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They “Shall Grow Together”: The Relationship of the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Joseph Smith Translation

JOSHUA SEARS

Historical divisions sometimes hinder the ability to see substantial connections. Such is the case with two members of the latter-day canon of scripture, the Bible and the Book of Mormon: many Latter-day Saints consider the Bible one thing and the Nephite record quite another. However, the Lord prophesied to Joseph, son of Jacob: “Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord” (2 Nephi 3:12). In this prophetic verse the Lord teaches Joseph of the latter-day importance of both the Book of Mormon (written by the posterity of Joseph) and the Bible (written by the posterity of Judah). It is clear that as they “grow together,” each will have a critical role in confounding false doctrines, laying down contentions, establishing peace, and restoring knowledge of the Lord’s covenants with long-forgotten ancestors. The Bible and the Book of Mormon are intricately related. Further, as an inspired translation of the biblical word, the Joseph Smith Translation is tied in many respects to the Book of Mormon.

These connections come about through several historical, textual, and spiritual means: first, the Bible prepares men for the Book of Mormon; second, the Book of Mormon testifies of the Bible and of the Joseph Smith Translation; third, the Joseph Smith Translation elevates the Bible to a higher plane in which it can work more effectively with the Book of Mormon to teach doctrine and testify of Christ; fourth, although the Joseph Smith Translation is the main work of Biblical restoration, such work is also found in the Book of Mormon; and fifth, parallel material restored in both the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation allows each to illuminate the truths of the other. By understanding these relationships, we can more fully comprehend how the Bible and the Book of Mormon have become “one in thine hand” (Ezekiel 37:17) through greater ways than merely sharing the same cover. They more alike than different.

THE BIBLE PREPARES PEOPLE FOR FURTHER LIGHT

There is no doubt that historically the Bible has been a force of transcendent good. An angel told Nephi in vision that the words of the Bible “are of great worth unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:23). Why has the Bible been so important? For one, it has prevented the world from sinking even further than it already has into the abyss of apostasy. Elder Bruce R. McConkie noted: “*The Bible is the book of books. It has done more, with greater numbers of people, to preserve Christian culture, uphold gospel ethics, and teach true doctrine than any other book ever written, many times over.*” It is significant that in Nephi’s panoramic vision of the history of this continent, and even in our abridged version of what he saw, his angel-guide devoted great time to the Bible and its role in this history (see 1 Nephi 13–14). No other book has had such an influence on people throughout the centuries.

Additionally, one of the most important roles of the Bible is its ability to prepare men to hear the greater light of the restored gospel. Elder McConkie also wrote: "Of itself this volume of ancient scripture bears witness of Christ, teaches his doctrines, and leads good people everywhere to live by higher standards. But what is equally, perhaps even more, important in the long run is that the Bible prepares men for the Book of Mormon and therefore for belief in living prophets who have power both to teach the truth and to administer the ordinances of salvation."²

It is no coincidence that almost every early member of this Church, from Joseph Smith to Parley P. Pratt, was drawn to the gospel because of a love of the Bible. Even today missionaries are better able to teach those who already have belief in God and Christ through reading the Bible. Those who truly love its divine message recognize that same spirit in the Book of Mormon and find it easy to embrace.

Also of critical note, however, is that the Bible is imperfect. Primary children are familiar with the eighth Article of Faith: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." As emphatically as the Book of Mormon declares the biblical message to be true, it also warns that it has not come to the world in its fullness. The angel warns through Nephi that "that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches . . . [has] taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away" (1 Nephi 13:26). What have been the effects of this tampering with the Bible? "An exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Nephi 13:29). So while the Bible has been of great benefit to the world, the removal of plain and precious truths has been a stumbling block, and one with serious consequences. The Bible's own incompleteness is a testimony of the need for further revelation—including the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation (JST).

THE BOOK OF MORMON IS THE KEYSTONE WITNESS

The Prophet Joseph Smith called the Book of Mormon “the keystone of our religion.”²¹ It serves this purpose in one sense because it is the foundation upon which the entire latter-day work rests. If the book is true, all else is true; if false, all else is false. Of particular importance in this role of keystone is the Book of Mormon’s preappointed purpose of testifying of the overall truthfulness of the Bible. Consider the words of its authors:

“I beheld other books [including the Book of Mormon], which came forth . . . unto the convincing . . . that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true. And . . . [they] shall establish the truth of the first” (1 Nephi 13:39–40).

“Now these things were written . . . that the seed of this people may more fully believe his gospel [the Bible], which shall go forth unto them” (Mormon 5:12, 15).

“For behold, this is written for the intent that ye may believe that [the Bible]” (Mormon 7:9).

And finally, the words of Elder McConkie: “Indeed, the Book of Mormon itself came forth for the express purpose of ‘proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true.’ (D&C 20:11.) By ‘holy scriptures’ is here meant the holy Bible.”²²

The Book of Mormon validates this truth both by directly stating that the Bible is true and by the hundreds of references to biblical people, events, ideas, and locations.

As has been seen, however, the Book of Mormon also testifies that the Bible has only been preserved in a diluted state. It is these warnings that make the Book of Mormon not only a keystone witness of the Bible but also a singular testament of the JST.

Understanding of the JST depends on a concurrent understanding of the Book of Mormon, which gives the clearest revealed scripture from God on the subject of biblical corruption.⁷ Latter-day Saint scholar Robert J. Matthews has explained that "without the viewpoint of the Book of Mormon, neither scholar nor layman, even in the Church, would sense the magnitude of the depletion of the Bible."⁸

In relationship to the JST, the Book of Mormon fulfills one of its roles as keystone by boldly testifying of the need and purpose of an inspired restoration of the Bible. During Nephi's vision of the last days the angel told him, "Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness . . . [but] shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them" (1 Nephi 13:32, 40). All modern revelation rests upon the truth found within the Book of Mormon—"the keystone of our religion"—and this is especially true of the Joseph Smith Translation.

THE JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION ELEVATES THE BIBLE TO A HIGHER PLANE

With the Book of Mormon establishing the context for an inspired translation, one is ready to see just how the JST fulfills its role of restoring the plain and precious truths that were removed. The Lord told Joseph of Egypt in 2 Nephi 3:12 that the Bible and the Book of Mormon would grow together unto the confounding of false doctrines, the laying down of contentions, the establishing of peace, and the restoring of knowledge of the Lord's covenants with ancient patriarchs. Any student of the Book of Mormon will readily see its ability to fulfill all these prophetic requirements. But is the Bible as the world has it today an effective companion to the Book of Mormon to accomplish the Lord's work? True, the Bible has done

untold good, but is it capable of being “established in one” (1 Nephi 13:41) with “the most correct of any book on earth”? How can the Book of Mormon be completely at one with a book that suffers from the deliberate removal of truth by men who made these changes that “they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men”? (1 Nephi 13:27).

The JST is the answer. While the Bible is capable to some degree of fulfilling this prophecy, its effectiveness is hindered by, in the words of Joseph Smith, “ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests [who] have committed many errors.”⁹ The JST gives correct translations, complete transcriptions, and corrections for many of these errors. It amplifies and expounds upon the spiritual truths presented in the Bible and enables it to better fulfill the prophecy of the Lord to Joseph of Egypt.

The JST is even implied as the fulfillment of this prophecy when the entire chapter of 2 Nephi 3 is viewed in context. The theme of this chapter is restoration—the revealing anew of that which had been lost. The central figure of this work is the Prophet Joseph Smith, who was commissioned by the Lord “to work mighty wonders, and do that thing which is great in the sight of God, unto the bringing to pass much restoration unto the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 3:24). Much of the chapter deals with the Prophet’s restoration of the words of the fruit of the loins of Joseph—the Book of Mormon. Within the chapter, however, is the previously cited prophecy about the Bible. Knowing that these prophecies deal with the Prophet Joseph Smith and his work as a restorer, one can see that this prophecy is closely connected with such work. And the JST is, of course, the Prophet’s primary work of biblical restoration. A brief overview here will demonstrate that the JST is more than capable of meeting the prophetic requirements of 2 Nephi 3:12 and that it en-

ables the Bible to more easily be "established in one" with the Book of Mormon.

The confounding of false doctrines. The Prophet Joseph Smith said: "There are many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelations of the Holy Ghost to me."⁹ It seems that if an incomplete and altered Bible is the source of false doctrines, then an inspired restoration and revision would logically place great emphasis on the dissemination of correct doctrinal principles. The JST does just that. Space does not permit a complete examination of the restored doctrines in the JST, but they include the premortal ministry of Jesus Christ, the fall and nature of Satan, the life of Enoch and his ancient city Zion, the clarification of confusing passages relating to the personality of God, and other doctrines such as the age of accountability and the necessity of the Fall of Adam and Eve. The primary role of any scripture is to be a witness of Jesus Christ, and the JST emphasizes His divinity frequently and forcefully.¹⁰

The restoration of doctrine by the Prophet Joseph Smith in his translation of the Bible included a greater purpose than merely restoring biblical text. It served as the means of making known these doctrines for the first time to this dispensation.¹¹ Robert J. Matthews noted:

Every member of the Church since 1831 has been influenced in some way by the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, even if he or she has never heard of it and does not know even one corrected verse. This is true because many of the doctrines and practices of the Church were first made known, or enlarged upon, through the Prophet's translation of the Bible. These include the age of accountability at eight years, the degrees of glory, the ministry of Enoch and his city, the concept of Zion, and doctrine of premortal existence. The JST is not just a better Bible, it is a major vehicle of the Restoration.¹²

In other words, the Prophet's work was not merely a casual pastime in which he added already-revealed doctrines to the biblical word; rather, it was a primary source for latter-day doctrine, as much as the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants. It is clear that the Joseph Smith Translation does indeed work unto "the confounding of false doctrines" (2 Nephi 3:12) as the prophecy to Joseph states. "In one sense of the word," Elder McConkie said of the JST, "it is the crowning part of the doctrinal restoration."¹¹

The laying down of contentions and the establishing of peace. It is well known that disparate versions of the Bible and the subsequent secular traditions loosely based upon it have caused much contention. Joseph Smith recorded the bickering of his day:

For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, . . . it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions.

So great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong.

The teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. (Joseph Smith—History 1:6, 8, 12)

History has demonstrated how mistranslations and misinterpretations of the Bible have given rise to countless churches. While many of these claim the Bible as the primary source of their doctrine and practices, few can agree on how to interpret fundamental theology. "The Bible," Elder McConkie noted, "is indeed the perfect tool to support every conceivable doctrinal view."¹⁴ The JST, however, does much to remove the stumbling blocks created by the great and abominable church. It has previously been shown that the JST restores many doctrinal truths. Consequently, the knowledge and application of these truths can put to rest many of the contentions arising from worldly Bibles. For example, many churches have conflicting views over the nature or necessity of infant baptism. Much of this conflict could have been prevented had the restored account of JST, Genesis 17:11 been preserved: "Children are not accountable before me until they are eight years old." For the Latter-day Saints, the JST works to the "laying down of contentions, and establishing peace" (2 Nephi 3:12) through its simple truths and revealing clarifications.

The bringing of knowledge of our fathers and the Lord's covenants. The JST restores vast amounts of information about the Biblical patriarchs. The lives of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and others are expanded upon with a clarity unmatched by any other source. The JST, for example, has eighteen times the number of verses concerning Enoch than found in other Bibles!¹⁵ The JST shows that each patriarch was taught the fullness of the gospel, was baptized, and was ordained to the priesthood. Robert J. Matthews noted: "There is a *continuity* in the account of the JST Genesis that is not found in any other Bible. The JST gives an account of the early patriarchs in gospel context and setting, [which included] the fulness of the gospel, the priesthood, and faith in Jesus Christ and the same covenant."¹⁶ This "covenant" refers to the promises of the Lord to each patriarch. The King James Version can leave one with the impression that each patriarch was separate from the

rest in matters of time, location, and gospel understanding. From the JST it can be seen that “there was a continuity in the way the gospel was handed down and communicated from one generation to another.”¹⁷ Each time the Lord made a covenant with Adam’s descendants, the JST points out that He was renewing the same covenant He had already made with other prophets. The JST truly helps fulfill the Lord’s promise that the Bible would bring us “to the knowledge of [our] fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of [His] covenants” (2 Nephi 3:12).

It is not difficult to see that the JST allows the Bible to approximate the Book of Mormon in terms of correctness. This being established, a further examination can be made as to how the JST of the Bible and the Book of Mormon fulfill their roles with respect to each other.

PLAIN AND PRECIOUS TRUTHS WERE RESTORED

The JST restores truths that were once in the Bible but are now missing, whether those truths are doctrinal or historical. The Book of Mormon, however, is a *new* record of a distinct people. Although there are exceptions, its primary task was not that of restoring actual biblical text. Hugh Nibley noted:

[The Book of Mormon’s] purpose was not to restore these lost passages of the Bible. . . . And the great doctrinal teachings—such as those of Alma, Nephi, Ammon, Moroni, Mormon—are all direct revelations. They are not restored from old books. . . . But it is the Pearl of Great Price [which includes part of the JST] alone to date that restores precious parts that were removed from the scriptures.¹⁸

The Book of Mormon does quote portions of the Bible. For example, Nephi includes over a dozen chapters of Isaiah, and Jacob includes Zenos's olive tree allegory. If the Book of Mormon is primarily designed to be a new witness and the JST to be the primary restorer of pure biblical text, why would the Lord include these chapters that seemingly belong more to the JST? That has never been revealed. There are, however, some possible explanations, including both context and use.

Context. If the Lord knew that the inspired, original biblical text needed to be brought forth in the latter days, He would have had several mechanisms available to accomplish this task. The JST, Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, and even Doctrine and Covenants (for example, section 7) all contain lost Bible text to one extent or another. Though the primary means of revealing this text is the JST, the Book of Mormon authors may have been inspired to include parts simply because it made sense to do so in the context of their teachings. For example, if Nephi wanted to discuss Isaiah's messianic prophecies, it would have been logical to include them in his commentary.

Use. Another possibility as to why some material may fall outside of its normal sphere may be that the Lord knew just which books would be used the most. For example, the JST was largely unused by the Church for over a century, while the Book of Mormon was of course wholeheartedly accepted and taught. Perhaps one reason that the Isaiah chapters, for example, are in the Book of Mormon is because by placing them there the Lord knew that they would be read and studied—at least more often than if they were in the JST. Monte S. Nyman has pointed out that “of the 425 separate verses of Isaiah which are quoted in the Book of Mormon, 391 say something about the attributes or mission of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ In other words, these are particularly important passages, worthy of attention.

THE WORKS COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER

Although for the most part, the JST and the Book of Mormon have different sources for their text, their teachings are interrelated, and the work of one complements the work of the other. To understand this relationship, one must remember the main source of the Nephite scripture: the plates of brass. Robert J. Matthews has demonstrated that "the contents of the Joseph Smith Translation, having received the touch of restoration through the hand of the prophet of God, resemble the doctrinal content of the brass plates more fully than do those of any other Bible."⁷⁰ Evidence for this can be found by looking at quotations from the brass plates, as cited by the Nephites, and comparing them to changes made by Joseph Smith in his inspired translation (for example, compare 2 Nephi 3:6–17 and JST, Genesis 50:26–35). Remember that the brass plates came into the protective custody of the Nephite record keepers *before* the scriptures were corrupted—and the JST is a work to restore the scriptures to this original state.

What is the significance of this relationship? It is now possible to view the frequent Nephite commentary on the plates of brass as applicable to the JST. This is a powerful idea. A modern reader can study both the commentary provided by a Nephite prophet on an event or idea as well as the original record of this event or idea in the JST. Robert L. Millet has outlined six examples of such connections:

1. The fall of Lucifer (2 Nephi 2:17–18; Moses 4:1–4)
2. The Creation, Fall, and Atonement (2 Nephi 2:22; Moses 5:10–11)
3. The origin of secret combinations (Helaman 6:26–27; Moses 5:16–55)
4. The prophecies of Joseph (2 Nephi 4:1–2; JST, Genesis 50:24–35)

5. Abraham's knowledge of the Messiah (Helaman 8:16–17; JST, Genesis 15:9–12)
6. The ministry of Melchizedek (Alma 13:1–19; JST, Genesis 14:25–40)²⁷

To understand how these relationships function, examine the third example with regard to secret combinations. Mormon in the book of Helaman outlines the history of the Gadianton robbers, noting their earliest roots. He tells of how Satan “did plot with Cain, that if he would murder his brother Abel it should not be known unto the world. And he did plot with Cain and his followers from that time forth” (Helaman 6:27). Here Mormon bases his ideas on his knowledge of the brass plates. The JST then provides more detailed information about this event:

“And Satan said unto Cain; Swear unto me by thy throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die; . . . and this day I will deliver thy brother Abel into thine hands” (Moses 5:29).

“Wherefore the Lord cursed . . . all them that had covenanted with Satan; for they kept not the commandments of God, and it displeased God, and he ministered not unto them, and their works were abominations, and began to spread among all the sons of men” (Moses 5:52).

These verses are just two instances out of an entire chapter discussing Cain, Satan, and the rise of secret combinations. As another example, let us look at point 6 (regarding Melchizedek). Alma 13 is a discussion on priesthood and its attributes, and reference is made to Melchizedek and his greatness as a priesthood holder. Alma concludes his remarks by noting that of priesthood holders, “None were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention. Now I need not rehearse the matter; what I have said may suffice.

Behold, *the scriptures are before you*" (Alma 13:19–20; emphasis added). The "scriptures" Alma refers to and indeed bases his sermon on seem to be the record of Melchizedek found in JST Genesis 14:25–40, which gives a wealth of information on this great seer who "stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire" (JST, Genesis 14:26). The concepts in this restored account even seem to be the basis of much of Paul's priesthood discussion in Hebrews.

The point of these examples is clear; there is much for the reader to learn by an examination of both the JST and the Nephite vision of the events that transpired. Study the source in the JST (brass plates) alone and there is much to learn; study the commentary in the Book of Mormon alone and there is much to learn. But study both together and each acts as a lens to magnify the greater truths of the other. Used in this way, do the Bible and the Book of Mormon not become "established in one"? Do they not "grow together"? Do they not confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, establish peace, and restore knowledge of the Lord's covenants with the prophets and patriarchs back to the first dispensation? The answer is yes—each helps in learning "line upon line, precept upon precept" (D&C 98:12).

In summary, the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the JST have many relationships:

1. The Bible prepares men for the Book of Mormon.
2. The Book of Mormon testifies of the Bible and explains the need for the JST.
3. The JST helps the Bible to work more effectively with the Book of Mormon.
4. The JST is the primary source of restored biblical text, but there are meaningful exceptions in other works of scripture.
5. The Book of Mormon and the JST offer parallel teachings that help one to better understand the other.

Above all else, the Book of Mormon and the JST are testaments of the Savior. The Book of Mormon title page explains that it was brought forth "to the convincing . . . that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD" and the Bible, especially Joseph Smith's inspired version, is clearly meant to do the same. The Lord called these two works a "testimony of two nations [as] a witness unto you that I am God" (2 Nephi 29:8). By studying both of these monumental works given through the Prophet Joseph Smith, one can more greatly understand the Lord's plan for each one of His children and gain greater faith in the mission and divinity of Jesus Christ.

NOTES

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 393; emphasis in original.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 96.
3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1908), 4:461.
4. McConkie, *A New Witness*, 395.
5. See *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon: The 1991 Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 98–99.
6. Matthews, "What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about the Bible," in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, 95.
7. Smith, *History of The Church*, 4:461.
8. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002), 338–39.
9. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:425.
10. See W. Jeffrey Marsh, *The Joseph Smith Translation: Precious Truths Restored* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002), 61;

- Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Plain and Precious Truths Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 168–69.
11. See Robert J. Matthews, *Selected Writings of Robert J. Matthews: Gospel Scholars Series* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 325–27. Brother Matthews demonstrates that the JST is in many cases a primary source of doctrine, with many Doctrine and Covenants revelations coming about *because* of this work.
 12. Robert J. Matthews, CES Symposium handout, Brigham Young University, 1993.
 13. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrinal Restoration,” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1985), 21.
 14. McConkie, *A New Witness*, 460.
 15. See Marsh, *Precious Truths Restored*, 85.
 16. Robert J. Matthews, “Major Doctrinal Contributions of the JST,” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, 281; emphasis in original.
 17. Matthews, “Major Doctrinal Contributions,” 278.
 18. Hugh Nibley, *Ancient Documents and the Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert Smith and Robert Smythe, Lecture 1, 5.
 19. Monte S. Nyman, “Great Are the Words of Isaiah” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 7.
 20. See Robert J. Matthews, *A Bible! A Bible!* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 153.
 21. See Robert L. Millet, “The Joseph Smith Translation, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Book of Mormon,” in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored*, 138–44.