2008-01-01

One Continuous Flow: Revelations Surrounding the New Translation

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We often underestimate both the complexity and continuity of Joseph Smith’s revelatory life. His visions rolled, he said, “like an overflowing surge before [his] mind.” Now that they have been compartmentalized into different sections, chapters, and books, we tend to compartmentalize them in our minds. Such a practice, however, limits our ability to see how powerful and continuous this “overflowing surge” really was. Nevertheless, if we read his revelations in the order in which they came, we find ourselves better able to understand not only the revelations themselves but also their interrelations with each other and the context from which they arose. In the infancy of the Church, Joseph’s revelatory work on translating the Bible and his other concurrent revelations laid, stone by stone, a doctrinal foundation upon which the Church would firmly stand. The revelations resulting in the Joseph Smith Translation, which he called the New Translation, and those in the Doctrine and Covenants are not two separate sides of this

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foundation but are instead many individual stones that overlay and interlock.

To understand this interaction, we must first establish a time line for the revelations. While the entire process of creating the New Translation is worthy of study, that would be too large a project for the current venue. Instead we will focus on the material that represents Old Testament Manuscript 1 (OT1), or Joseph’s first pass through the first twenty-four chapters of Genesis. This material contains the revelations and corrections he received until the Lord directed him to stop translating the Old Testament and begin with the New Testament. This period is associated with great new revelations, such as those found in the book of Moses. Afterward, while many important changes were made during the translation, including small bursts of completely new passages, it was not of the same magnitude as the beginning of the work. For these reasons, we will consider the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants that took place just before, during, and after the time in which the Prophet was creating OT1.

We must also keep in mind that the revelations the Prophet Joseph received were not immediately published. The eventual publication would come in various forms, including the Book of Commandments and several serial publications such as the Evening and Morning Star, the Messenger and Advocate, and Times and Seasons. Yet often these publications were designed to make the revelations available to Saints who had joined the Church after their reception. We know that early on some people, such as John Whitmer and Edward Partridge, made their own copies of portions of the New Translation. We are also sure that Franklin Richards obtained copies in some way. While we cannot know how many people had some personal portion of the translation, the existence of personal copies is indicative that some Saints wanted, obtained, and shared the information flowing from the Prophet. We can assume that as the revelations were received they were read or made known in some way to many Church members of the time. At the very least, the doctrine learned by those who had access to the revelations was imparted to others in sermons, conversations, and preaching. Thus, the revelations surely had immediate impact on the doctrinal understanding of the Church as a whole. Furthermore, when Joseph Smith
speaks of the happiness of the “little flock” upon receiving a revelation that was part of the New Translation, it indicates that at least many members of the fledgling Church had indeed received the revelation. Indeed, when Joseph said that the flock received the revelation, he simultaneously noted that the total membership was about seventy people, which suggests that most, if not all, of those members knew the contents of the revelation.

When we see and teach the relationships between these various revelations, it will enhance our study and understanding of the gospel. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Sometimes I fear that we teach the scriptures in isolation from each other, when in fact, if you will make multiple use of them . . . you will not only make the teaching moment more significant but you will also be witnessing to the congruency and relevance of all the scriptures. You will find, as one would expect, a powerful conceptual consistency that flows throughout all the scriptures, sometimes even verbatim language, because they come from the same source.” Among other things, our understanding of Joseph Smith, Church history, certain gospel doctrines, and the Lord’s methods of teaching His people will be enhanced by correctly understanding the interrelationship of the New Translation and Joseph Smith’s other revelations.

It must also be noted that the work done here is only possible because of that which has already been done by others. While this is true of all scholarship, it is particularly true of this topic. One cannot work on the New Translation without learning that every path has been paved by Robert J. Matthews. Additionally, his work in conjunction with Scott H. Faulring and Kent P. Jackson in providing a critical edition of the New Translation manuscripts opens up completely new avenues of possible research, including the current article.

**Seeing the Continuous Flow**

In early April 1830, several revelations clarified the organization of the Church and questions relating to various people joining it shortly thereafter. These revelations are Doctrine and Covenants sections 21–23 and seemingly portions of 20. We are aware of no significant revelations coming during the rest of that month, nor in all of May. But
sometime in June a wonderful flood of light sprang forth as Joseph began the New Translation of the Bible. As the spectacular vision in Moses 1 was unfolded to him, it apparently flowed “from the Prophet’s lips without the slightest contemplation, hesitation, or uncertainty.” Following this, sections 24–26 were received in July, section 27 in August, sections 28 and 29 in late September, sections 30 and 31 on September 28, and section 32 in mid-October. Of particular note is the Lord’s command to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and John Whitmer to devote their time to studying the scriptures (see D&C 26:1). Along with the reception of Moses 1, this urge may have served as an impetus to continue the New Translation.

During the same months these revelations were given (June–October), the Prophet also received revelations that became Moses 2–5:43. He grouped this material into two separate topics. On page 3 of OT1, just above the beginning of Moses 2, the heading states, “A Revelation given to the Elders of the Church of Christ On the First Book of Moses.” Written on page 8 of this manuscript above what is now Moses 4 is “A Revelation concerning Adam after he had been driven out of the garden of Eden.” These two headings indicate that Moses 2–3 was received separately from Moses 4–5:43. While we know that all this translation was done by October 21, 1830, we do not know precisely when these verses were received and recorded. It is possible that their translation was spread over a number of days and received on a number of occasions. However, the Prophet seems to have worked on the New Translation in great bursts of communion with the divine, which, combined with the two topical headings, suggests that Moses 2–3 was received as one great revelation and Moses 4–5:43 as another, though we cannot be certain.

One small clue may enable a more refined dating of the reception of these revelations. As noted above, the heading of Moses 2 states that the revelation was “given to the Elders of the Church of Christ.” The wording suggests that several elders were present either at the reception of the revelation or that the revelation was intended to be read to several elders shortly after its reception. This may even indicate that the revelation was associated with a conference. The timing of the Church’s second conference on September 26–28 coincides with the
time Moses chapters 2–3 were received. Section 28 was received just days before the conference. President Joseph Fielding Smith believed (though he provided no explanation as to how he came to this conclusion) that the Lord also revealed section 29 just days before the conference. However, the Prophet Joseph Smith noted that section 29 was received in the presence of six elders. There were six elders (besides the Prophet) attending the conference held in September, so it is likely these were the same six elders present when the revelation was received, signaling it may have been received at the conference instead of before the conference. This may be confirmed by Newel Knight’s record, which states that they received three revelations after the conference began (he notes the reception of section 28 before the conference but mentions no other revelations until the conference had convened).

It is difficult to tell what revelations Knight may have been referring to. Sections 30 and 31 were revelations received at the conference, and by this count section 29 may be the third to which he referred. However, originally section 30 was regarded as three separate revelations (comprising chapters 30–32 of the original Book of Commandments), which would mean that these three and section 31 comprise four revelations received at the conference. We cannot be certain precisely when section 29 and Moses 2–3 were received. It is plausible that they were both given in the presence of the same elders and that this was either during or just before the September 26 conference. Certainly section 29 was read at the conference, and perhaps Moses 2–3 as well. Whether or not this is an accurate scenario, it seems quite likely they were both received close together. Thus it is probable that Moses 2–3 was received around the same time as sections 28–31, with Moses 4–5:43 coming shortly after Moses 2–3. Undoubtedly Moses 2–5:43 and sections 28–31 were received within (at most) months of each other. At this point the “surge” of revelation had begun in earnest, but it was only a forerunner to the deluge on the way.

Shortly thereafter the Lord poured out revelations upon the Saints. Moses 5:43b–5:51 was received on October 21 according to John Whitmer’s handwritten annotation in the text (Whitmer had just taken over scribal duties from Oliver Cowdery). The Prophet received
section 33 in late October and section 34 on November 4. The end of November through the beginning of December was a period during which Joseph received a flood of revelations. On November 30 he received Moses 5:52–6:18. The next day he brought forth Moses 6:19–52. Sometime in the next nine (possibly six) days, he also dictated Moses 6:52–7:1. Sections 35 and 36 came on December 10 (possibly the 7). Section 35 is particularly meaningful for the New Translation because it said Joseph had been given “keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed” (D&C 35:18), and Sidney Rigdon was commanded by the Lord to “write for him; and the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect” (D&C 35:20). Sidney Rigdon’s service as scribe allowed the torrent of translation to continue with the reception of Moses 7:2–8:12 sometime during the rest of that month. It is remarkable to note that the Prophet provided 156 completely new verses of Genesis in one month or less, surely observing the Christmas holiday in the midst. Section 37 was also received sometime in late December.

Combining the Doctrine and Covenants revelations with those of the New Translation allows us to understand that Joseph gave the fledgling Church 195 new scriptural verses during the last month of the Church’s first year. The reception of sections 38 (January 2) and 39 (January 5) within the next few days brings the total to 261 verses in a five-week period. Without considering the place of the New Translation, we could easily pass over the fact that this was one of the greatest periods of revelation the Church has experienced, an overflowing surge.

After this, the New Translation efforts took a brief respite while the Prophet and Sidney moved to Ohio, where they arrived in early February. Sometime in January the Lord gave Joseph the revelation that is now section 40. Then recorded revelation ceased for about a month. However, upon arrival in Kirtland the prophetic flow resumed. Section 41 came on February 4, section 42 on February 9, section 43 sometime in the middle of the month, and section 44 late in the month. Section 45, wherein the Prophet was instructed to temporarily stop translating the Old Testament and begin translating the New Testament, came on March 7, 1831. By that time the translation had reached Genesis 24:41. This means that all the material between Moses 8:12 (equivalent to
Genesis 5:32) and Genesis 24:41 was received during a five-week period. Thus, the translation process seems to have happened in great bursts of prophetic energy. To be sure, there was less new material received in these chapters of Genesis than those that preceded, yet the Prophet still worked through every verse, and Sidney still wrote out each entire verse by hand.32 This means that the two men labored together as the Prophet received inspiration regarding 470 verses (with an additional 221 received that would make their way into the Doctrine and Covenants, totaling 691 verses in five weeks, though many of the Genesis verses comprised nothing new). While this work may have largely taken place on certain days with gaps between, the work must have gone forward somewhat consistently and steadily to cover so many verses in a mere thirty-five days. Thus, while we cannot know for certain the exact dates on which the Prophet translated specific verses, we can deduce fair approximations within definite time limits.

During this five-week period, the translation process averaged ninety-four verses a week. Again, some weeks may have seen more translation than others, but the rapid and extended pace demands that it could not have been far off this mark. If the average is close, we can estimate that after one week of being in Kirtland, on February 8, Joseph and Sidney had probably gone through most of Genesis chapter 9, coinciding roughly with the reception of sections 41 and 42. By February 15 they had likely worked their way through Genesis 12 and would then have been midway through chapter 17 by February 22. Section 43 was seemingly received sometime during this process. By March 1, they were likely about halfway through Genesis 20, enabling them to have progressed to Genesis 24:41 by March 7, the day the Lord revealed section 45. We can use these approximations as rough guidelines as we look at the interrelationships of the revelations.
### Concurrence of Revelations

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### Time Line of Revelations

- **March 1830**
  - Section 19
- **April 1830**
  - Section 20 (parts composed in 1829)
  - Section 21 (April 6)
  - Section 22
  - Section 23
- **June 1830**
  - Moses 1
- **July 1830**
  - Section 24
  - Section 25
  - Section 26
- **July–August 1830**
  - Moses 2–3
- **August 1830**
  - Section 27
- **September 1830**
  - Section 28
  - Section 29
  - Section 30
  - Section 31
  - **September–October 20, 1830**
    - Section 32 (mid-October)
    - Moses 5:43b–5:51 (October 21)
  - Section 33 (late October)
- **November 1830**
  - Sections 34 (November 4)
  - Moses 5:52–6:18 (November 30)
- **December 1830**
  - Section 35
  - Moses 6:19–52 (December 1)
  - Moses 6:52–7:1 (between December 1 and 10)
  - Section 36
- **January 1831**
  - Section 37 (late December)
- **February 1831**
  - Section 38 (January 2)
  - Section 39 (January 5)
  - Section 40
- **March 1831**
  - Section 41 (February 4)
  - Section 42 (February 9)
  - Moses 8:13–30; Gen. 6:14–mid-Gen. 9
  - Section 43 (mid-February)
  - Mid-Gen. 9–mid-Gen. 17
  - Section 44 (late February)
  - Mid-Gen. 9–mid-Gen. 17
  - **March 1831**
    - Mid-Gen. 20–Gen. 24:41
    - Section 45 (March 7)
The time line not only allows us to gain a clearer idea of just how continuous the “overflowing surge” of revelation was which the Prophet received, as well as the magnitude of this flow, but also permits us to more fully examine how the process of the New Translation is connected with other revelations received, providing fascinating insights and greater understandings of both groups of revelations. Although we cannot touch on all the many aspects of Joseph’s revelations that impact one another, we will visit some important highlights.

**Understanding Prophethood**

As noted, the April revelations comprising sections 20–23 are almost entirely concerned with the organization of the Church and the entrance and duties of members thereto. It was months before the Prophet received another revelation that would make its way into the Doctrine and Covenants. In the meantime God gave him a striking and powerful vision (or recounting of a previous vision) now known as Moses 1. We know nothing of the background of the reception of this revelation. It may have been the result of thoroughly going through the Bible or may have been the impetus for doing so. We do, however, know how grateful Joseph was for the vision because he testified, “Amid all trials and tribulations we had to wade through, the Lord, who well knew our infantile and delicate situation, vouchsafed for us a supply, and granted us ‘line upon line, here a little and there a little,’ of which the following [Moses 1] was a precious morsel.”

We will never know all that was going through the Prophet’s mind and heart at this time, but we can understand some of the significance of this revelation. While the Prophet had already experienced several visions and revelations and was by now confident as a translator, his role as revelator for the Church was still being established, probably in his mind as well as in others. During this “infant” period, Joseph became part of a prophetic experience regarding the great prophet of Israel: Moses. This vision expanded our understanding of just how prophetic and revelatory Moses was. The light that shone from this vision not only illuminated the wonderful doctrines conveyed about God, His creations, and His relations with man but also elucidated what it meant to be a prophet. When the question of prophetic ability and authority
arose in connection with Hiram Page shortly thereafter, the Lord outlined the special and unique position that Joseph the Prophet held in the Church: “No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses” (D&C 28:2; emphasis added). Coming about two months after receiving Moses 1, this last phrase meant far more than it could have before, for they had a new and substantially elevated perception of Moses’s prophetic experiences. The revelation five months later, wherein God told the Church that Joseph was the only one “whom I have appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations from my hand” (D&C 43:2) would also have been enriched by the recent reception of Moses 1. The Saints would have understood Brother Joseph as one who gave commandments after he had been likened unto Moses, for Moses was renowned as the lawgiver. For those who had access to the account of Moses’s glorious vision, they now had a new understanding of how Moses was also a revelator, thus better understanding Joseph’s role as one “like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:9; see also D&C 28:2). Thus, both the Prophet’s and the Saints’ reading of section 43 were informed and enhanced by the earlier reception of Moses 1. The reception of Moses’s vision in concert with Joseph’s revelations raised the stature of both Moses and Joseph.

Satan, Creation, Fall, and the Gospel

It seems that after this glorious glimpse of what was missing from the Bible, the New Translation began in earnest. As mentioned, in the next three and one-half months, Moses 2–5:43 were received. Sometime early in this process, perhaps even before the reception of those chapters had begun and perhaps midstream, Joseph, Oliver, and John Whitmer were told to “let your time be devoted to the studying of the scriptures” (D&C 26:1). Surely this command gave further impetus to the New Translation. As part of that translation process, Joseph and the Church learned a great deal more about the Creation, Adam, Eve, and the Fall than they had previously known. In Moses 3–4 we gain a tremendous amount of knowledge regarding spiritual aspects of the Creation, how Satan became the devil, Adam’s and Eve’s roles in the Fall, and the nature of the Fall in general.
As noted, while we cannot be certain, it is likely Moses 3 and 4 had been translated about the same time as the reception of section 29 in late September. This context changes the way we read certain verses in the section. Consider the great understanding imparted by the reception of Moses 3:5, wherein we learn that the Lord God created all things “spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth.” Seemingly a short time later, the Lord further explained to the Prophet that He created “all things both spiritual and temporal—first spiritual, secondly temporal” (D&C 29:31–32). This was not particularly new given the Moses revelation, but the Lord went on to explain more. He first reminded Joseph that these creations had no end, nor beginning (see D&C 29:33), reinforcing what had just been communicated in Moses 1. Lest any think that when Adam had been cast out of the garden his whole experience had become temporal or that the commands he was given to sacrifice animals were concerned only with things temporal, the Lord explained that “all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created” (D&C 29:34). We wonder if this particular verse was not in response to some speculation members might have engaged in after the reception of Moses 3–5. The Lord hastened to add that Adam had agency, and “I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual” (D&C 29:35).

It could have been natural to view all those things in which the Lord had instructed Adam after he left the garden as temporal commands, dealing with the newly temporal and changed earth. But shortly after giving the Church more details concerning what Adam had been commanded, the Lord taught the Church that these were not merely temporal commands (see D&C 29).

While He was on the subject of Adam’s agency, the Lord expounded on the process of how Satan became the devil and how that impacted Adam’s agency. He had recently (or contemporaneously) revealed new knowledge that Satan had offered universal redemption, seeking to obtain God’s glory in the process and that “because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man,
which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down” (Moses 4:3). Then, after discussing Adam’s agency, the Lord revealed that Satan had “rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power, and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency; and they were thrust down, and thus . . . came the devil and his angels. . . . And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet—wherefore, it came to pass that the devil tempted Adam” (D&C 29:36–37, 39–40).

Robert Matthews has said of the relationship between Moses 4 and section 29 that the Doctrine and Covenants material “is a brief statement of doctrinal principles—without the story—actually a summary of the doctrines found in the longer narrative of JST Genesis 1–5.” It can be supposed that the New Translation spurred on the reception of section 29, but that would be only half the story. By looking at the larger time scale, we note what the Lord had done in teaching the Church about the Fall. When the Book of Mormon came forth in early 1830, the Saints learned from Lehi something of Satan’s pre-earth actions, that there must be opposition and that Satan was a part of that opposition so that we might know the bitter and sweet (see 2 Nephi 2:17–23). In mid-1830 they received a more full version of the story of the Fall, including more about who Satan was and what he did (see Moses 4:1–12). Around the same time, the Lord again taught something of Satan’s pre-earth actions, that he was a needed part of opposition, which was necessary to know both the bitter and the sweet (see D&C 29:36–40). The Lord hastened to add that while Adam was cast out, he had the gospel taught to him and redemption made known (see D&C 29:41–43), something just being made known to the Saints in narrative form (see Moses 5:4–15). Furthermore, about two months later, even more was revealed on how Adam and his children were taught the gospel and how to overcome the Fall (see Moses 6:51–68).

By combining the Book of Mormon material with the interlaced revelations of the New Translation and those that became the Doctrine and Covenants and by assuming section 29 came just after Moses 4, we
see that the Lord gave them a doctrinal discourse on the Fall (2 Nephi 2), then a narrative (Moses 4), then another doctrinal discourse (D&C 29), then more narrative (Moses 6:51–68), all in two four-month intervals. Thus, within about eight months, the Saints learned more about the Fall than any had for well over a thousand years, with multiple lessons, explanations, reminders, and reinforcements. These doctrinal foundation stones interlocked integrally. A Restoration understanding of the Fall was an important part of the overflowing surge that came to the Prophet during 1830 and early 1831.

The Concept of Zion Before Moses 7

Today we cannot speak of Zion without bringing to mind the great prophet Enoch. But it has not always been so. I will not go into great detail about the process of learning about Zion here, for Robert Matthews has already done significant work on this subject. Instead I will offer a few additional insights.

While undoubtedly the city of Zion became a central theme in the movement of the Church, if we are to understand the learning process the Saints went through as they came to a clearer understanding of Zion, we must begin with what they knew from the Book of Mormon, coupling it with knowledge gained from the New Translation and other revelations. The Book of Mormon mentions Zion forty-five times. All of these are either by Isaiah or by someone expounding on Isaiah, most notably Nephi. Because of this, the Book of Mormon did not add anything to the Saints’ understanding of Zion beyond what they had gathered from the Bible. Most of the times Isaiah uses the term Zion he does so as a synonym for Jerusalem; thus his Zion usage imparts very little information about what we now know. Nephi’s continual use of the term may have heightened its importance in their minds, but the Book of Mormon would not have caused them to understand anything more about Zion other than that it was a term referring to God’s covenant people in some way.

The Savior said that a New Jerusalem would be built in the Americas and that He would gather His people unto it (see 3 Nephi 20:22; 21:23–24). Ether and Moroni spoke extensively about the New Jerusalem as well, also noting America as its location (see Ether 13). But
the New Jerusalem had not yet been scripturally equated with something called Zion. Because we view the scriptures with hindsight, we typically equate Zion and New Jerusalem in our minds and assume that the early Saints did as well. However—and we seem to have missed this point up until now—there is nothing in the Book of Mormon that would have led the Saints to believe Zion and New Jerusalem were the same thing. The closest thing is in 3 Nephi 21, wherein the Saints learned Israel would be gathered together and the Lord would establish His Zion among them. Many verses later the Lord also explained that gathered Israel would build a New Jerusalem. Again the reference to Zion is to a vague, ethereal idea not specifically connected with a concrete city or order. While they may have had their own ideas, even after reading the Book of Mormon the Saints knew little about what the Lord meant by the term Zion.

The revelations preceding the New Translation did not significantly alter this. Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Knight Sr., Hyrum Smith, and David Whitmer were all told in revelations to “seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion” (D&C 6:6; see also D&C 11:6; 12:6; 14:6). This confirmed Zion had something to do with God’s work and people and indicated Zion had not yet been established, while clarifying that they would need to do so. A slight refinement of the idea came in several revelations having to do with the Prophet, wherein the Lord indicated that Joseph was inspired to move the cause of Zion forward and that He had been weeping for Zion (see D&C 21:7–8). The Prophet was also admonished to devote all his service to Zion (see D&C 24:7), as was John Whitmer (see D&C 30:11). Emma Smith was informed that she would have an inheritance in Zion (see D&C 25:2), while Sidney Rigdon was assured that if he kept the commandments and covenants, Zion would rejoice and flourish (see D&C 25:24). While the Saints were to build up Zion, they knew little other than the Church was somehow equated with Zion.

Perhaps the most curious pre–New Translation revelation concerning Zion came in late September, some three months before the revelations concerning Enoch were received. At this point the Lord told the Prophet that no one knew where the city of Zion would be built (see D&C 28:9). This is the first modern scriptural statement identifying
Zion with a geographic location. While the “inheritance in Zion” phrase from section 25 could be interpreted as a geographic reference, it could just as easily have fit with the “Zion as the kingdom of God” references already received. We must ask ourselves why the Lord was suddenly so specific about the geography of Zion in what seems to be an abrupt way. There are several possible answers to this question.

It is possible that the idea of Zion as a specific city was native to the Saints’ understanding as New Englanders. For many years the idea of an American Zion, or New Jerusalem (and some equated the two), had been prominent among Puritan and other Protestant groups. Certainly this idea had been a driving force behind many Puritan actions and teachings, eventuating in the concept of creating the holy “city upon a hill” written across much of the American cultural landscape and filtering its way into most American religious denominations in one form or another. Some towns were even held to be the New Jerusalem by their Protestant inhabitants. This type of idea was particularly fervent in upstate New York around the time of the organization of the Church, where the establishment of a New Jerusalem was an idea touted by several groups. A “New Zion” was established just before this time near Palmyra. A similar group established a holy city around the same time in New Lebanon and felt this was part of the return to the “primitive church.” Moreover, Harmony, Pennsylvania, derived its name from the Harmonists, who tried to establish a communal group in that town to achieve unity and holiness. Their environment was such that Joseph Smith and other early Church members could have easily carried with them the cultural idea of establishing Zion as a specific geographic location. This idea may have included equating Zion with the New Jerusalem, a city the Book of Mormon had proclaimed would be built in the Americas.

It is also possible that the Saints equated the New Jerusalem with the Jerusalem of old, thus adopting the Zion ideas of the Old Testament. This by itself might explain the idea of Zion as a city or may be combined with the cultural ideas presented above.

There is an additional possibility that section 28 was given in response to the supposed revelations that Hiram Page had been receiving. We know little of the content of these revelations, other than that
they had to do with the “upbuilding of Zion” and “the order of the Church”; these revelations may have even dealt with the location of Zion. This would certainly explain why the Lord, in the midst of addressing Joseph’s place as the revelator for the Church, and the spuriousness of Page’s revelations, would mention that no one yet knew the location of Zion. Moreover, if Page had been purporting a location for Zion, the statement that Zion would be in the general area of the borders of the Lamanites (D&C 28:9) may have corrected this false location. The concept of Zion as a city might have been first introduced to the Saints by Page, with the Lord confirming the idea in this way; or it may have been present among the Saints already, with the idea added to by Page and then addressed by the Lord.

Thus there are at least three options as to how the Saints came to the concept of Zion as a city: (1) As a product of New England society, they assumed that Zion was a city to be built in the Americas. (2) They had equated Zion with the New Jerusalem the Book of Mormon prophesied would be in this land. (3) Hiram Page’s purported revelations contained information about Zion as a city, and Doctrine and Covenants 28:9 dealt with specific aspects of these “revelations.”

Enoch, Latter-day Saints, and Zion

What is curious about section 28’s Zion reference is that many have assumed the first real exposure to Zion as a city came in the revelation about the city of Enoch in Moses 7. Yet paying close attention to the chronology reveals that the mention of Zion in section 28 precedes the translation of Moses 7. This is not to diminish the role the story of the city of Enoch would play in the concept of Zion in the Church. Before Joseph received the revelation about Enoch in December, the Saints knew precious little as to what establishing Zion really meant. But the reception of Moses 7 brought several important aspects of such a work vividly to the forefront: (1) God would protect His people against great wickedness as they established Zion (see Moses 7:13). (2) The people of Zion must be of one heart and mind (see Moses 7:18). (3) The people of Zion would have no poor among them (see Moses 7:18). (4) Zion was also known as the City of Holiness (see Moses 7:19). (5) Zion would be blessed when the rest of the earth was cursed (see
Moses 7:20). (6) The goal of Zion was to become so righteous it would be taken up to abide with the Lord (see Moses 7:21). (7) Zion had existed for 365 years before being taken up (see Moses 7:68). (8) Before Zion was taken into the bosom of the Lord, her inhabitants walked with God, and He dwelt in their midst (see Moses 7:69). (9) Zion was the New Jerusalem (the first scriptural equation of the two terms), would be established again in the last days, would eventually meet Enoch’s Zion in a great day of reunion and rejoicing, and would become a city where the Lord would again abide (see Moses 7:62–64). This represented an overwhelming flood of knowledge about Zion. It fundamentally changed the vision of what it was that they had been counseled to seek to bring forth and establish. It seems that this revelation became the blueprint for what the Prophet would spend the rest of his life trying to accomplish. The profound impact that this revelation had on Joseph and the Church is probably beyond our ability to understand. Certainly the Prophet felt that building Zion was one of his greatest personal missions and that the future of the kingdom of God hinged upon his ability to build Zion. He likely looked to Enoch as a role model in this work, even choosing Enoch as his code name when he first published section 78. In many ways the work of Enoch defined the mission in which the Saints have been engaged from December of 1830 until now. It is no wonder that the revelation was received “to the joy of the little flock.” The grandeur of the God-given vision matched the magnitude of the divinely appointed task.

The timing of the reception of this revelation is crucial. It was received just before the Prophet and Sidney were instructed to halt the work while they moved to Ohio (see D&C 37:1). In this same revelation the Saints as a whole were also commanded to gather to Ohio (see D&C 37:3). This would prove to invoke a new phase in establishing Zion. Within days of the directive to gather, the Prophet received a revelation during a conference which commanded the initial phases of creating a Zion that included having no poor among them. At the beginning of this revelation, which would be difficult for many to receive, the Lord reminded them of just who was asking this of them: “The Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the same which looked upon the wide expanse
of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made; the same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes; I am the same which spake, and the world was made, and all things came by me. I am the same which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom” (D&C 38:1–4).

This last line, referring to Zion and Enoch, would have had little meaning to the Saints a few weeks earlier. But here, at the very moment the Lord would ask them to care for the poor in a Zionlike way, He referred to Himself with a term that would remind those assembled of the glorious Zion and her characteristics, which must have so inspired them just days before. The Lord reminded them that Enoch and his people were in His bosom, bringing to the fore the great blessings available to those who chose to live in a Zionlike way. This type of juxtaposition was only possible because of the New Translation material they had just received with such great joy.

The use of Moses 7 imagery continued. Immediately after mentioning Enoch, the Lord said He would plead for those who believed in His name, “but behold the residue of the wicked have I kept in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day, which shall come at the end of the earth” (D&C 38:5). Here the Lord contrasts the blessed state of those who will believe in Him with those who remain in chains of darkness, which surely suggested to the Saints the recently received vision Enoch had beheld of Satan standing with “a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced” (Moses 7:26). This chilling allusion underscored the need to obey the new and strenuous commands the Lord was about to deliver. For those who did not, a laughing Satan awaited, chain in hand.

Moreover, when the Lord told the assembled Saints that “I am in your midst and ye cannot see me” (D&C 38:7), it undoubtedly gave them a surge of hope that they were approaching the type of Zion where the Lord could abide, mingling with its inhabitants. Additionally, the promise that the Lord would give them a land flowing with milk and honey where they would have no laws but His when He came (see D&C 38:18–22) must have added to the swelling desire and hope to establish a city like unto Enoch’s. Surely the command to “be one; and
if ye are not one ye are not mine” (v. 27) must have reminded them that Zion consisted of those who were “of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Moreover, the way that the Lord had protected Enoch’s Zion would have lent a sense of urgency and understanding to the Lord’s warning that the earth was going to shake and that only those who gathered to Ohio would have power to escape the enemy (see D&C 38:30–32). The insistent imagery of section 38 is redoubled in light of the epic episodes of Moses 7.

All of this would help the Saints accept what the Lord was asking of them, namely, that they should gather to Ohio (see D&C 38:32), and appoint men to govern the affairs and property of the Church in such a way that the poor and needy would be taken care of (vv. 34–36), that all things should be preserved and eventually “gathered unto the bosom of the church” (v. 38), and that they should labor with their might to accomplish these things (v. 40).

From the outset, section 38 divided some Saints. John Whitmer, who was likely not present at the meeting, reported that the revelation created some divisions among the people and that some would not receive it as coming from God. Another account recorded that the Saints received the revelation with “unshaken confidence” and “all rejoiced under the blessings of the gospel.” Given these accounts, it is difficult to know exactly how the revelation was received, but we know that as the difficulties of the move and of caring for the poor pressed upon the Saints, many forsook the revelation, even in the face of the grandeur of Enoch’s Zion. We can only wonder how many more would have done so had they not possessed such a beacon to see them through their trials.

A little more than a month later, on February 9, the Lord revealed many more specifics as to how Zion was to have no poor (see D&C 42). These detailed directions, such as consecrating properties to the bishop, were integrally tied to Joseph’s other revelations. When speaking of what the bishop would do with consecrated properties, the Lord said that surplus (or residue) should be kept in the storehouse to administer to the poor and to purchase lands for the “building up of the New Jerusalem” (D&C 42:35), which had so recently been identified with the latter-day imitation of the city of Enoch (Moses 7:62–64).
Lord then explained more of how consecration would take place, immediately followed by the instructions “thou shalt ask, and my scriptures shall be given as I have appointed, and they shall be preserved in safety” (D&C 42:56). The Lord Himself then juxtaposed the process of the New Translation and the other revelations Joseph received, as we have been doing, by telling Joseph he would receive more revelations and by tying them in with New Jerusalem: “Thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge. . . . Thou shalt ask, and it shall be revealed unto you in mine own due time where the New Jerusalem shall be built” (D&C 42:61–62).

While there were probably many reasons for the Lord to associate the New Translation with other of the Prophet’s revelations he was about to receive, many of which would have to do with the New Jerusalem, here we will identify one specific reason. As noted above, we cannot tell exactly when in February 1831 Joseph translated various verses of Genesis. But if our approximation is correct, then he translated Genesis 14 not long after section 42 but a little while before receiving other important Zion revelations, such as sections 45 (March 7, 1831), 48 (March 1831), 49 (March 1831), 51 (May 1831), 56 (June 1831), 57 (July 20, 1831), 58 (August 1, 1831), and 59 (August 7, 1831). This is significant because of the material contained in the New Translation of Genesis 14. While Moses 7 must have provided a surge of hope and excitement about building Zion, it must have been somewhat deflating as members met their own shortcomings head on as they tried to implement this order. It is likely that many questioned whether or not it was possible to ever duplicate what Enoch had done. In the midst of this the Prophet learned that men who came to God in an Enochlike way “were translated and taken up into heaven” and that Melchizedek “and his people wrought righteousness, and obtained heaven, and sought for the city of Enoch” (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:32, 34). How comforting this must have been, to know that others had attempted and succeeded in imitating that which Enoch had done. In the face of day-to-day-induced doubt, the Lord supplied the Saints with a vision of accomplishing their lofty ideal, an assurance that Enoch could be imitated, a knowledge that such a difficult task was possible.
The theme of building Zion is intertwined with another motif that appears in both Moses 7 and the other revelations received around that time, and on which we can touch only lightly here. That is the theme of the signs of the times and the troubling days and events associated with the Second Coming. In Enoch’s vision he not only saw the horrible wickedness that happened in and just after his day but also similar events to happen just before the Second Coming. The vision clearly casts these eras in parallel, highlighting their similarities. Similarly, the Doctrine and Covenants revelations received about this same time stress the signs of the times and the need to prepare, such as in sections 29, 34, 43, and 45. The last section explicitly ties those things learned of Enoch’s day to the need to establish Zion in the last days.

In Moses 7, as iniquity grew, the wicked hated and fought against the righteous, yet the righteous were protected as they gathered to Zion. The Saints learned of Enoch’s causing the earth to tremble and rivers to turn from their course as Zion was defended. Zion’s enemies feared them so much that while among the wicked there was great bloodshed, those same iniquitous people stood afar off from Zion, which flourished beneath the glory of the Lord during all this chaos (see Moses 7:13–17). How edifying this must have been for the Saints as they compared this comforting and inspiring story with that which the Lord told them of their own day.

The Lord Himself encouraged this comparison, telling them, “Hearken ye [to] . . . the wisdom of him whom ye say is the God of Enoch, and his brethren, who were separated from the earth, and were received unto myself—a city reserved until a day of righteousness shall come” (D&C 45:11–12). The Lord then told the Saints of terrible things that would come forth upon the earth, noting some of the most horrific of the signs of the times, such as the love of men waxing cold, earthquakes, wars in their own land, an overflowing scourge, and a desolating sickness covering the land (see D&C 45:27–33, 63). To prepare against this, the Lord urged them to gather together “and with one heart and with one mind, gather up your riches that ye may purchase an inheritance which shall hereafter be appointed unto you. And it shall be called the New Jerusalem, a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of
safety for the saints of the Most High God; and the glory of the Lord shall be there, and the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it, and it shall be called Zion” (D&C 45:65–67).

The Lord warned the Saints that if they did not want to be part of the fighting and wickedness, they must gather to Zion and that the wicked would be afraid to go against Zion (D&C 45:68–70). In a symbiotic circle, the vision of Enoch, his Zion, and prophecies concerning the last days must have cast light on this revelation and helped the Saints understand the relevancy of Enoch’s message. Moses 7 added to both the horror and glorious comfort that the Lord propounded in section 45, and the Lord specifically used language to help the Saints feel this connection. We see again the unity of the Prophet’s revelatory experiences and of God’s communication with His children.

The timing and sequence of these Zion revelations were important. In September 1830 the Lord noted that Zion would be built in the borders by the Lamanites. In October He sent Oliver Cowdery and others on a mission that would open doors in Ohio and Missouri. In December the Lord gave the Prophet both the wonderful revelation concerning Enoch and the command to move to Ohio. Rising persecution necessitated that the Saints begin to move, and it seems that the Lord intended that when they did so, it would commence the gathering that was part of establishing Zion. Thus in January He commanded them to gather to Ohio and later to Missouri as well. These gatherings would require land, which would require the implementation of consecration. Both gathering and living consecration were arduous efforts, and the revelations that came about Enoch and Melchizedek must have been immensely helpful and important in this process. Again we see one revelation interlocking with another as the Lord carefully and systematically built up an understanding of Zion. He provided many custom-fitted stones to create the proper foundation for this great work.

Why would the Lord have Joseph start translating Genesis and in the middle abruptly instruct him to stop and begin translating the New Testament, as he did on March 7, 1831? (see D&C 45:60–61). Why not just have the Prophet begin translating the New Testament in the first
place? There are probably many answers. It is likely that the Saints needed to know of Enoch and Melchizedek as they began gathering. The time was approaching in which the Saints had to move, and thus they had to have lands to move to. Physical necessities dictated that the gathering begin in early 1831, so before that time the Lord gave the Saints an inspiring scriptural vision of what He was going to ask them to do. The events of early 1831 were facilitated by the sequence of revelations provided during late 1830 and early 1831. In His omniscience, the Lord had instructed His servants to do that which would fortify them in their hour of need. After providing this much needed revelation, it was time for the Prophet to move on to the New Testament.

Clearly the relationship between the Doctrine and Covenants and the New Translation was more intimate than we have generally realized. The Prophet experienced this revelatory surge as a continuous, connected flow, not as separate streams that we must force together. As we see the timing of the New Translation, its interrelationship with Joseph’s other revelations and with the events which became an everyday reality for the early Saints, we join with Lehi in proclaiming, “Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!” (1 Nephi 1:14). We also stand in admiration of the “overflowing surge” Joseph received during the infancy of the Church, a surge that was stronger and larger than most of us had supposed.

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NOTES


4. For information on how these bursts may have come, see Kent P. Jackson and Peter M. Jasinski, “The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” *BYU Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003): 61–62.


10. See Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*.


13. For dates, see Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary*, 188, 195. While many sources could be cited regarding the dating of Doctrine and Covenants sections, Robinson and Garrett’s work represents the most up-to-date information.


18. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1947), 130.


32. This process continued until they had gotten through John 5, when they switched to only writing out the changes and making marks in Joseph’s Bible (see Jackson, “New Discoveries,” 151). For information about the Bible Joseph used, see Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Cooperstown Bible: The Bible Used in the Joseph Smith Translation in Its Historical Context,” *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 41–70.
34. Matthews, “JST as Primary Source,” 146.
38. I am grateful to Scott Esplin, Richard Bennett, and Spencer Fluhman for their valuable aid in regard to this section.


51. As is assumed by Wright, “Hiram Page Stone,” 89.

52. As was done by Robinson and Garrett, Commentary, 192.

53. See Smith, History of the Church, 1:1207.

54. Smith, History of the Church, 2:517.

55. Smith, History of the Church, 1:132.


