

CHAPTER 9



“IF . . . AND”: A HEBREW CONSTRUCTION IN THE BOOK OF MOSES

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The original text of Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible (JST) continues to reveal heretofore unrecognized information about the text’s history and interesting new avenues for research.¹ The New Translation text that underlies the Book of Moses (Genesis 1:1–6:13) is particularly interesting because more than one Joseph Smith manuscript of it exists and because the Prophet made significant revisions to the text after his initial dictation.² Important questions regarding the New Translation of Genesis include “To what extent does the JST restore original text lost in antiquity?” and “What was the language of the original text?” I have argued elsewhere that evidence exists to suggest that at least part of the New Translation of Genesis is a restoration of an ancient Hebrew *Vorlage* because of the existence in the text of a grammatical construction that cannot be explained in English but represents good Hebrew.³ To honor my former teacher and twenty-eight-year faculty colleague S. Kent

1. See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible—Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004).

2. See Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005).

3. Kent P. Jackson, “Behold I,” *BYU Studies* 44/2 (2005): 169–75.

Brown, I would like to discuss another Hebrew grammatical construction found in the original manuscripts of the Book of Moses.

In English, conditional sentences are usually expressed with the use of an *if-then* formation. The protasis (the conditional clause) is preceded by *if*, and the apodosis (the consequence clause) typically is preceded by *then*. We see this formation in these examples, taken from the King James translation of the Old Testament: “*If* I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, *then* I will spare all the place for their sakes” (Genesis 18:26); and “Jacob vowed a vow, saying, *If* God will be with me, . . . *then* shall the Lord be my God” (Genesis 28:20-21). Often an English *if-then* clause lacks the *then* but communicates the message just as well, as in this example: “*If* ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed” (1 Samuel 12:25).

The examples presented above are good translations from the original Hebrew text. But in the two Genesis examples, the Hebrew uses *and* rather than *then* to introduce the consequence clauses. This is consistent with standard Hebrew usage that expresses the *if-then* idea with *ʾim* (*if*) to introduce the protasis, and *wě-* (*and*) to introduce the apodosis. Thus, more literal renderings of our two Genesis examples would yield, “*If* I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, *and* I will spare all the place for their sakes” (Genesis 18:26); and “Jacob vowed a vow, saying, *If* God will be with me, . . . *and* shall the Lord be my God” (Genesis 28:20-21). For all their literalness, these translations miscommunicate dramatically, so the translators wisely placed the phrases into more conventional English.

The *if-and* construction is evident in the earliest manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. Royal Skousen has discovered fourteen examples in the Original and Printer’s Manuscripts, the presence of which argues strongly for a Hebrew-based text that underlies the 1829 English translation. But in preparation for the 1837 second

edition, *and* was edited out of all of them to bring the wording into harmony with standard English usage.⁴

Only one example of the *if-and* construction is found in the original manuscripts of Joseph Smith’s New Translation of Genesis.⁵ The passage is now designated Moses 6:52 in the Pearl of Great Price. The first line of the passage was revealed to Joseph Smith, probably on 1 December 1830. The scribe for that line was his wife, Emma Smith, who wrote for her husband only for a short time, taking dictation for slightly more than two pages. Perhaps on that same day, and most likely by 10 December, John Whitmer took the dictation for the remainder of the passage. The dictated manuscript is called Old Testament Manuscript 1. The text of the conditional sentence in Moses 6:52 reads as follows, with the *if* and the *and* italicized:

If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all their transgressions, and be baptized, even by water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, which is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, *and* ye shall ask all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given.⁶

4. Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 132–33; “The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 33–35.

5. In nonbiblical material in the Book of Moses, some other conditional sentences are found that do not have the *then/and*, for example, “If men do not repent, I will send in the floods upon them” (Moses 8:17; see also 5:29; 6:29; 8:24). In Genesis in Hebrew, forms without *then/and* are more common, outnumbering those with *then/and* by about 1.5 to 1.

6. For comparative purposes, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling have been made consistent with the text in the current (1981) edition of the Pearl of Great Price. Emma Smith’s handwriting ends with the word *voice*.

The *if* and the *and* identify the protasis and apodosis of the conditional sentence; the *if*-clause lists the conditions of the promise, and the *then*- (in this case *and*-) clause identifies the consequences.⁷

Probably on 8 March 1831, John Whitmer began making a copy of the text of Old Testament Manuscript 1, which by that date had progressed to Genesis 24:41. On the resulting manuscript—Old Testament Manuscript 2—he faithfully (although not always flawlessly) copied the original, sometimes making needed spelling and grammatical corrections (for example, changing *their*, early in the above text, to *thy*). Old Testament Manuscript 2 was the document on which the Prophet continued the translation to the end of the Old Testament. And on Old Testament Manuscript 2, he made additional corrections to the text already recorded, editing and refining as he felt inspired to do so. With Sidney Rigdon serving as scribe, the Prophet made some important refinements to Moses 6:52. Following is Joseph Smith’s final wording of Moses 6:52, with the *if* and the *and* italicized:

If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, who is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, *and* ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you.⁸

7. I examined the possibility that the final *and* in the passage might introduce the apodosis. This seems less likely because “turn unto me,” “hearken unto my voice,” “believe,” and “repent of all their transgressions” constitute a series of actions all governed by “thou wilt” in the first clause. The “and ye shall” forms a natural break, with a new subject, “ye,” and a new governing verb, “shall.”

8. Again, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling have been made consistent with the text in the current (1981) edition of the Pearl of Great Price.

Readers of the modern text of the Pearl of Great Price will note that the *and* that introduces the apodosis is no longer in the passage today. It was removed in the 1878 Pearl of Great Price. When Elder Orson Pratt was preparing the 1878 edition, he took the text of the Book of Moses directly from the *Inspired Version*, published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1867. The *Inspired Version* is a printed edition of the New Translation with editing, punctuation, and chapter-and-verse divisions provided by a publication committee chaired by Joseph Smith III.⁹ Because Elder Pratt and Latter-day Saints in Utah had no access to the original New Translation manuscripts, Elder Pratt drew the Book of Moses text from the best source available to him, the printed RLDS *Inspired Version*. For the first draft of the new Book of Moses, Elder Pratt edited a printed 1851 Pearl of Great Price against the *Inspired Version*, writing the corrections that needed to be made.¹⁰ In the process, he made very few changes to the Book of Moses text,¹¹ and he wrote the corrections to Moses 6:52 precisely as the text reads in the 1867 *Inspired Version*. At some point after Elder Pratt wrote the needed corrections in his 1851 printing, the *and* of the apodosis at Moses 6:52 was removed. This probably took place in the proofreading process, removed either by Elder Pratt or by an editor in his employ. The reason seems clear. The *if-and* construction makes no sense in English. The *and* disguises the consequence clause and thus changes the intended thought. Removing the English *and* corrected the verse and expressed the passage in English with the meaning intended in the original.

9. The *Inspired Version* is a popular title for *The Holy Scriptures, Translated and Corrected by the Spirit of Revelation*. By Joseph Smith, Jr., the Seer (Plano, IL: The [Reorganized] Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1867).

10. The 1851 Pearl of Great Price text was incomplete, out of order, and came from an inferior preliminary manuscript, so Elder Pratt was wise to replace it with the superior text of the RLDS *Inspired Version*. Elder Pratt's edited copy of the 1851 Pearl of Great Price is in the Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

11. See Jackson, *Book of Moses and Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*, 33–36.

The wording at Moses 6:52 has remained unchanged in the Pearl of Great Price since 1878.¹² The passage is a scriptural gem. It is a quotation of God’s words when he taught the gospel to Adam and as such may be the earliest recital in human history of what we call the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. The *if-then* promise is both to Adam and to his children: *If* we turn to Christ, obey his voice, believe, repent, and are baptized, (*then*) we will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, so that whatever we ask, we will receive.

The King James translators were thorough and consistent in rendering the Hebrew *if-and* formation as *if-then*. Thus there are no examples in the English Bible from which Joseph Smith could have modeled this Hebrew, non-English construction, just as it was not found in American spoken English. When added to evidence already published for the even more enigmatic “behold I” construction, we see a greater case being made for a Hebrew text behind the nonbiblical material in the Book of Moses.¹³ These phrases are nonsense in English, are found nowhere in the English Bible, but are perfectly good Hebrew. Even in limited numbers, a Hebrew original seems to be the best way to explain their presence in the manuscripts. This is not to say that God spoke to Adam in Hebrew or that Enoch recorded God’s words in Hebrew. But the evidence seems to suggest that the text of the early chapters of Genesis, revealed in English to Joseph Smith in 1830–31, came from an underlying Hebrew original.

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12. Readers will note one other difference between Joseph Smith’s text of Moses 6:52 and the text in the current Pearl of Great Price. In the preparation of the 1867 *Inspired Version*, the RLDS publication committee did not use the Prophet’s correction of the second *which* to *who*, probably due to simple oversight. Because Elder Pratt used the *Inspired Version* reading in the 1878 Pearl of Great Price, our current text includes the awkward, unintended sequence: “mine Only Begotten Son, *who* is full of grace and truth, *which* is Jesus Christ.”

13. See Jackson, “Behold I.”