journal of Thomas Bullock, one of the four scribes who originally took down the sermon and the man given the task of editing it for publication, Barney concludes that it was probably John Taylor who suggested the added clarification.[17] He points out that although Taylor had not joined the Mormons early enough to have attended Joshua Seixas's 1835–1836 Hebrew classes, there is nevertheless independent evidence of Taylor's having studied Hebrew after joining them, as for example the fact that "the copy of the Moses Stuart grammar on microfilm at the library of the LDS church historical department has John Taylor's signature on the flyleaf."[18] In addition, on 6 April 1844, the day before King Follett was delivered, Bullock's journal reports that he had been "with El[der] Taylor writing in German & Hebrew."[19]

During the time he was actually editing the conference minutes containing King Follett, Bullock reports being in the company of Taylor two times. On 25 April, Bullock records that he went "to Elder Taylor with 30 pages of writing—staid till 3 o'clock," implying that perhaps Bullock was going over the text of the minutes with Taylor. During this same period Bullock does not record any personal interaction with Joseph Smith himself, he only says that he attended one meeting on the 23ʳᵈ at which Joseph spoke. That Barney's conjecture concerning the possible source of the clarification of the meaning of ברא may indeed be correct is seen in a statement that appears in

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[14] Kevin L. Barney, "Joseph Smith's Emendation of Hebrew Genesis 1:1," *Dialogue* 30/4 (Winter 1997) 113.

[15] Ibid. 114. Hence also its absence from Larson's "Newly Amalgamated Text" 202.

[16] Ibid. 113–14.

[17] John Taylor would later become the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[18] Barney, "Emendation" 117, n. 35.

[19] Ibid. 115.

an article entitled "The Living God," which appeared in the 15 February 1845 issue of the *Times and Seasons* (pp. 808–9), then under the editorship of Taylor:

> [T]he first line of Genesis, purely translated from the original, excluding the first *Baith* (which was added by the Jews,) would read:— *Rosheit* (the head) *baurau,* (brought forth,) *Eloheim* (the Gods) *ate* (with) *hah-shau-mahyiem* (the heavens) *veh-ate*, (and with) *hauaurates*, (the earth.) In simple English. The Head brought forth the Gods, with the heavens and with the earth.

The portion of this article that includes the above passage has also been reprinted in *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret, 1943) 28. Although Barney does not refer to this passage, it does confirm that Taylor thought *baurau* should be translated "bought forth." The next step Barney takes is to argue that Taylor's clarification misrepresented what Joseph had actually said. He then attempts a hypothetical reconstruction of Joseph's original intended meaning. Barney concludes that it was not the first three words of Gen 1:1 minus the preposition ב (ראשית ברא אלהים) that Joseph translated "The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods," but only the modified first word (ראשית). In order to prove this, however, he has to suggest a great deal more was going on in the actual sermon than is evident in the manuscript reports of it. And although Barney's reconstruction may be hypothetically possible, it nevertheless strikes one as too ingenious, and probably demands a deeper knowledge of Hebrew on the part of Joseph Smith than he had actually ever attained. What is more, the reasons for supposing that Smith actually did translate ברא "brought forth" seem a good deal stronger than Barney's reasons for insisting that he did not.

First, there is no reason to suppose that if John Taylor were the source that he misrepresented Joseph's meaning. Indeed, Bullock's own journal may be read in such a way as to suggest the opposite. In the entry for 23 April 1844 we read: "went to mill—meeting—Joseph and others speaking then went with Elder Taylor to his house, home at 2, began writing out the minutes. . . ."[20] Is it unreasonable to suppose that Bullock might on that occasion to have pulled Joseph aside to ask for a clarification of his statement about the translation of the Hebrew? Is it hard to imagine Joseph, and perhaps Taylor as well, trying to explain the Hebrew to an uncomprehending Bullock, or a frustrated Joseph sending Taylor along with Bullock to make sure he finally gets it right? True, we cannot be sure things happened that way, but neither can Barney be sure that they did not.

Second, the fact that ברא is translated "to organize" later in King Follett does not rule out the possibility of its being translated "brought forth" earlier on. The place where it is translated "organize" likens it to a man building a ship. In order to build a ship, or as Joseph would say, to *organize* one, you take the various parts and assemble them. When we view it from this perspective we can see the logic of Joseph's extending the semantic range of the

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[20] Ibid.

word ברא to include the meaning "brought forth." If it is possible to assemble things such as boards, rope, and sails, why should you not be able to use the same word when speaking of assembling gods at council? Indeed, in the 16 June Plurality Sermon, which we will be discussing next, Bullock reports Joseph saying: "rosheit—the head—it sho[ul]d read the heads of—to organize the Gods. . . ."[21] In this case there can be no question that the אלהים, the gods, are being treated as the object rather than the subject of ברא, implying perhaps that in Smith's mind "brought forth" and "organized" can be used synonymously. That the Hebrew word simply was not used that way probably did not matter to Joseph, just as the fact that his translation of the entire verse would not be endorsed by any conventional Hebrew scholar was of no concern to him.

Third, four manuscript accounts of King Follett have Joseph translating the passage: "The head one of the Gods *brought forth* the Gods." This statement is followed in the printed versions with "that is the true meaning of the words. *Baurau*, signifies to bring forth." As already noted, the second sentence is not in the manuscript reports, but Barney must argue that the first sentence, which *is* in the reports, is wrong in the printed editions as well. Bullock has Joseph saying, not, "is the true meaning of the *words*," but, "is the true mean[in]g. of the *word*" (singular).[22] But the fact that "word" is singular probably does not imply that the phrase translates only one word, as Barney argues, but rather that the change in the way of translating the first three words of Gen 1:1 pivots on a new understanding of the one word: ראשית (arising from בראשית minus the ב).

Barney's suggestion that we might need to recover the original meaning of Joseph's words certainly represents legitimate caution since the scribes who recorded it were not competent in Hebrew and therefore might well have misunderstood what he said. On the other hand, a strong motivation for trying to come up with an alternative rendering of what Joseph said is the simple fact that, if the traditional text and translation of Gen 1:1 are accurate, then Joseph's supposed restorations of them are hard to defend as they stand. Louis Zucker, for example, states:[23]

> Joseph, with audacious independence, changes the meaning of the first word, and takes the third word, "Eloheem" as literally plural. He ignores the rest of the verse, and the syntax he imposes on his artificial three-word statement is impossible."

Barney himself relates how, prior to his discovering the new solution defended in the article we have been discussing, he had "from time to time . . . pondered how Joseph could have mangled the Hebrew so badly."[24]

So what exactly is wrong with Joseph's translation here, in addition, that is, to what we have already discussed? First, by making ראש the

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[21] Ibid. 108.

[22] Ibid. 125, n. 56.

[23] Louis C. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," in his reprint of Seixas's *Grammar* xx.

[24] Barney, "Emendation" 103.

subject of the sentence, it departs from the usual practice in Hebrew of placing subject nouns after the verb rather than before it as in English. Seixas's *Grammar* explains in connection with this very verse that: "Nominatives normally *follow* their Verbs."[25] Even if this is not an absolute rule, by departing from it here Joseph breaks the conspicuous pattern followed throughout the entire first chapter of Genesis where אלהים consistently serves as a singular subject following after its singular verb. So even though King Follett is an improvement over Abraham in its treating ברא again as a singular verb, as it was in Moses, rather than a plural verb, nonetheless it still treats אלהים as a plural rather than as the singular it clearly is throughout the larger passage, and as an object of the verb rather than as the subject (it is the latter).

Second, Joseph's "translation" raises serious questions as to what he intends to do with the rest of Gen 1:1. One reason is that the nouns "heaven" and "earth" are both preceded by the direct object marker את, which is lacking before Joseph's new direct object אלהים. Significantly, it is John Taylor's 1845 passage that clues us in to what Joseph might have been thinking. We recall that Taylor translated the later part of the verse "*with* the heavens and *with* the earth." This he explained as coming from the Hebrew as follows: "*ate* (with) *hah-shau-mahyiem* (the heavens) *veh-ate*, (and with) *hau-aurates*, (the earth)." What he is doing, in other words, is treating the dual את not as direct-object markers but as prepositions. Both these options for translating את are described on page 60 of Seixas's *Grammar*. Again, however, the regular repetitive pattern used throughout Genesis 1 all but rules out translating את here in 1:1 as a preposition rather than as a direct-object marker.

2. *Plurality of Gods Sermon (16 June 1844).*   In this his last public sermon, Joseph turns to Gen 1:1 one final time. In this case the manuscript evidence is very limited and the printed versions derived from it are of little use for getting at what was actually said. The most detailed manuscript account is that of Thomas Bullock which I follow unless otherwise indicated. He reports Joseph Smith translating Gen 1:1 as follows:[26]

> In the begin[ning] the heads of the Gods organized the heaven & the Earth.

Additional help is provided by one other manuscript source, the McIntire Minutes Book, which records Smith's words as: "in the Begin[n]ing the Head Gods organized the Earth & the heavens."[27]

Here, only two months after King Follett, Smith presents yet another version of the first verse of the Bible. What was formerly the singular in King Follett ("head one of the Gods") has now become plural: "the heads of the

[25] Seixas, *Grammar* 85.

[26] Barney, "Emendation" 108; *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook; Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980) 379.

[27] Ibid. 383.

Gods" (Bullock), or "the Head Gods" (McIntire). In addition Smith seems to have forgotten that he had earlier arrived at "head" by removing the preposition ב and the termination ית from בראשית in order to get ראש. What he now has requires that the full form of בראשית be included before the stripped-down version that had appeared in King Follett: בראשית ראש [ית]. Bullock reports Smith as saying: "Berosheit &c In the begin. rosheit—the head."[28]

In his explanation, as Bullock reports it, Smith still appears to treat אלהים as plural and as object of the verb:

> it sho[ul]d. read the heads of—to organize the Gods—Eloiheam Eloi. God in sing. heam, reanders Gods.

When he comes to his English translation, however, Joseph seems to contradict himself by having "heaven" and "earth" as objects of the verb "organize" ("organized the heaven & the Earth") rather than אלהים, as it was in his explanation ("to organize the Gods"). In light of this we give preference to the English translation over the explanation of the Hebrew, because it seems less likely that it was garbled as a result of scribal misunderstanding, and because it is supported by two manuscript sources, rather than just one.

Joseph's replacing the singular "head" with the plural "heads" again requires that the verb ברא be treated as a plural verb as it was in Abraham rather than as a singular verb as it was in Moses and King Follett. On the other hand, if the English translation is correct, אלהים moves back into its position of subject in agreement with Moses and Abraham, rather than object as in King Follett.

Yet even supposing that אלהים is in the position of the subject, how did Joseph come up with "heads of the Gods" when "heads" and "Gods" are separated by a verb, rather than next to each other as we should expect in the case of a genitive construct relationship?[29]

V. IS THERE A WAY TO HARMONIZE THESE DIFFERENCES?

A merely superficial knowledge of the evidence might lead to the mistaken conclusion that, starting with the current Mormon understanding of the creation story, one can very easily achieve a harmony between Joseph Smith's varying renditions of Gen 1:1. The most explicit presentation of the creation story is the LDS temple ceremony, which in the current version describes the creation work of the first day as follows:[30]

> Elohim: Jehovah, Michael, see: yonder is matter unorganized. Go ye down and organize it into a world like unto the other worlds we have heretofore formed. Call your labors the First Day, and bring me word.
> Jehovah: I shall be done Elohim. Come Michael, let us go down.

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[28] Ibid. 379.

[29] See Barney, "Emendation" 122, n. 42.

[30] Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony: 1842–1990* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990) 65 and 110–11.

> Michael: We will go down, Jehovah.
> Jehovah: Michael, see: here is matter unorganized. We will organize it into a world like unto the other worlds we have heretofore formed. We will call our labors the First day, and return and report.
> Michael: We will return and report our labors of the First Day, Jehovah.
> Jehovah: Elohim, we have done as thou hast commanded, and have called our labors the First Day.
> Elohim: It is well.

According to the current LDS understanding of this scenario Elohim represents God the Father, Jehovah is Jesus, and Michael the Archangel becomes the first man, Adam. Using this temple-ceremony account as a grid through which to interpret Joseph Smith's renderings of Gen 1:1 leads to their being understood something like this:

(1) Moses 2:1: ". . . in the beginning I created the Heaven & the Earth. . . ."
"I" refers to the head of the gods, Elohim, the others not being mentioned in this context.

(2) Abraham 4:1: ". . . they went down (1) at the beginning, and they organized and formed, (that is, the Gods,) the heavens and the earth."
"Gods" refers to Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael, or at least Jehovah and Michael, since Elohim stays in heaven.

(3) King Follett: "The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods."
"Head one" refers to Elohim bringing forth the Gods, including Jehovah and Michael (as spirit children?).

(4) Plurality Sermon: "In the begin[ning] the heads of the Gods organized the heaven & the Earth."
The "heads of the Gods" here are Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael.

All but one of these harmonizations, however, are completely anachronistic. The three figures, Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael, are not attested as part of the temple ceremony until 10 December 1845, the day endowments began being performed in the Nauvoo Temple more than a year after Joseph Smith's death.[31] And although it is possible that these three played some part in the earlier expanded endowment that Joseph Smith had introduced on 4 May 1842,[32] none of his renditions of Gen 1:1 can be naturally correlated with the current temple ceremony. They all have to be tailored to one extent or another in order to fit.

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[31] George D. Smith, *Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associate, 1995) 204. We would be in error, however, to think that the ceremony had already been set in stone even by this time. Indeed two days later (Dec. 13) Clayton reports that: "Last evening an arrangement was made establishing better order in conducting the endowment. Under this order it is the province of Eloheem, Jehovah and Michael to create the world, plant the Garden and create the man and give his help meet" (ibid. 210).

[32] Little more than two weeks after the first publication of the Book of Abraham creation story in the 15 March 1842 *Times and Seasons* (pp. 720–22).

But there remains a more important consideration. This whole approach to harmonization founders on the fact that we are not merely discussing Joseph Smith's views and opinions about creation, such as we might find them expressed in independent, occasional statements. We are dealing with his differing translations *and/or* restorations of a single biblical verse. So even if the thoughts expressed in them could be harmonized, at the end of the day we are still thrown back upon the task of trying to explain how Joseph made Gen 1:1 yield up such differing statements in the first place.

VI. JOSEPH SMITH AND THE TEXT OF GENESIS 1:1

In order to evaluate the changes from a text-critical perspective we begin by placing the various renditions of Gen 1:1 side by side, after which we will evaluate individual differences:

KJV 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Moses 2:1: ". . . in the beginning I created the Heaven & the Earth. . . ."

Abraham 4:1: ". . . they went down (1) at the beginning, and they organized and formed, (that is, the Gods,) the heavens and the earth."

King Follett: "The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods."

The Plurality Sermon: "In the begin[ning] the heads of the Gods organized the heaven & the Earth."

1. בראשית *(In the beginning).*   As we have seen, the translations of Genesis, Moses, and Abraham reflect an acceptance of an underlying Hebrew בראשית. King Follett rejects it saying of the first letter: "When the inspired man wrote it, he did not put the *baith* [ב] there. A man, a Jew without any authority" did it.[33] And so Joseph translates the remainder of the word, "head," which he also treats as subject of the sentence. In the Plurality Sermon he again repeats the charge that the ב was not original but then seems to forget he did it and to contradict himself by having a translation of בראשית before his modified ראשית: "In the begin[ning] the heads of the Gods." In addition, the singular "head" of King Follett becomes "heads" in the Plurality Sermon.

In reality it cannot be both "head" and "heads"; it has to be one or the other. And it is illegitimate both to reject and to retain בראשית. In this case we might want to grant the possibility that the fragmentary character of the scribal reports of the Plurality Sermon are at fault, but it may also be that Joseph was in the process of changing his mind yet again. The rejection of the ב in בראשית by King Follett and the Plurality Sermon invalidates the translations of both Moses and Abraham, both of which treat בראשית as legitimate and both of which have it serving as an adverbial clause rather than as subject. Those attempting to take Joseph Smith's claims as a prophet

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[33] Barney, "Smith's Emendation" 105.

and translator seriously must decide whether they will accept the Plurality Sermon and King Follett *or* Abraham and Moses.

Against Joseph Smith's claim that the ב was added to בראשית by a "Jew without authority," we can say with confidence that the ב was present at the time of Jesus and for a considerable time before that because:

(1) Of the twenty-four Genesis mss that have been identified among the Dead Sea Scrolls,[34] seven or eight of these provide coverage of Gen 1:1–2:3. Of the 800 mss found at Qumran only four actual titles are retained. One of these is the title of Genesis: בראשית (4QGen[h-title]). Gen 1:1 is covered by 4QGen[b] and 4QGen[g]. The presence of the ב *is* attested.

(2) Origen of Alexandria (d. c. 251) transliterated the name of the first book of the Bible into Greek and explained its meaning: "That which is called Genesis, but by the Hebrews, from the beginning of the book, *Bresith*, which means in the beginning" (quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.2; ET: C. F. Cruse; italics added).

(3) The ב is also borne witness to by the Samaritan Pentateuch, a form of the five books of Moses that was transmitted entirely independently from the Jewish manuscript tradition since more than a century before the time of Christ,[35] and in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) in its translation ἐν ἀρχῇ.

(4) The correctness of the LXX manuscripts finds additional confirmation in the quotations of Gen 1:1 in several early authors, including the first-century Jewish author Philo of Alexandria (*On the Creation of the World* 26; *Who is the Heir?* 122; *On the Eternity of the World* 19), and early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 59 (c. 150), and Theophilis of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 10 (c. 180).

(5) The first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus begins his paraphrase of Genesis 1 in his *Jewish Antiquities* (1:27) with the same words as the LXX: ἐν ἀρχῇ.

(6) The LXX translation of בראשית is intentionally echoed in the ἐν ἀρχῇ with which the Gospel of John opens (1:1).

In addition to this early evidence it should be noted that Joseph Smith in his Inspired Version made several changes in John 1:1 but retained John's opening statement: "In the beginning" (ἐν ἀρχῇ).

2. ברא *(created).* This verb is translated as "created" (Moses), "organized" (Abraham, Plurality Sermon), and "brought forth" (King Follett). It is also treated as a first person singular (Moses) a third person singular (King Follett) and a third person plural (Abraham, Plurality Sermon). The translations "created" and "organized" are not mutually exclusive. "Organized" was preferred because it made room for the idea of creation out of pre-existent matter and a denial of *creatio ex nihilo*. The third translation, "brought forth,"

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[34] Twenty at Qumran, three at Wadi Murabba'at, and one at Masada.

[35] The level of antagonism that existed between Samaritans and Jews can be seen in the story of the woman at the well in John 4 (esp. v. 9) and the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30–37. In the parable the traditional good guys are bad guys and *vice versa*. That is probably why Jesus picks a Samaritan to be the hero of the story.

is something of a stretch but not impossible, since Joseph may use "organize" as its synonym in the Plurality Sermon. The greater difficulty in the use of ברא relates to the question of number and person. Joseph's translation in Moses presupposes the replacement of a supposedly corrupt third singular ("he created") ברא with the first singular ("I created") בראתי. He made the same "correction" for all the third person verbs in the rest of Genesis 1 as well. But despite this he ultimately returns to the third singular form ברא in King Follett, which causes us to wonder why, if it needed to be corrected in Moses in the early 1830s, it was restored to its uncorrected form again in King Follett in the early 1840s, since the form of the verb in King Follett agrees with the form in the KJV which Joseph had originally changed. The third person plural translation of Abraham and the Plurality Sermon, "they organized" (בראתם), likewise contradicts the first singular of Moses (בראתי) and the third singular of King Follett. We have to decide, in other words, which of the texts within the boundaries of the LDS Scriptures themselves, Moses or Abraham, is correct. Both cannot be right. From the perspective of the history of the text, however, both the third plural of Abraham and the first singular of Moses are wrong. Neither reflects the form of the text as it existed in the centuries leading up to the time of Jesus. All the evidence, both the direct evidence of the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the indirect evidence of translation in the LXX and Philo (ἐποιήσεν, "created") and Josephus (ἐποίσεν, "founded") supports the third person singular form ברא. No early evidence supports either the first singular or third plural.

3. אלהים *(God)*.   Moses, Abraham, and the Plurality Sermon treat אלהים as the subject of the verb ברא. King Follett treats it as its direct object. Moses stands alone in treating it as a singular noun, even though Smith does not actually translate it here in Gen 1:1, but rather replaces it with "I" and then follows by inserting "I" before "God" throughout the rest of Gen 1:1–2:3 (34x). In the one instance where the plural form of the verb enters in, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26), Joseph preserves the singular character of אלהים by introducing an additional person: "And I God said *unto mine only begotten* which was with me from the beginning *Let us* make man in our image . . ." (OT MS 1).

But here again אלהים cannot be both the subject and the object of ברא. Either Moses, Abraham, and the Plurality Sermon are right and King Follett is wrong, or the first three are wrong and King Follett is right. What is more, אלהים is either singular as in Moses, or plural as in all the rest. This again forces a choice between two different translation options within the LDS Scriptures themselves. Is Abraham right or is Moses right? They cannot both be right.

In terms of the history of the text both are wrong. There is no textual support for Moses' replacement of אלהים with the first person singular pronoun "I." Nor is there support for his repeated inclusion of "I" before God (אני אלהים) in the larger passage. The formula "I + name" is not a common biblical form. "I, God" does not in fact occur (for example) in the KJV that

Joseph used as his base text at all, although "I, the Lord" (אני יחוה) does (Isa 41:4, Ezek 21:17). But "I God" is used in D&C 19:4 and 16, a section originating in the same year Joseph Smith restored Moses' version of Genesis 1. There are no "I Davids," "I Solomons," "I Abrahams," "I Moseses," or "I Isaiahs" in the Bible. There are, of course, six "I Pauls" (1 Thess 2:18; 2 Cor 10:1; Phil 1:19; Gal 5:2; Eph 3:1; Col 1:23) in the NT, but it is from the book of the Revelation with its "I Jesus" and three "I Johns" (1:9; 21:2; 22:8, 16) that Smith probably derived the formula. Smith uses "I John" (referring to the Baptist) several times in D&C 93 (11, 12, 15, 16), a passage whose dependence on the first chapter of the Gospel of John in conspicuous. We also find "I Jesus" in D&C 17:9 and 18:23, 47. Furthermore the "I + name" formula occurs very frequently in the Book of Mormon. "I Nephi," for example, occurs 87 times, "I Jacob" 16 times, "I Enos" 5 times, "I Mormon" 15 times, "I Moroni" 17 times. And then we find "I Abraham" 11 times in the Book of Abraham. The "I God" formula in Moses, therefore, does not come from an ancient text; it is a Smithism, as is the reference to "mine only begotten" in verse 26. In both cases Joseph follows his regularly attested practice of tapping distinctive Johannine terminology for use as revelational filler.

4. את השמים ואת הארץ *(The heaven and the earth).*   These concluding words of Gen 1:1 do not come into play as a problem until King Follett. Even though King Follett does not discuss them, its rendering of אלהים as the object of the verb ברא inevitably raises questions about them. Moses, Abraham, and the Plurality Sermon all agree with the KJV in translating these four words: "the heaven and the earth."[36] Each of these treat את and ואת as object markers indicating that the words following them, השמים "the heaven" and הארץ "the earth," are both objects of ברא. In treating אלהים as the object of ברא in King Follett, however, Joseph forces us to ask what he intended to make of these two object markers. And here it is John Taylor's fuller translation that may provide the answer. Taylor, we recall, had translated both as the preposition *with:*

> "ate (with) *hah-shau-mahyiem* (the heavens) *veh-ate*, (and with) *hauaurates*, (the earth.) In simple English. The Head brought forth the Gods, with the heavens and with the earth."

Naturally את and ואת are either prepositions *or* direct object markers in Gen 1:1. They cannot both be both. But since את can actually *mean* either one or the other, the issue in this case has as much to do with the translation of the text as with its transmission. This being so, an ancient translation like the LXX can be helpful in deciding the point. The LXX presents the two nouns "heaven" and "earth" along with their accompanying articles in the accusative case, τὸν οὐρανόν καὶ τήν γὴν, that is, in the case of the direct object. In other words, the LXX translators, like the KJV, Moses, Abra-

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[36] The Book of Abraham has the *heavens* and the earth, picking up on the plural form of the underlying Hebrew word: השמים. But that is not a significant variant.

ham, and the Plurality Sermon, read את and ואת not as prepositions, but as object markers.

A further point to consider in this connection is the fact that the stereotyped sentence structure throughout Gen 1:1–2:3 presents several parallel instances of the use of את, which, if treated as prepositions rather than object markers, would significantly garble the meaning of the passages where we find them. Do we really want to extend Taylor's approach and translate verse 21, for example, "he organized the gods *with* the great sea monsters and every living soul . . . , or verse 27, "he organized the gods *with* man. . ."?

VII. CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that none of Joseph Smith's "improvements" on the text of Gen 1:1 are supported by ancient evidence. To the extent, then, that the changes in the translation of the verse are based on these unsupported changes in the text they are to be dismissed. As for the rest of his modifications in translation, those that are not impossible are unlikely and in some instances mutually contradictory when considered in relation to one another. So what does all of this mean?

1. *Book of Moses.* In relation to the first text we looked at, Moses, it first of all confirms what earlier studies on the text of the JST have already established, namely that even though Joseph Smith set out to restore the text to its original state, he did not accomplish this. Where the KJV text was corrupt he almost always failed to correct it, and where he did make corrections they almost never found support in the ancient biblical manuscripts or versions.[37] In the case of Moses' rendering of Gen 1:1 this relates only to the

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[37] In an earlier study of the changes Joseph Smith made to Romans 7, for example, this writer discovered the following:

> As represented in the *Nestle-Aland26* [*sic*], the following activity is recorded for the Greek manuscript tradition for Romans 7: At four points insertions have been made; at four more, deletions occur; and at eleven, variant readings occur. In each of these cases Smith follows the [King James Bible] whether it reflects the best and earliest manuscript evidence or not. In addition, not one of the 168 words Smith introduces, nor any of the seven transpositions of words and phrases, has any manuscript support. (Ronald V. Huggins, "Joseph Smith's 'Inspired Translation' of Romans 7," in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interprative Essays on Joseph Smith* [ed. Bryan Waterman; Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1999] 265).

Out of the many hundreds of instances where Smith corrections lack any support in the ancient manuscripts there are two where they actually do find some support: Isa 2:16 and Matt 5:22 (= 3 Nephi 12:22 and JST Matt 5:24). Mormon apologists regularly point to these two instances as clear and striking evidence of the legitimacy of Joseph Smith's prophetic ministry. See, for example, John W. Welch, "A Book You Can Respect," *Ensign* (Sept 1977) 47 and *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999) 200–201; Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 135–38; Royal Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welsh (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998) 376–77. In both cases, however, the changes can be explained from easily accessible sources in Joseph Smith's own day.

latter. LDS writers have developed a number of solutions for dealing with this problem. The most common are:

Solution #1: Joseph Smith never finished the JST. Whatever problems there might be resulted from the incompleteness of his work.[38]

Solution #2: Joseph Smith never said exactly what he was intending to do in the JST. Therefore we cannot judge the product by the intent, because we do not know what the intent was. Any peculiarities that we encounter would probably be readily resolved if we knew the prophet's intent, but we do not.[39]

Solution #3: The earliest biblical manuscripts would agree with Joseph Smith's changes if "many plain and precious things had not already been taken out of them by the Great and Abominable Church."[40]

Solution #4: The JST is not part of official LDS Scripture. Therefore any problems we might encounter there are irrelevant.[41]

To these four solutions we respond as follows:

a. *Solution #1.* In fact, the JST *was* finished in 1833. As to the NT portion Joseph Smith wrote in his journal: "I completed the translation and review of the New Testament, on the 2nd of February, 1833."[42] The OT portion was completed a few months later, as is seen in a letter in the handwriting of Sydney Rigdon from the First Presidency to the "Brethren in Zion" dated 2 July 1833: "We this day finished the translating of the Scriptures, for which we returned gratitude to our Heavenly Father."[43] In addition, at the end of the manuscript for the book of Malachi is written the words: "Finished on the 2d day of July 1833." So the JST was finished. In seeming contradiction to these early statements George Q. Cannon once claimed he had "heard President Brigham Young state that the Prophet before his death had spoken to him about going through the translation of the scriptures again and perfecting it upon points of doctrine which the Lord had restrained him from giving in plainness and fulness at the time of which we write [i.e., the early 1830s]."[44] Historians would probably want to view Canon's statement with some suspicion, on the grounds that it comes from a time when the JST was regarded with considerable suspicion by the LDS Church, even though it

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[38] E.g. Robert L. Millet, "Hard Questions about the Joseph Smith Translation," in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation* (ed. Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews; Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1995) 148–49.

[39] E.g. Philip L. Barlow, "Joseph Smith's Revision of the Bible: Fraudulent, Pathologic, or Prophetic?" *HTR* 83 (1990) 57; Robinson in Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997) 64.

[40] E.g. R. J. Matthews, "Major Doctrinal Contributions of the JST," in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things* (ed. by Monte S. Nyman and Robert Millet; Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1985) 286; Robinson in Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide?* 206 n. 17

[41] Robinson in Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide?* 63–64.

[42] Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 1.324.

[43] Ibid. 1.368.

[44] George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret, 1986) 148, n.

was accepted by the RLDS Church, which owned the manuscripts. Nevertheless, given the extent of doctrinal development between the time of the completion of the JST in 1833 and Joseph Smith's death in 1844, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Joseph Smith did indeed consider the idea of updating the JST. But since much of this development related to the doctrine of God it seems quite probable that one of the first portions he would have reworked would have been Gen 1:1 (which indeed is precisely what he did do in Abraham, King Follett, and the Plurality Sermon). This being the case it is hard to imagine Joseph Smith at this later stage in his doctrinal development having wanted to see his earlier 1830 revision of Gen 1:1, which was by that time terribly out of step with his later views, published, much less elevated to the level of Scripture.

b. *Solution #2.*   There can really be no legitimate doubt as to what Joseph Smith's intent was in producing the JST. He intended to restore the Bible to its original purity. In the same month that the JST was completed, the Mormon paper *The Evening and Morning Star* published an article aimed at whetting the appetite of the faithful for what was hoped would be the soon publication of the JST:[45]

> As to the errors in the bible, any man possessed of common understanding, knows, that both the old and new testaments are filled with errors, obscurities, italics and contradictions, which must be the work of men. As the church of Christ will soon have the scriptures, in their original purity it may not be amiss for us to show a few of the gross errors, or, as they might be termed, contradictions.

And then a little later:[46]

> With the old copy full of errors; with Dickinson's and Webster's polite translation, with Campbell's improved, and many more from different persuasions, how will a person of common understanding know which is right without the gift of the Holy Spirit? . . . the bible . . . must be PURIFIED! . . . O what a blessing, that the Lord will bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit, upon the meek and humble, whereby they can know of a surety, his words from the words of men?

So, despite the fact that he did not accomplish it, Joseph Smith's intent in modifying Gen 1:1 was to restore it to its original purity. Whether or not the JST as a whole is considered finished by the LDS Church, we should think that their elevating the portion represented by Moses to the level of Scripture represents at least a tacit suggestion on their part that they considered that part at least to be finished.

c. *Solution #3.*   This does not apply in this case because the text of Gen 1:1 as we have it today is identical to what it was when Jesus walked upon

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[45] "Errors of the Bible," *The Evening and Morning Star* 2/14 (July 1833) 106. On the expectation of the early publication of the JST see Robert J. Matthews, "Joseph Smith's Efforts to Publish His Bible 'Translation,'" *Ensign* (Jan. 1983) 57–64.

[46] "New Version," *The Evening and Morning Star* 2/14 (July 1833) 106.

the earth, that is, before the "Great and Abominable Church," charged in the Book of Mormon with corrupting the Bible, ever existed. Prior to coming into the hands of the great and abominable Church, the Bible is said to have gone forth "from the Jews in purity" (1 Nephi 13:25). We have been considering the form of Gen 1:1 before it went forth from the Jews.

d. *Solution #4.*   This does not apply in this case because Moses is a portion of the JST that *is* part of canonized LDS Scriptures.[47] Interestingly, its elevation to scriptural status has not improved the quality of its attempted textual restorations. They are every bit as baseless as those in the non-canonical parts of the JST. The fact that it comes no closer to the original text despite its having subsequently been canonized tends to cast doubt on the LDS Church's current prophetic claims. The fact that Moses 2:1 *was* supposed to be a restoration of Gen 1:1 to its original purity but *is* not, raises serious doubt about the claim that Joseph Smith translated the Bible by the power of God.

2. *Book of Abraham.*   The fact that the creation story in Abraham represents itself as a vision that Abraham himself received and reported, when it is really a reworking of the Genesis one colored by the Hebrew Joseph Smith learned from Joshua Seixas (as were the two late Sermons as well), goes a long way towards undermining its credibility. But when one passes over this and tries to take Abraham seriously as a rendition of the biblical text, only to discover that it is flawed as a translation and mutually contradictory in terms of its relation to Moses' treatment of the same biblical passage, it raises real and serious doubt not only about the validity of Joseph Smith's prophetic ministry in general, but also about the integrity of the LDS canon as a whole.

3. *The two late sermons.*   King Follett and the Plurality Sermon do nothing to improve the situation. Indeed, in them we merely see Joseph Smith moving further away from anything like a valid restoration and translation of Gen 1:1. These sermons are not, strictly speaking, canonical. Still, it is arguable that King Follett at least is as important, or perhaps even more important, to the formation of the Mormon theological world view than Abraham and Moses combined. In any case, however, Joseph Smith's claims concerning the history of the text of Gen 1:1 and his attempted translation of the text are both equally wrong, and, canonical or not, are equally invalid.

4. *Where does this leave us?*   The pre-release promotional plug for the JST in the July 1833 *Evening and Morning Star* quoted above had promised that "the church of Christ will soon have the scriptures, in their original purity," and had gone on to enthusiastically exclaim: "O what a blessing, that the Lord will bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit, upon the meek and humble,

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[47] Robinson in Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide?* 63–64.

whereby they can know of a surety, his words from the words of men?" Yet the LDS Church never received the scriptures in their original purity as promised. Rather, as Stephen E. Robinson has noted, "the King James Bible *is* the LDS Bible,"[48] the very Bible that the *Evening and Morning Star* had said was "filled with errors, obscurities, italics and contradictions, which must be the work of men." For the first time in 1979 the LDS Church published its own edition of the Bible, and the cover story in the official church magazine, *Ensign,* proudly announced: "Not one word of the King James text has been changed in this edition."[49] For the first time also hundreds of quotations from the JST were included in footnotes with larger ones consigned to an appendix in the back. But the official LDS Church has never stated specifically what we are to make of them. Sometimes the language of restoration is used, other times not.

What is supremely ironic in all this is that the very process which promised the LDS faithful that, of all the churches in Christendom, they alone were going to be blessed through the gift and power of God, with the Bible in its original purity, ultimately resulted in their being left with the very Bible they had originally repudiated. In the meantime, however, the careful study of textual criticism flourished in the rest of Christendom, giving birth to original language editions that were much more accurate and pure than the text underlying the KJV. And this, in turn, led to translations that more accurately reflect the original meaning of the biblical writers. The long and short of it, in other words, is that the so-called Great and Abominable Church now has a better Bible, a purer Bible, than the LDS Church. What is more, the very same text-critical tools that have in so many cases vindicated the ancient biblical text are now being employed (as in the present article) to investigate the validity of Joseph Smith's "translation" work. And the result very much parallels what happened when the Renaissance humanists applied their new scholarship to the Bible and other religious texts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At that time traditional Roman Catholics looked on in horror and dismay as familiar Latin proof texts supporting cherished medieval dogmas were shown to be unacceptable as translations of the original Greek. But in the end the light of the written Word of God shone the more brightly because of the scrutiny. The same, however, could not be said of other religious documents such as the so-called Donation of Constantine, a forgery upon whose bogus claims the medieval Catholic Church had based much of its claim to temporal authority. That document was debunked by humanist scholar Lorenzo Valla in 1440. One cannot work with the prophetic writings and translations of Joseph Smith for very long without thinking of Lorenzo Valla and of how Joseph Smith has provided the modern textual critic with a great deal more grist for his mill than the Donation of Contantine ever provided for Lorenzo Valla's. Today, of course, the Catholic Church openly admits that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery. Yet one cannot help but wonder what

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[48] Robinson in ibid. 59.

[49] Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Church Publishes First LDS Edition of the Bible," *Ensign* (Feb. 1979) 9.

might have ultimately become of Valla's work had the fifteenth-century Roman Catholic Church had the apologists from the LDS Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.) working for them. Would they still cling to the Donation of Constantine? Would they still quote from it? Who can tell?